

Spring 2018

# The Poetics of Power The role of women's writing in the Moroccan Education System

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*SIT Study Abroad*

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## Recommended Citation

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## **The Poetics of Power**

*The role of women's writing in the Moroccan Education System*

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for MOR: Multiculturalism and Human Rights, SIT  
Study Abroad, Spring 2018

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## **Abstract**

While women have always been writing in Morocco a lack of access to education and sexist ideals have limited the ability of women to disseminate their stories. Now, after years of attempted reforms women are still fighting against a society that relegates them to enact traditional gender roles. While more women are receiving education in Morocco the messages that the State projects continue to be androcentric. As such, this paper examines the role of women's writing and literature in the Moroccan education system. By putting it in the context of the women's rights movement this paper strives to trace the position of women's writing as a form of protest in Moroccan. This paper argues that women's writing is critical to changing a sexist mentality as it teaches and demonstrates empathy and tolerance. Furthermore, through interviews with women Moroccan authors, educators and literary analyses of their work, it seeks to show how women's literature subverts an internalized misogyny that helps perpetuate gender inequality.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the SIT: Multiculturalism and Human Rights Program and the Center for Cross Cultural Learning (CCCL) for the comprehensive education in human rights in Morocco that provided the basis for my research. Moreover, I'd like to thank my research advisor Youssouf Elalamy for the contacts he was able to provide me and my academic director, Taieb Belghrazi for supporting me throughout the entire ISP process. Lastly, I would like to thank all of my interview subjects for taking the time out of their busy lives to help with the questions of my research as they shared their experiences.

## **Introduction**

Tolerance, subversion, and self-expression. These are the three words that appear again and again in conversations with Moroccan authors. Morocco has a rich literary tradition in Arabic, French, Spanish and English but the question that I came across in my research is if women have always been writing there where are they? But if women writers have been publishing work in Morocco another question comes to the surface, where are these books being read, and by whom? Moreover,

While more women are receiving education in Morocco the messages that the State projects continue to be androcentric. As such, this paper examines the role of women's writing and literature in the Moroccan education system. By putting it in the context of the women's rights movement this paper strives to trace the position of women's writing as a form of protest in Morocco. This paper argues that women's writing is critical to changing a sexist mentality as it teaches and demonstrates empathy and tolerance. The content that these women create interacts with the world around them and puts forth an opportunity to subvert a societal rejection of female agency.

I attempted to respond to the following questions and propositions:

**Question 1:** What role does women's writing have in the Moroccan education system?

**Proposition 1:** I proposed that although women's writing deals with topics that are inherently subversive to the State education. In this way I expected that women's literature would not be overly present in the education system. As the State continues to be dominated by men I postulated that the education system would reflect the dominant voices of society despite movement towards change.

**Question 2:** How does women's writing enter or effect social movements in Morocco?

**Proposition 2:** I proposed that as women's writing handles topics that demonstrate the nuances behind the patriarchal system it accordingly helps create a culture of change. Furthermore, I proposed that women writers because of their unique positionality as artists must hold secondary

roles in society that allow them to engage with social movements and share the impact of their writing extraneously.

**Question 3:** How does women's writing subvert the type of sexist patriarchal messaging?

**Proposition 3:** I proposed that by handling subjects such as sexuality these women give voice to a level of individuality that has been shut down by the State.

### **A Brief History of Moroccan Education and Literature**

The history of Moroccan education is long and tumultuous. To understand the emerging role that women writers are just starting to have in Morocco one must look at how Moroccan education has evolved into what it is today. Before colonization, Moroccan education was predominately based in Sufi Islam. However, at the time the number of girls enrolled in schools was abysmal. Women were expected to remain at home as they were responsible for everything in the private sphere. Then, at the beginning of the French occupation in 1912, the education system in Morocco shifted to privilege a European ideal. Those in charge of the education system, “worked to increase the degree of institutional and theoretical segregation between schools for Moroccan Muslims and those for Europeans” —where all of the resources were funneled towards the colonizer. This system directly created a divide between two educations in Morocco, “one education system prepared the future elites and the other prepared future subalterns” (Segalla, 2009). However, this was the systematic divide for male pupils. Female students were also separated into an elite and non-elite track at lower levels of education, but, all education focused on teaching how to succeed in the domestic sphere and “prepare for marriage” (Segalla, 2009). Moreover, the teaching of literature at the time was considered irrelevant. As the French presence in Morocco solidified between 1912 and Independence in 1956 only those with access to an Elite French education —Moroccans or Europeans— succeeded in the country.

Yet, the French colonizers attempted to create a distinction between a unique Moroccan culture that would ultimately factor into the way the education system changed when Morocco gained independence. As such, The Minister of Education in 1956, Al-Fasi, sought to “promote a ‘Moroccan’ culture and identity...defined by by the Arabic language and Islamic religion. However, the promotion of Arabization caused a split between those in power educated in the French system and everyone else. When the school systems rejected a pan-Arab identity Morocco was left with a curriculum trying to concept a unique pedagogical identity. But, there weren’t enough educators sufficiently trained in what this new identity meant. Then, in the 1970’s with the death of King Mohammed V and the ascent of King Hassan II, the education system again saw a reversal. Hassan II, himself educated in France, put Arabization to the side until the mid 1980’s when the state again condemned a bilingual education. The correlation between Arabization in the 1980’s aligned with the period known as the Years of Lead . During which, liberals and opponents to Hassan II’s regime were forced to flee or suffer from imprisonment and torture (Segalla, 2009). Accordingly, any sense of liberal education —e.g. gender equality— at a State level disappeared with the regime.

In 1999 when King Hassan II died the next and current King Mohammad VI was left to try and clean up the mess of his father. Without delving into the broad attempts at reform and reparations from the Years of Lead it’s important to note the change in the education system. In response to mass protests Mohammed VI promoted a plan to provide more access to education for girls who continued to lack access to education. Eventually the protests saw to the 2004 change in the *mudawana*, or Moroccan family code. The changes attempted to regulate such aspects of current social norms —based in Islam— such as polygamy, it raised the age of marriage for girls from 14 to 18, and gave women the right to a divorce (Maghroui, 2001).

Nonetheless, even today society struggles to implement. Stephanie Bordat, head of women's rights NGO *Mra*, indicated that today 85% of early marriages are still accepted by judges. Furthermore she asserted that because of the problem of illiteracy women —particularly in rural communities— don't know about their rights under the new *Mudawana* (Bordat, Personal Correspondence, February 1, 2018) . According to UNESCO women's literacy has lagged behind men. In 1980 females aged 15 or older were literate at 17.5% while males were literate at 43.7%. By 2015 females literacy had reached 59% a marked improvement while male literacy had increased to 80%.

Furthermore, Bordat (2011) outlines how current Islamist non-profits attempt to benefit the situation of women through a focus on their poor economic status through tactile aid such as literacy classes, food, and money. However, when activists have started to focus on elements such as legal aid and education, these women as sensationalized by the religious aid believe that these groups are withholding money from them. Nonetheless, as Bordat outlines there's been an increase in NGO's who focus on providing literacy and legal education to women in Morocco. The main focus of these organizations is to ensure that women know their legal and human rights in Morocco. As such, the NGOs strive to empower women to know their rights so that they can then succeed socially and economically. Bordat speaks to the success these organizations have had, specifically when they put the educational seminars in a direct Moroccan context —such as making the analogy between a healthy marriage and a good tagine.

While the situation for women in Morocco has markedly improved, access to social power is still incredibly limited by the patriarchal system. According to the vice president of the Association Démocratique de la Femme Marocaine, while the representation of Women in parliament has increased it's a false representation. In 2003 there were only 3 women in

Parliament. Then they introduced a quota system that increased the number of women in Parliament to 60. However, women still only make up 20.5% of Parliament. Furthermore, according to the vice president of the ADFM, “women in the majority party have a patriarchal mentality and use their political power more in relation to Islam than human rights” (ADFM Representative, Personal Correspondence, April 22, 2018).

It is thus in this system that the importance of women’s writing materializes. In the wake of all of these educational changes literature was essentially relegated to the background. In an in-depth doctorate thesis on the teaching of Moroccan literature in Moroccan education Aboussi (2010) found that 108 teachers she sampled believed that students did not have the adequate skills to analyze a literary text. Furthermore, while there was interest in teaching Moroccan literature the majority of texts taught in public primary and secondary education came from a Pan-Arab or French source. Divisive writings such as Choukri and *al-Khubz al-Hafi*, or *For Bread Alone*, while favored by educators aren’t considered appropriate to teach. Furthermore, the State and the educators as an extension of the State control the content that goes into the educational manuals. Some poems by Moroccan authors such as Abdellatif Laabi, Nabi Fares, and Youssef Sebti have made it into some textbooks. However in the over 20 manuals Aboussi examined she only found two women writers present in the curriculum. Nonetheless, Aboussi adds that in the face of this lack of implementation, Morocco is “moving towards the effective recognition of women’s writing.

In a study of Algerian and Moroccan women writers Detrez (2010) compares the different ways in which these writers protest daily through their work. She cites Gadant (1995) who said, "the woman is she who does not have words and who has no name, the one that men must not evoke in public other than by the impersonal "How is your household ? "(...) If she

seizes writing, she seizes words and threatens the rules that separates the sexes, the condition of existence in society. She will violate the law that men themselves must respect. It is therefore doubly forbidden twice for the woman to speak (of herself).” Thus women’s writing holds the power to subvert the oppressive system as soon as a woman puts pen to paper. By moving beyond the private sphere she fights against the patriarchal norm. However, as Detrez proposes, the newfound freedoms in Morocco over the past two decades have started to open up space for women writers to gain a larger readership. Furthermore by interviewing several writers, as I did in my own research, she concluded that women who have the ability to write are “part of the middle class or of a privileged milieu” as they’re able to have studied enough to write or “have the financial means to publish their books.” This capacity indicates that despite gender based oppression these women are able to publish their works. So thus the question becomes how do these writers and their works affect the world they inhabit. As Aboussi writes, “teaching / learning are also objects of acquisition and distinction in the after-school social environment, this triangular interaction is itself part of a complex network of practices and social representations of the written word.” It is this triangular interaction that I sought to understand in the Moroccan context through my research as I examined the way the written word enters education and impacts society.

## **Methodology**

In order to investigate the place of women’s literature in education I conducted a qualitative study on three Moroccan writers; Bahaa Trabelsi, Aicha Bassry, and Hafsa Lamrani. All of these women, aside from their careers as writers, have a history of civil engagement in Moroccan education. In order to engage with the language politics inherent in the Moroccan education system I chose these authors based on the positionality of the language that they write

in. Respectively, as Francophone, Arabophone and Anglophone writers each woman speaks to the role of their experienced language from the education system. While the role of language is important the ultimate barrier to learning lies in the societal and governmental issues present in Morocco. Furthermore, I spoke to two long term pedagogues, Hafsa Lamrani, and her friend Latifa who asked to remain anonymous. Lamrani and Latiffa have over forty years of teaching experience in English, French, and Arabic within the Moroccan school system. Both of these women are also founding members of the non-profit organization Shahrazad which focuses on women's, youth, and incarcerated peoples' literacy in Morocco.

Additionally, I had the chance to attend a conference on Mediterranean Women's Writing, hosted by the organization the Feminist Plural. While I wasn't able to interview the writers present at the round table discussion, their commentary provided critical insight into women's writing in Morocco. The content of the conversation spoke to how Arabophone and Francophone writing operates in the international arena. While not directly a part of my research, in serving as a translator for some of my peers, I was able to interview the Vice-President of the Casablanca branch of the Association Démocratique de Femme Marocaine (ADFM). The ADFM is an organization that works across Morocco on legislation to support women's —socio-economic, environmental, and governmental— equality. The interview provides key context for the socio-political system that perpetuates a patriarchal education system.

Finally, in an attempt to contextualize my interviews, I reviewed the history of the education system in Morocco, and the role of literature therein.<sup>1</sup> I also performed a comparative literary analysis showing how the text of these women's writings provides the necessary content

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<sup>1</sup> See introduction

to shape Moroccan society should the government see fit to implement it in their education policy.

### **Research Design:**

In order to perform my interviews I created an initial questionnaire, appropriate for the three writers (Appendix 1). While I did create specific additional questions for the individual authors I let my investigation work much like a case study. Because participants brought their own unique perspective following the template often didn't make sense. The goal of these questions were to understand the basis for their writings, how they engage in the world as women, and women writers, as well as their experience of writing in the education system.

Before each interview I provided a consent agreement where participants signed their consent to the interview, recording, and usage of their names (Appendix 2). While almost all participants gave their consent to list their names, some members asked to remain anonymous and thus will be indicated as such in this study. All interviews were performed in person.

### **Research Sites and Subject Populations**

The majority of my research was performed between Rabat and Casablanca, Morocco. While literary culture is present throughout Morocco, these two cities stood out as clear hubs for writing. My research was also limited by the availability of the authors and my desire to performed a focused analysis on three writers. Much of my time was spent reading the works of these authors as I attempted to gain and understanding for the content and style of their writing. Moreover I spent a considerable amount of time translating the content I analyzed in terms of my interviews and the literature itself. I started my research by connecting with my academic advisor Youssouf Elalamy, who has emerged as one of the newer voices in the Moroccan literary scene. As someone who writes in English, French, and Darijah, as well as the head of PEN Morocco

(Poets, Essayists, and Novelists) he had a list of contacts he thought would benefit my study. I initially reached out to Bahaa Trabelsi and Aicha Bassry and set up meetings with the two authors. I was able to obtain copies of their respective books as well as they gave me copies in various translations once we had our interviews. I was able to meet with Bahaa Trabelsi in her home in Casablanca and with Aicha Bassry at a café in Rabat. Although Aicha Bassry writes in Arabic and Spanish, because of my language capabilities, both interviews were held exclusively in French. After my interview with Bahaa Trabelsi she put me in contact with her cousin who's a primary school teacher in Rabat, however, she did not respond to my communications. Nonetheless when I interviewed Aicha Bassry she was able to put me in contact with Hafssa Lamrani and accordingly her friend Lattifa a co-activist/teacher. I conducted my interview in French and English as Lattifa spoke only the former in Lamrani's home in Casablanca.

### **Ethical Consideration and Limitations:**

While I wasn't engaging with any at risk populations throughout my interviews I still needed to address the ways in which I dealt with sensitive topics. All of the authors were more than willing to share their experiences, however, I still ensured that they knew they could opt out of any question I asked. Moreover, while I tried to keep the content of the conversations professional the nature of the research meant that these interviews were handled in an intimate setting. By interviewing Trabelsi and Berki-Lamrani in their homes I risked a degree of professionalism. Nonetheless the fact that we were discussing their personal lives and experiences, as they had already relayed them through their literature, mitigated the risk of holding the interviews in their homes.

Additionally, my research was limited by my positionality. As a white, upper-middle class American man I obviously wasn't able to relate to the diverse experience of these women.

Because they all have the experience of being a woman growing up in Morocco any attempt to analyze the situation of women's literature here is influenced by my positionality as a man and an American. While I have been able to get a brief glimpse into Morocco the time I spent there was limited to four months. Moreover, the research project occurred over four weeks. This was not nearly enough time to interview the number of people necessary to provide an complete understanding of the role of women's literature in Morocco. Furthermore, because of my language capacities I only spoke to people who could communicate with my in French or English—opposed to Arabic or the Moroccan dialect Darijah. Although I was able to speak to an Arabophone writer, I was unable to investigate the rich history of Amazigh poetry present in Morocco, which has had no presence in the Education system.

## **Findings and Analysis**

As I sought to discover what role women's literature holds in the Moroccan education system I will provide a summary of my interviews with three Moroccan writers: Bahaa Trabelsi, Aicha Bassry, and Hafsa Berki-Lamrani. Additionally as part of my interview with Hafsa Berki-Lamrani I interviewed her friend Latifa—who chose to remain anonymous. My summary will also include their perspective as long term educators and activist. Through these interviews I found that while women's literature isn't taught at all in public school, their work serves a key role in facilitating the conversation around various social movements in Morocco. Namely, these interviews confirmed that despite the progress that's been made in the public sphere—in relation to legislation—the education system in Morocco facilitates home environments that continue to oppress women. At the end of my analysis of each interview I will provide a literary analysis of the author's writing to prove that their work mirrors the goal of progress, or lack thereof, that each author claims.

In my research there's been a distinction that's emerged between women's writing and education as it fits into the mold of Morocco as an Islamist State. Aicha Bassry and Hafsa Berki-Lamrani firmly believes that positive change can occur without completely ridding Morocco of its religiosity. This compares with the perspective of Bahaa Trabelsi who holds that equality and religion are antithetical. Nonetheless, all of my interviews confirmed that introducing women's writing into education is crucial to effect social change as it fosters tolerance and allows women to interrogate a pervasive sense of internalized misogyny.

### **Methods of Authors and Educators**

#### *Bahaa Trabelsi*

Bahaa Trabelsi was born in Rabat, Morocco in 1963 and spent the bulk of her education in Morocco before heading to France for a graduate's degree. After earning her degree she returned to Morocco where she now lives in Casablanca. She spent several years in the early 2000's working as a journalist before becoming a full time novelist. She's written four novels, *Une femme tout Simplement* (1995), *Une Vie à Trois* (2000), *Slim, les femmes, la mort* (2005), and a collection of vignettes *Parlez-moi D'amour* (2014) which received Le Prix Ivoire for Francophone African Literature. Her most recent novel, and the text I examine in my literary analysis, is *La Chaise du Concierge* (2017). Her work has been translated from French into Arabic and Spanish.

In speaking with Trabelsi she outlines a perspective on education, activism, and Islam based on her many years engaging with the literary community of Morocco. As she indicated in our interview Trabelsi has used her literature to help create conversations about tolerance that are crucial towards advancing social rights in Morocco. Furthermore, her testimony demonstrates

how women's writing works in activism. Accordingly, she talks about how the education system in Morocco is broken as it doesn't create these conversations. However, Trabelsi's critique of the education system in Morocco relies on the demonization of Islam. In her opinion, the reason Morocco struggles to evolve is the way that the religiosity of the Moroccan Muslim patriarchy.

When talking about the power of literature as a form of an education in empathy Trabelsi said,

“First of all for yourself, it is a message that goes to others, because there's a connection so there's must be a mirror effect, an identification, that brings something to the human experience. When I wrote [Une vie à trois] I was very satisfied because I had several boys who like boys who identified themselves and thanked me for my work. But for me it's enough that I only had one, and I had several, for me this is important. But frankly at the beginning, I did not write for that, I just wanted to tell a love story between two men and all the obstacles that they face in their story.”

Through her writing she was able to convey a story that allowed gay men, a marginalized community in Morocco, to see themselves represented in popular culture. While this work raises the question about the ethics of a heterosexual woman writing the story of two gay men, she uses the privilege of her positionality and notoriety as a famous author to tell a story that wouldn't appear otherwise. While the LGBTQ+ community in Morocco can publish testimony anonymously, it would be impossible for someone to openly publish this type of writing. Specifically because then they would be openly gay in Morocco which is illegal. Despite the fact that this type of writing isn't included in school curriculum Trabelsi's work is heavily read in Morocco. She highlights the role education has in creating a gendered system of power. She said, “Gender is constructed by education and religion. The feminine and the masculine are psychoanalytic symbols the masculine it is supposed to be power, and action, while the feminine is supposed to submission, softness. This imaginary is in the sub consciousness, it's in the collective unconscious.” Thus her writing can help show that gender is a construct as it teaches

her readers a new perspective. Despite the good that Trabelsi's writing might do she also holds several problematic positions on who can write what. She indicates that because we are all human we are all "hetero, homo, black, white, we are anything you want." She holds that anyone has the right to write from any perspective that they want. This position neglects the real experience of the people she tries to emulate in her writing.

But, Trabelsi's writing inspires dissonance in the Moroccan and Arab global community as her work attempts to get readers to empathize with marginalized identities. In this way, as she talks about subverting the powers at be she proves that her work has the possibility to facilitate the kinds of conversation She said, "On the other hand I have a fatwa, there are many passages that have been translated into Arabic to justify the fatwa saying that I played the devil's game, that I encourage homosexuality... when one has a fatwa you stop caring and continue courageously." The fact that Trabelsi has a fatwa against her proves that her work is subversive. As it relates to the role of writing in education as it facilitates activism Trabelsi contradicts herself. She said, "for me movements, community, I don't believe in all of that. I believe in the individual." Yet, at the same time, she recounted a story where she got fired from a newspaper she worked at for participating in the February 20<sup>th</sup> movement and posting an opinion piece on Facebook.

Furthermore she suggests that this problem stems from "a generation that through education and a local education system, has been educated on the values of the Muslim patriarchy."

She said, "for me education in Morocco is archaic, it totally lacks pedagogy. What is taught today in public schools is made for to indoctrinate students, not to open their minds. We do not teach them critical sense. How you can go beyond a text that you read? The school system teaches how to adapt a text they read. So the education system is an essential part for the evolution of this country. We have infrastructure, the TGV, wow, but who are we

giving it to? To a people who have no sense of citizenship, because you need citizenship to access infrastructure.”

Her opinion illustrates the importance of introducing more diverse writing into the education system. If students don't have the opportunity to critically analyze a text that speaks to a broad range of experiences then they must search these skills outside of the classroom. Trabelsi underlined the problem of education as it encourages division instead of inclusion. She said, “after Independence we went to Arabization just to be against the French. So schools were bilingual. We switched to Arabization and in this Arabization we switched to a pedagogy frontiers.”

Nonetheless, Trabelsi describes the paradox between the social freedoms that have been gained in Morocco and the way society continues to lag behind. She said that “feminist women had their glory days in the early 2000's” as they were able to change the *mudawanna* or Moroccan family code.” Similarly, though her books might not be read in schools, they aren't banned —like they would have been during the Years of Lead. However, she believes that the problem is “women who want to regress, first and foremost women.” She indicated that in the early 2000's when there was a proposal to integrate women into the new development plan there “were a million people in Casablanca, mainly comprised of women, who were against [this plan].” However, here is where she nuances her answer to indicate that the problem of the education system, and the feminist movement in Morocco, is Islam. She spoke to those who engage in social movements and said, “even young people who rap or make hip hop, street art, who are in modern movements, even they have as background of their Muslim education and their Muslim education that over time has become an Islamist education.” She continued to demonize Islam when she said, “secularism is respect” but the “veil is an ostentatious sign” even in France she believes that “we [Muslims] are not persecuted.” She scorned the education system

“financed by the Muslim world.” Thus, as Trabelsi demonizes Islam she rejects a majority of Moroccan women who were brought up Muslim but still believe in equal rights. (Trabelsi, Personal Communication, April 10, 2018).

Even though Trabelsi advances that women’s writing has an impact on the social dialogues that occur in Morocco, the way she’s moved towards sensationalized fear negates the experience of Muslim women. She rejects these women who work daily to achieve equality without ostracizing other members the Moroccan community. In the next part of my research I performed a literary analysis of Trabelsi’s most recent work *La Chaise du Concierge* to show how her writing emulates her actions and beliefs as an Islamophobic and feminist text.

### **Literary Analysis *Le Chaise du Concierge***

In *Le Chaise du Concierge*, Bahaa Trabelsi explores various connotations of female sexuality and feminine identity by emphasizing the “dirty” quality of the characters in the story. The story centers around a Muslim Serial Killer who signs his murders with verses from the Qur’an as a Journalist and Cop attempt to catch him. Meanwhile, during their investigation, the two characters fall in love. The Journalist attempts to empower herself by embracing the same dirty quality that the Serial Killer abhors. By emphasizing the similarities in “dirty” language between the Journalist, the Serial Killer, and the Cop, Trabelsi rejects a society that allows men to be dirty but persecutes women for the same undertaking. The Journalist expresses her weariness with the way Moroccan society treats herself, other women, and subverted identities—such as homosexuals, Christians, and Jews— compared to men.

However, the way that the Serial Killer speaks and acts mirrors the dirty (sexual) quality of those he persecutes. Then, through the usage of imagery from the natural world, Trabelsi

shows the necessity for dirt —sexuality— as water nurtures fertile earth. By indicating that dirt is a part of human nature, as it facilitates love and love’s resulting fertility, the Journalist attempts to subvert the patriarchy. Nonetheless, at the end of the novel, though the Journalist rejects the negativity behind the connotation of dirt, she, and the other marginalized characters still suffer under the hand the Serial Killer. Thus, as a militant text, Trabelsi’s work shows how the patriarchy continues to dominate a Moroccan society amidst efforts that strive for tolerance. But Trabelsi’s critique loses steam in the way it handles Islam. By assigning the Serial Killer the personage of a religious extremist she attempts to demonize all of Islam. As she takes up arms against all religious women, she negates the message of tolerance her novel pursues as a redemptive force against the oppression of the patriarchy.

Trabelsi sets the scene in the background of a grey and dirty Casablanca. The real city that she imitates in her writing underlines the repugnant nature of the hate present in her novel. When describing the city she says, “Casablanca is pretentious, it wants to be the center of... modernity but loses itself in delirium” (21). She describes its “glaucous” and “sordid” atmosphere (47). Moreover, in the places where the characters spend their time, she indicates that, “everything here looks dirty, ashy walls, wobbly chairs, and corners where spiders weave there webs” (23). By describing the environment itself as dirty, Trabelsi underlines how the patriarchal world in which the story unfolds, integrates the emotional tones of the characters and the story.

Throughout the novel, the Journalist continuously expresses the sentiment that men in Moroccan society, specifically Muslims extremist, view women as dirt —meaning sexually promiscuous as well as animals. The way the Journalist laments the sexism of today sarcastically comments on this lack of tolerance. When the Journalist describes her relationship with men, she

says, "they saw me in the infernal trio mother-whore-wife, but for them there was a clear advantage, I was a free and independent woman. The icing on the cake, with an apartment to fuck"(45). The description of infernal trio, "mother-whore-wife" points out the double standard in a patriarchal society. Women are supposed to be loyal and doting mothers and wives but implicitly sexual in their role as matriarchs. While sex inside of marriage isn't illegal in Morocco, the addition of "whore" implies that as soon as women become sexual beings they degrade themselves. However, when the Journalist says, "I was a free and independent woman" followed by, "the icing on the cake, with an apartment to fuck" she points out the irony of sexual freedom in relation to general women's equality. By using an idiom and the harsh, or dirty, language of "fuck" she mocks the double standard in an attempt to subvert the patriarchy. For men, the ability to have sex with her warrants her independence. In this way the Journalist outlines how men only want women to be independent when it allows them access to their bodies.

The language that the Journalist uses matches that of the Serial Killer and the Cop. Accordingly, Trabelsi shows how the violent language, and consequently, the real violence of the patriarchy that permeates society. Moreover, Trabelsi uses the perspective of the Serial Killer to illustrate that the masculine intolerance hurts more than just women, but also other persecuted identities in Morocco. Then, the way that the actions of the Serial Killer mirrors that which he abhors demonstrates the inescapable dirty —or violent and sexual— nature of humans. When the Serial Killer describes a woman he sees walking down the street he says, "with make-up and her hair done, she looks like she's going to prostitute herself, with scarlet nail polish on her long fingernails, in reality she isn't the mother of a family, she's a whore" (56). The Serial Killer describes this woman with venomous violence. He uses her appearance to degrade her humanity

in a way that's rooted in sexuality. When he says she isn't a mother but a whore, he suggests that the ideal for women is to be the caretaker in the family —the same sentiment the Journalist mocks. Moreover, the Serial Killer uses his dirty language to target other oppressed identities such as the LGBTQ+ community. Describing a gender-queer man he says, "I tracked. Like an oriental belly-dancer, Cheikha, watching men. And his clothes close to his body. I saw him enter the shop where women... get false eyelashes. He came out with the eyes of a bitch. Throwing his ass around when he walks in the street." (41). When Trabelsi makes the Serial Killer target more people than just women, she strives to show how a patriarchal Moroccan society affects everyone. However, the way Trabelsi takes issue with all Muslims who practice religion openly, defies the message of inclusivity the rest of the novel carries.

Nonetheless, the way the Serial Killer describes his murders portrays a desire for the very dirt that he finds unholy. He says, "this skin excites my demons, small vermilion cuts on her milky skin. The pain wakes her up again and I close her mouth with a cloth and tighten her neck between my hands" (96). This language is both violent and sexual. Supposedly the skin that excites his demons should come from a place of piety. In juxtaposition with the descriptive imagery of her body, however, the Serial Killer clearly fetishes this woman. Much like with the Journalist, he claims to want "wholesome" women, but in reality objectifies his victims to satisfy [something sexual]. Therefore, while his actions directly expose the violence of the patriarchy, the usage of descriptive language shows the multidimensionality of gender inequality. The system that begins with objectification culminates with the types of gendered violence Trabelsi describes in the novel.

Through the perspective of the Cop, the supposed hero of the book, Trabelsi illustrates that even men who don't go as far as murder, still perpetuate the systems of inequality present in

Morocco. When the Cop describes falling in love with the Journalist he says, “It’s her tiny imperfection and her fragility that make me crack. I want to take her in my arms and say, ‘everything is alright, I’m here. You can count on me.’” (76). That which he admires in the Journalist isn’t her capacities or agency, but rather that he hopes to save her and her physical fragility. The idea that men can save women from an eternal desire to exist in relation to a man further supports a society that privileges masculine energy. Additionally, by the end of the novel, the Cop has cheated on the Journalist several times. The Cop says, “with her I make love, look for her pleasure as much as my own, it’s beautiful, tender, insufficient. I need to express my rage, abuse a body, fuck someone to death” (127). Thus, the impiety, or dirtiness, of his actions dominate the story despite his efforts to fight against that which the Serial Killer stands for. His masculine energy is just as violent and harmful as that of the Serial Killer. The fact that in the end the Journalist dies, but the male characters continue to live, underlines that the patriarchal system persists.

Despite the oppressive society she lives in, the way Trabelsi uses dirt—in relationship to forces of nature—strives to subvert the system that ultimately kills her. The characters demonstrate the power of women as beings of nature. The Journalist says, “like every morning, I pray in the shower... Naked and under the water. Because for me, water is the source of life. It quenches, cleans, spouts springs and waterfalls, is unleashed in the seas and oceans. It is the rain that waters the earth, our vegetable gardens and our flower beds. Our nourishing mother... So I pray under the water that god made me to fill my heart with love and stir my faith” (135). Here Trabelsi combines the dirt that the patriarchy rejects with sacred feminine water to create the fertility of earthiness. Though the water nourishes the earth as if the water is the mother, the earth itself has a connotation of a feminine force. The hatred and violence is washed away by

these two feminine forces. Where the water washes away violence, the earth and the rain nourish her heart with love and faith. Thus, it is only through the combination of soil—or the same “dirt” sexuality—and water that the Journalist can find love to undermine the patriarchy. The Journalist shows that the dirt that the patriarchy criticizes and abuses is in fact same place from which positive liberation emerges—her humanity as a woman. Thus as the end of the novel, even though the Journalist dies, “joy is reborn” (9) as her daughter promises to “cherish and display the liberties you taught me” (219).

Unfortunately, despite this novel’s work as a text that strives for equality, Trabelsi’s critique loses some of its value as it demonizes all forms of Islam. Trabelsi tries to vie for a religion that supports tolerance, but in the process becomes islamophobic herself. While she validly points out that religion can exist without oppressing others, she surpasses this statement to ostracize any woman who wears the veil in Morocco. She writes, “our grand-mothers wore the djellaba and the lthem. They participated in the resistance against the French protectorate, heroines of the liberation movement. Then they stopped wearing their traditional clothing to actively participate in the development of our country. And look at us regressing” (88). In this sentiment the ability of women to participate in movements for equality depend on them giving up aspects of their religion. The difference Trabelsi makes between a modern and equal woman and those rooted in the oppression of the past is the outward display of their religion. At the end of the novel the daughter of the Journalist says, “my mother believed in the liberty for a woman to wear the veil. But she didn’t want to admit that the veil and liberty are contradictory” (219). The positionality of the novel motivates the discussion I will explore later in my ISP about how equality can exist and be taught in a country where there is no separation of church and state and the disagreement various writers, teachers, and activist hold in this debate.

*Aicha Bassry*

Aicha Bassry was born in 1960 in Rabat where she received her undergraduate and graduate degree in Arabic Literature. She's currently a member of La Maison de la Poesie, and the Union des Écrivains du Maroc. She has written over twenty works of poetry and prose in Arabic and Spanish such as *massā'āt* (2000; Evenings), *araqū al-malā'ikah* (2003; Angels' insomnia). Her work has been translated into Spanish, Catalan, French, Turkish, and German. She's currently in the process of looking for a publisher of an English translation of her book of poetry *Women Swimming in Thirst* (2017) from which I performed a literary analysis of the titular poem.

In our interview Bassry confirmed the importance of the role of women's literature in education and activism in Morocco. However, in contrast to Trabelsi, Aicha Bassry's work and perspective speaks to an education in subversion that works inside the context of Morocco. While she too names the problem of extremism in the Moroccan Patriarchy she believes that the type of revolution that must occur, must occur within the context of the home. She points to the misogyny even within the feminist movement. Additionally, Bassry indicates that the literature taught in the Moroccan school system pulls from archaic French and Arab writers. In her opinion, even though there are more liberties these days the reason why women's literature hasn't been integrated into education is a censure put on women by society.

Bassry spoke the role women's writing has in education and said that she, "write[s] to educate society on the situation of women." She indicated that writing as a creative forms limits her ability to "say things directly," but that she "[does her] best to teach society, to teach men on the situation of women." She talked about the fact that "in the arab world it's not easy to be a

writer, but it's harder because you have to fight in your own home so that your husbands understand and accept your ideas." Bassry and Trabelsi together imply that the Muslim patriarchy limits gender equality. However, Bassry rejects Trabelsi's assertion that Islam is to blame. She says, "extremism is in every Arab country. But you can't attack it. You have to talk about it, you have to speak against it." Bassry claims that "in order to transcend the frontier mentality we must translate the work of women's writers." That's why "Moroccan writers asked the minister of culture to open a door for translation" to "influence what the world thinks of [Morocco]." Through her work as part of the writers' union she was able to help introduce Moroccan writing into the global conversation. Unlike Trabelsi her work attempts to subvert the patriarchy while uniting people across cultures instead of rejecting all of the Arab world.

Nonetheless Bassry affirmed that "Change starts in schools, with the education of the child in school and in the family." Of her own life, as "a married woman with three daughters," she specified that she felt the need to "censor [herself] to remain in good relation with society and [her family]." Because "even in liberal families you find sexism." Moreover, she provided an example from her own life. Bassry and her husband —himself a well-known Moroccan writer— were part of the socialist party around the time of the February 20<sup>th</sup> movement. But, she belittled the way men in this party would fight for women's rights in the streets only to return home and ask, "what is there to eat." Therefore she named a large part of the problem to be the way that society distributes sexist norms. According to Bassry, "the entire system of education in Morocco needs a revision" because even though there are Egyptian and Syrian writers included in the curriculum there are no contemporary Moroccan writers. "The minister of culture has never said, 'this woman writes about sexuality we must ban it.' No. It's society."

Bassry clarified that “[Morocco] need[s] to educate boys and girls. We need to revise the sexist texts and books in our education system. In manuals you find for example quotes like, ‘Mahmud goes hunting with his father, Fatema helps her mother in the kitchen.’” In this point Bassry and Trabelsi agree that the way to eradicate sexism from the Moroccan school system is to increase the number and visibility of women writers in Morocco. She described how, “at the beginning of the 1970’s there were no female poets in Morocco” but now, “there are several.” She said that the way to fight against the sexist society is through their writing because “if we don’t fight, the mentality will never change.” Thus Bassry shows how the education system in Morocco, as it excludes the voices of women —and causes women to exclude themselves— perpetuates the patriarchal systems of violence. I then performed a literary analysis of Bassry’s poem “Woman Swimming in Thirst” to emphasize strength behind Bassry’s way of subverting the patriarchy while wrestling with auto-censorship as a form of internalized misogyny (Bassry, Personal Communication, April 11, 2018).

### **Literary Analysis “Woman Swimming in Thirst”**

#### **Woman Swimming in Thirst**

From the hotel window,  
I look down on a morning without any forthcoming evening.  
I see a brief shower covering the streets.  
I see seagulls flying between rooftops.  
I see the port over there.  
I see the boat that will carry me across  
Soon.  
And on the opposite seashore,  
I see a woman withering  
In a dark corner of life.

In Aicha Bassry's titular poem *Woman Swimming in Thirst* she explores the oppression of women through the themes of movement, water, and life—as defined by light. Bassry compares the agency of the narrator with the agency of the elements of natural world around her. The water that dominates the poem functions both as a critical life-providing source and as a metaphor for fluidity of movement. Yet, as nature thrives in the light of day, the [observed] woman in the poem remains rooted in the stagnation of the patriarchy. Her usage of light illustrates the passage of time, or rather the lack thereof. She contrasts the smooth 's' sounds of this movement with harsh consonants of the words that evoke the lack of mobility. In this way, the body of the poem mirrors the content and further strengthens its effectiveness as a work of art. Thus with nuance and tact, Bassry subverts the misogynist society she lives in.

In the poem, water represents the lack of mobility for women. The title itself sets up the paradox that Bassry examines. The idea of a woman swimming in thirst suggests that women exist in the domain of water, they swim, or act, in the fluid and moveable world around them. However, the condition of thirst suggests the opposite of movement. Instead of swimming through water, these women experience a lack of water. They don't have access to the type of mobility that water holds and thus thirst for it. Bassry develops the thesis of her title with the water that moves throughout the rest of the poem. In the line, "I see a brief shower covering the streets" she shows how water moves freely through the world the poet inhabits. Similarly, she "see[s] seagulls flying between rooftops." As animals linked to the ocean, the water that allows them to thrive defines their existence. When Bassry indicates that the seagulls fly between rooftops, as the rain covers the streets, she uses water to evoke agency as they move wherever

they want. What has more power than the ocean? As such, Bassry uses the first two anaphoric “I see’s” to praise the agency of the natural world.

In the next three lines she introduces human agency into the poem. She says, “I see the port over there./ I see the boat that will carry me across/ Soon.” Ports are human-made creations that allow for economic trade as an emblem of cooperation. The poet can see the opportunity for movement, for agency, in the boat that will carry her across the port. The thought ends with the word “soon,” which stands on its own line. The emphasis on “soon” demonstrates a feeling of optimism. It protests the stagnation otherwise present in the poem and promises that change is coming. Soon. Finally, the sounds of the poem mirror the content Bassry explores elevating the content to a work of art. In the main body of the poem Bassry uses anaphoric repetition of “I see,” paired with other soft ‘s’ sounds to imitate the agency and fluidity of the ocean. She achieves this with “streets, seagulls, rooftops, across, see and soon.” Furthermore by repeating “I see” as the action the reader can’t help but hear the cognate “I sea.” This distinction in part of the poem that focuses on ocean as a metaphor for agency re-enforces the poems message. Nonetheless, the way that Bassry handles time and light in the beginning and end of the poem confirms that gender equality has a long way to go.

While we as the reader don’t know the gender of the speaker in the poem, we can assume that she is also a woman. Despite the movement around them, these two women are stuck where they are. Bassry starts the poem “From the hotel window,/ I look down on a morning without any forthcoming evening.” Despite the agency the narrator fleshes out in the body of the poem, she observes everything from a stationary perspective. The imagery of looking down from a hotel window evokes the trope of the damsel in distress, observing the world around her from a tower in the sky. Able to see the possibilities in the world, but only able to act in the world if a prince

deems her worthy of rescue. Bassry underlines the static positionality of the narrator when she writes, “a morning without any forthcoming evening.” Time has stopped. The day has begun but from the narrator’s position there is no passage of time, no progress.

Though Bassry sets the scene in the middle of the day, in the presence of light, the end of the poem exposes its true negative tone. She writes, “on the opposite seashore,/ I see a woman withering/ In a dark corner of life.” The observed woman on the other shore is suffering just like the narrator of the poem. The fact that both women are at the edge of the sea parallels their experiences. Even though the narrator doesn’t describe herself withering, the juxtaposition with the opposite woman links their experiences together. The woman withers “in a dark corner of life” unable to access the agency that the ocean promises. Thus each woman’s inability to act in their world causes the narrator and the woman to swim in thirst. Here, Bassry uses hard ‘c’ and ‘k’ consonants and the round ‘w’ sounds to show how these women suffer under a static patriarchy. She achieves this in the first two lines of the poem where she writes, “window, look, and forthcoming,” and at the end of the poem with, “woman, withering, dark, and corner.” Therefore as Bassry uses sound to enhance her poem it functions aesthetically and contextually elevating her commentary to a poignant work of art.

*Hafsa Berki-Lamrani/ Latifa ----*

Hafsa Berki-Lamrani was born in 1958 in Paris, France. Her parents sent her to Algeria when from the time she was four-years-old until she was around thirteen at the peak of the French-Algerian war. After returning to Paris, Lamrani finished her education and received a master’s degree from the University of Paris VIII in English Literature. Since 1979, Lamrani has taught English all over the world from America to China. However, she has spent the majority of

her time teaching English in Rabat and Casablanca, Morocco. At the beginning of the 1980's Hafsa and Latifa co-founded the organization *Shahrazad*, a non-profit dedicated to teaching children, women, and incarcerated peoples in Morocco how to read and write. Lamrani started publishing works of fiction and poetry in the early 2000's with her debut work *Jellabiates* (2001), followed by *Tendresse et autres lumières and Sparks of Life* (2004) a double collection of poetry published in English and French. Latifa, has been a teacher of French and Arabic in Moroccan middle schools and high schools since the 1980's. She has also spent time as a Professor responsible for teaching other teachers at Le Faculté d'Égalité et Citoyenneté.

My conversation with Lamrani and Latifa confirmed many of the assertions that Trabelsi and Bassry made. Through their perspective as teachers these two women demonstrated that today, despite the fact that most educators and students are women, there's a societal expectation that privileges the experience of men in education. As Lamrani confirmed in personal anecdotes there's an abuse of power that's male and financially motivated. Although women's literature is on the rise in Morocco the education system has yet to integrate Moroccan women's writing into the curriculum. Much like Bassry, Latifa speaks to a sense of internalized misogyny that limits women's perceptions of what needs to change in order to have an equal society. Nonetheless, Lamrani held that while there's undoubtedly patriarchal extremists in Islam she points to a long history of cohabitation and tolerance that shows the power of a religious education based in tolerance.

During our interview Lamrani recounted how her father and grandfather were both theologians of Islam. Furthermore, her father translated the entirety of the Qur'an from Arabic to English. As we talked about the increase of extremism Lamrani rejected Islamophobia. She told me about a story where a man came to see her grandfather before making pilgrimage to Mecca.

The man said that he'd paid all of his debts except to one Jew, but considered this irrelevant. Lamrani's grandfather not only made the man go and repay the man with interest, but when the man discovered that the Jew had died, her grandfather made him go and find the Jew's sons to repay them. Moreover, while her grandfather was a theologian of Islam he also was the first person to institute the teaching of Hebrew to the blind in Morocco. In her experience Islam is tolerance. However, Lamrani acknowledges the way the religion is misconstrued to perpetuate the patriarchy. She told me another story about her sister getting into a taxi while wearing a djellaba. The taxi driver turned to her sister and said, "it says in the Qur'an! That men are superior to women, did I say that? It says in the Qur'an." When Lamrani's sister told this to her father, as a scholar of Islam he said, "listen, in Arabic, in the Qur'an in that particular verse that he was citing god says reejal (man) not males." Thus as a Muslim, religion and faith has always been something good as it motivates tolerance for Lamrani. When she finished telling me this story she said, "today when they tell me Islam is terrorism, I say yeah well, there is something in this world, something that is called Islam that I don't relate to and that is terrorism."

Latifa provided an overview of the educational content in Morocco from her experience. Firstly, she related that while teaching "in French and Arabic [she doesn't] remember seeing any women's writing. Only some women from the middle east. We also studied Andalusian text. But there are no Moroccan women in the educational manuals. In University we made a manual for students and there were none. Occasionally journalist but absolutely no writers. But only journalistic texts and it's not the same. But we don't study women poets." Her experience shows that even though some women are present in the curriculum there's a void in the teaching of women's writing. She said that while they taught Fatema Mernissi, women writers are only starting to emerge in Morocco because "there was a dark period because of the Years of Lead."

The general oppression at the time connected to the patriarchal society my interviews outlined. Latifa went on to talk about how “[Moroccans] truly live in a chauvinist society,” but more insidiously that “even women have a chauvinistic mentality because they’re educated in the patriarchy.” She talked about how the commission that determines what materials are put in educational manuals is composed mainly of men. Furthermore she indicated that teachers don’t have the freedom to teach what they want until students are at University level.

Moreover, Latifa told a story that shows how the sense of internalized misogyny affects education at the level of the teachers as well as the material they teach. Latifa was responsible for doing a workshop with teachers at the University of Equality and Citizenship. During the workshop they separated the teachers by gender and asked them what they would do if they were the opposite gender. Almost all of the men indicated that they would like to be pregnant while the women mostly indicated that they just wanted to go into the street and harass men. What this exercise shows is that there’s one thing that men literally can’t do that women can and that’s what they would like to do. In contrast, women wanted to act like men. While women could harass men in the street by the rules of society they don’t. As Latifa herself concluded women, “only want men to understand their perspective” but in doing so want to act like the men that oppress them.

Finally, Latifa and Lamrani talked about how they use literature to teach tolerance and change the dialogue around gender norms. For the forty years that Lamrani taught English her classes were the most attended because, according to her, she used new texts in her curriculum every time. She never recycled a lesson plan and so the material she was teaching engaged her students. This shows the power of a dedicated teacher but also someone who’s willing to show how to closely analyze a text. Additionally, in their organization Shahrazad, Lamrani talked

about how they seek to teach “[the youth] to read and write” because “the youth don’t read much here, and if they can write, especially girls... it’s important to write and express yourself.” The way that their organization has had success shows the power of literature and education to help the youth reorient their mentalities. Furthermore Shahrazad was founded in part by Fatema Mernissi, arguably one of the greatest writers to emerge from Morocco. Mernissi held several writing workshops with Shahrazad that were incredibly successful. In relationship to the way the women’s rights movement is changing, Latifa and Lamrani indicated that, “the problem with women’s rights is that they’re caught up with their lives. It’s the reflection of society because men can do whatever they want, they’re privileged. In our association there are very few men. But I was in a feminine organization and there were plenty of young boys. Because the youth are consumed with questions of equality. From the beginning until now.” If there are few men present in the social movements then the mentality present in Moroccan society will never change. However, the presence of young men and women in the movement suggests a path to progress. As all of my interviews showed the way to change the mentality of society is through education. Giving the youth the opportunity to recognize the system that they are entrapped in in order to analyze and transcend that system. Finally, in my last literary analysis I explored the way Lamrani’s writing illustrates the resiliency of Moroccan women and the power literature to expose the way society forces women to educate those around them (Lamrani, Latifa, April 20, 2018).

### **Literary Analysis of “The ballad of the old witness”**

#### **The ballad of the old witness**

Old she was and tired too

The game was old  
The actors were new.  
Newcomers  
like young spiders  
wove their webs  
of treachery  
behind dark curtains  
of villainy.  
She's seen it all  
wo many times  
with weary eyes  
and saddened heart.  
She's tried and tried  
to warn the flies  
driven by fascinating lies  
"tis jealousy" they would say  
and boldly fly away.

**February 22, 1990**

**From the collection *Sparks of Life* by Hafsa Berki-Lamrani**

In her poem "The ballad of an old witness" Hafsa Berki-Lamrani traverses the treachery behind the patriarchal powers that dominate Morocco and the world at large. As someone who has lived and seen trauma inflicted across decades, her poem grounds itself in the poetic form of a ballad. Ballads are narrative poems that are typically told orally and past down generations. Accordingly, Ballads carry cultural currency as they're used to inform future citizens of their past, in the hopes that they don't repeat the same mistakes. When Lamrani chooses to make the "Witness" that narrates, or orates, the story a woman, she reflects that is too often women —and more specifically women of color— who are forced to bear witness to the trauma in the world

around them. As Lamrani explores how history insidiously repeats itself, she uses the metaphor of spiders to show the dirty, and dark nature of oppressive systems of power. Furthermore, by giving us the date at the end of the poem the poet cements the narrative temporally. In 1990, the Years of Lead were just starting to wind down under the reign of Hassan II. As the country pretended to undergo reforms, this poem speaks to the duplicitous nature of those in power. In this way, the poem outlines how the patriarchal system, motivated by greed, divides all future generations as it lulls them into its web. Thus Lamrani's text transcends time to show the importance of education as the Witness attempts to liberate the youth from that which she has experienced.

The "old witness" in the poem provides credibility to her story as she explores the emotional labor and experience that comes with her age. Lamrani opens the poem, "Old she was and tired too,/ the game was old/ the actors were new." In these lines, she illustrates that although the "actors" or those who perpetuate villainy may change, the system they support has always existed. By using the word "old" three times in the first three lines (including the title) she drives home the repetitive and exhausting nature of the traumatic world to which the narrator bears witness. Moreover, the sing-songy nature of the first lines, evoked by the rhyme of "too" and "new" imply the orality of the poem. As ballads were songs handed down through generations the musicality of the poem indicates the importance of the oral tradition and the historical role women have had as story tellers. Thus the shape of the poem gives further authority to the Old Witness as someone well versed in relaying her testimony. After Lamrani describes the treachery of the new actors she writes, "She's seen it all/ so many times/ with weary eyes/ and saddened heart." She breaks the line at "all" and accordingly shows how the Witness holds an almost omnipresent view of the systems around her as they repeat "many times" over. She again

emphasizes the exhaustion of the Witness through her “weary eyes” but more importantly, she shows the Witness’s humanity through her “saddened heart.” Even though the Witness might know the systems with a godlike knowledge, she is decidedly human and decidedly female. Lamrani shows the physical toll bearing witness takes on the old woman as it affects her eyes and her heart. Therefore, the poet demonstrates how those aware of the patriarchy still suffer under it. The perspective of the orator highlights that beyond the violence, stagnation and inequality that stem from the patriarchy, these societies deplete their women emotionally as they are left trying to explain to future generations why change must occur.

Furthermore, Lamrani uses the metaphor of a spider to show how the patriarchy entraps those around it. In the second part of the poem, she writes, “Newcomers/ like young spiders/ wove their webs/ of treachery/ behind dark curtains/ of villainy.” She conditions the spiders as “young” showing that there are generations who continue inflicting pain. While most might think that a new generation would hold hope and the possibility for change the “young” age of the spiders suggests otherwise. However, in comparison with the wise and weary Witness, the adjective “young” speaks to the lack of authority or wisdom that these spiders have. Lamrani doesn’t absolve the “newcomers” from their misdeeds but still shows how their actions don’t carry the same weight as the testimony of the Witness. Lamrani then builds upon the spider metaphor to underline the worthless message of a capitalistic patriarchy. When the spiders “[weave] their webs/ of treachery,” Lamrani talks about the stories that these new actors try and pass off as beneficial. The usage of web could be the literally grime that spiders create but “webs” also carry the connotation of storytelling e.g. spin a tale. The fact that these newcomers tell treacherous stories compounds upon the seedy nature of spiders. Moreover, because webs are translucent, one can’t see that they are there until it is too late. This relates to how the spiders

spin their webs “behind dark curtains/ of villainy” to illustrate the lack of substance behind these “new” stories. Again, Lamrani uses light, to show how the general public can’t see into the villainous nature of the patriarchy despite the Old Witness’s attempts to elucidate us.

Finally, in the last fourth [line? Stanza?] of the poem Lamrani reminds the reader of the agency that each citizen holds. By introducing the “flies” who get trapped in the web of the spiders, she shows that while systems of power control us we have the opportunity to believe the lies authorities tell us. Speaking of the Witness she writes, “She’s tried and tried/ to warn the flies/ driven by fascinating lies/ ‘tis jealous’ they would say/ and boldly fly away.” The “flies” are driven by the stories that the spiders weave. When Lamrani says the flies blame the advice on jealousy, she references the promise of success if one adheres to the system. If the flies think that the Witness is jealous, then she must be jealous of some perceived success —such as financial, social capital, or power. Next, the word boldly demonstrates the rash nature of those who believe the lies and fly into the spiders’ traps. Additionally, the way Lamrani uses archaic language, paired with rhymed couplets, adds legitimacy to the Witness. The rhyme of “flies/ lies” and “say/ away” adds the same musicality from earlier in the poem that proves the poem’s worth as a ballad.

Then, when the flies say “tis jealousy” her usage of Shakespearean English contextualizes the false nature of the game. Now, re-reading the poem, the “actors” in the first sentence takes on a new meaning. They have agency as they play the power game, but they are just that players. With the Shakespearean English and rhymed couplets the game becomes a performance. Those in power pretend that they want equality and equal access, but in reality their actions are nothing but smoke and mirrors. Furthermore, the addition of “tis” brings in the entire history of Shakespeare’s plays. At the time, the roles of men and women in Shakespearean

plays were performed by men. Thus Lamrani demonstrates that the new actors in the game adhere to the rules established by the patriarchal players. Nonetheless, the positionality of the Witness acts to subvert the systems she observes and lives in as she describes it. Because the Witness knows the system and actively tries to fight it she challenges the patriarchy. But, her poem gains its power from the resilience of the Witness. This woman strives to teach future generations. Therefore, as a ballad that's purpose is to convey information, Lamrani confirms education as the key to liberate her Moroccan —and global— society from the “[villainous]” patriarchy.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion the make-up of women's writing in Moroccan education still has a long way to go. In response to the first question I sought to answer with my research my interviews with Lamrani and Latifa confirmed that women's literature is not taught through educational manuals in Morocco. Furthermore, that the types of stories these women relate are often considered too subversive for the education system. Even if the Minister of Culture has opened up a doorway for Moroccan literature —both male and female— to be translated into other languages there is no movement towards integrating Moroccan literature written by women into the education system.

I proposed that women's writing would create empathy and foster tolerance as it sensitized readers to the experience of women through symbolism such as sexuality. While my analysis of the literature confirmed this assertion the variation within transcended my initial analysis. The way in which these three authors handled feminism in the Moroccan context of an Islamist patriarchy showed the distinct divide in the feminist movement between those who believe in the complete secularization of Morocco and those who believe the problem is the patriarchy as it

works through a misinterpreted Islam. While I was unable to delve in detail into the way this divide affects the feminist movement in Morocco it holds relevance in a discussion of women's literature in education. If and when the education system integrates women's writings into the education system there will most likely be the same type of societal censure that Bassry spoke of. However, my analyses of these writings show how literature such as Lamrani or Bassry's subverts the patriarchal with just as much, if not more, nuance than an extremist work such as Trabelsi's.

In response to my second proposal I proposed that these authors must have a secondary life outside of their writing that facilitates their messages into social movements. Aside from the content of their writing my interviews showed that these authors bring their experience as those able to share stories that might not otherwise find a voice to their outside life. Bassry and Lamrani participate in the forums around the world spreading the message of the situation of women in Morocco. As a teacher and activist Lamrani seeks to give the tools of understanding to her community. Even Trabelsi attends lectures and symposiums spreading her brand of tolerance. Furthermore, these writers all participated in the conference hosted by the Feminine Plural to share their messages with the Rabat, Moroccan, and global community of women's writers.

Finally, with regards to my last proposal my literary analysis confirmed that women's writing subverts the patriarchy by showing the level of individuality and agency that women have. But, more specifically, something I had not considered as an important theme that permeated each text I examined was the role of internalized misogyny in Morocco. All of these women talked about the way this society produces women who adhere to the ideals of the patriarchy. By handling this topic in their work they provide an avenue to increase self-love and tolerance as these women acknowledge the harmful effects of internalized misogyny.

Due to the limited time of this research future research into the ways in workings of the committees that compose the educational manuals. As I indicated in my analysis, Latifa spoke to the male-dominated process of the selections that go into creating these pedagogical texts. Accordingly, if I had the opportunity to continue my study beyond this research period a series of focused interviews on the mindset of those responsible for the dissemination of educational texts would most likely be the logical next step. However, a point that all three women underlined is that education of children —and thus their mentalities— begins in the home. Therefore further research might look into the types of stories that a wide array of Moroccan parents tell their children and the connotations of the message those stories convey.

## Appendix 1: Questions D'Interview

1. Comment vous vous appelez ?
2. Qu'est-ce que c'est votre métier ?
3. Quelles sont vos projets maintenant ?
4. Pouvez-vous parler de la politique de l'écriture féminine en Maroc ?
5. Pour qui écrivez-vous ?
6. Qui sont des écrivaines qui se compose votre canon ?
7. Est-ce que votre position comme écrivaine se fonctionne dans la mouvement de féminisme en Maroc ? Comment ?
8. Est-ce qu'il y a une différence entre la façon dont les écrivaines francophone et les écrivaines qui écrit en Arabe, Anglais, ou Français parlent du féminisme ?
9. Parlez-moi de la situation de la littérature dans le system d'éducation en Maroc ?
10. Qu'est-ce que doit changer dans l'éducation ?

## Appendix 2: Participant Consent Form

### 1. Brief description of the purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to create a focus literary analysis and creative piece on women's rights through the lens of Francophone/translated poetry and fiction in Morocco.

### 1. Rights Notice

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT ISP proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by a Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If at any time, you feel that you are at risk or exposed to unreasonable harm, you may terminate and stop the interview. Please take some time to carefully read the statements provided below.

- a. **Privacy** - all information you present in this interview may be recorded, by hand, and safeguarded. Your interview will be tape recorded. If you do not want the information recorded, you need to let the interviewer know.
- b. **Anonymity** - all names of non-public figures in this study will be kept anonymous unless the participant chooses otherwise.
- c. **Confidentiality** - all names will remain completely confidential and fully protected by the interviewer. By signing below, you give the interviewer full responsibility to uphold this contract and its contents. The interviewer will also sign a copy of this contract and give it to the participant.

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Participant's name printed

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Participant's signature and date

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Interviewer's name printed

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Interviewer's signature and date

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