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CULTURAL HEGEMONY IN FATIMA MERNISSI'S DREAMS OF TRESPASS: TALES OF A HAREM GIRLHOOD

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Abstract

Learning through stories are always the best ways to comprehend the parts of world, history and people. Learning must be a gameful to kindle the interest of learners. Whichever difficulties might seem easier to learn in the form of stories. In that way the novels are doing great work. A novel not only gives the readers the story but it gives the understanding of the characters, their life, their country, their food, their culture, their religion, and how do they deal with their struggles. In that way, the novel and memoir *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* by Fatima Mernissi proves this fact. The story of this novel passes through men from women, Muslims from Christians and their every step of life which is set on their religion and culture. The main thread that runs through all of them is the distinctive oppression that divides everyone into strictly regulated categories. Life in Morocco is beautifully depicted in the novel. The country's motto is "God, Homeland, and King". The languages mostly spoken in Morocco are Moroccan Arabic, Hassaniya Arabic and Berber. Morocco regained its independence in 1956 from foreign domination, and has since remained comparatively stable and prosperous by regional standards. Morocco's predominant religion is Islam, and its official languages are Arabic and Berber; the latter became an official language in 2011 which was the native language of Morocco before the Muslim conquest in the seventh century. The Moroccan dialect of Arabic, referred to as Darija, and French are also widely spoken. Moroccan culture is a blend of Berber, Arab, Sephardi Jews, West African and European influences. There live the people of Islam 98.9%, Christianity 0.9% and Judaism 0.2%. Morocco is a country with a rich culture and civilisation. Through Moroccan history, it has hosted many people coming from East, South and North. All those civilisations have affected the social structure of Morocco. Each region possesses its own specificities, thus contributing to the national culture and to the legacy of civilizational. Morocco has set among its top priorities the protection of its diverse legacy and the preservation of its cultural heritage. Culturally speaking, Morocco has always been successful in combining its Berber, Jewish and Arabic cultural heritage with external influences such as the French and the Spanish and, during the last decades, the Anglo-American lifestyles.

Keywords: Culture, Literature, Ideology, Morocco, Islam, Harem, Stories, Hadith, Feminism, Fatima Mernissi

Introduction

A literary piece reveals not only the contents, which has been accumulated in the imagination of the writer, but also the combination of the real life where he is a character. Literature is a fantastic way of expressing the human life, culture, attitude and thought. So medium of literature is not concerned with the language and native of the author, who writes it. Wherever from the part of this world the literary piece arises, which will give the reader an overwhelming experience when he finds it interesting and gets drowned into that. To kindle and stir the mind of the reader the literary contribution must be distinctive and real. In that way, literature achieves the heart of all type of readers because it reflects life.

Only through culture human mind is cultivated. Culture is oriented to the religion. It is a set of beliefs followed by a group of people belonging to that religion. Culture and life are inseparable; inter-linked things in human life. There are many books which help to learn the mysterious cultures across this world and tend to inspire the readers. In that way among few distinguished Islamic books, the

quasi-autobiographical, memoir by an Arab Muslim feminist, Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* has its credits in portraying Moroccan culture in an effective way.

Moroccan literature flourished with novelists such as Mohamed Zafzaf and Mohamed Choukri, who wrote in Arabic, and Driss Chraibi and Tahar Ben Jelloun who wrote in French. Other important Moroccan authors include, Abdellatif Laabi, Abdelkrim Ghallab, Fouad Laroui, Mohammed Berrada and Leila Abouzeid. Orature (oral literature) is an integral part of Moroccan culture, be it in Moroccan Arabic or Berber.

Fatima Mernissi (1940-2015) is a Moroccan sociologist, philanthropist and writer. Born in Fez to a middle-class family, Mernissi studied at the Mohammed V University in Rabat and later went to Paris, where she worked briefly as a journalist for three years. She pursued her graduate education in the United States and in 1973 obtained a Ph.D. in sociology from Brandeis University. Returning to Morocco, alternatively, she worked in the sociology department at Mohammed V University, and

Moroccan InstitutUniversitaire de RechercheScientifique, also in Rabat.

As one of the best known Arab-Muslim feminists, Mernissi's influence extends beyond a narrow circle of intellectuals. She is a recognized public figure in her own country and abroad, especially in France, where she is well known in feminist circles. Her major books have been translated into several languages, including English, German, Dutch, and Japanese. She writes regularly on women's issues in the popular press, participates in public debates promoting the cause of Muslim women internationally, and has supervised the publication of a series of books on the legal status of women in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Personally she has gone to women in harems and interviewed them. She has a project also for UNESCO.

Mernissi's work explores the relationship between sexual ideology, gender identity, sociopolitical organization, and the status of women in Islam; her special focus, however, is Moroccan society and culture. As a feminist, her work represents an attempt to undermine the ideological and political systems that silence and oppress Muslim women.

She does this in two ways: first, by challenging the dominant Muslim male discourse concerning women and their sexuality, and second, by providing the "silent" woman with a "voice" to tell her own story. Her works represent the painful reality of their lives as they struggle against poverty, illiteracy, and sexual oppression. From her first book, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (1975), Mernissi has sought to reclaim the ideological discourse on women and sexuality from the stranglehold of patriarchy. She critically examines the classical corpus of religious-juristic texts, including the Hadith (record of word and actions of a prophet Muhammed) and reinterprets them from a feminist perspective. In her view, the Muslim ideal of the silent, passive, obedient woman has nothing to do with the authentic message of Islam. Rather, it is a construction of the male theologians who manipulated and distorted the religious texts in order to preserve the patriarchal system.

Material and Methods

For Mernissi, Islamic sexual ideology is predicated on a belief that women's inherent sexual power, if left uncontrolled, would wreak the male-defined social order, hence the necessity to control women's sexuality and to safeguard Muslim society through veiling, segregation, and

the legal subordination of women. Mernissi's work explores the impact of this historically constituted ideological system on the construction of gender and the organization of domestic and political life in Muslim society today.

She, in all her endeavours examines the historical context of Muslim law and tradition and argues that the original message of the Prophet Muhammad, which called for equality between the sexes, has been misrepresented by later political leaders and religious scholars.

This paper focuses on the culture of the Islam people live in Morocco. The story spins around the tale of a young girl's life in a traditional Moroccan harem that is as much as enchanting as it is disparaging. The term 'harem' is very usual word among Muslim people literally means 'forbidden'. But pragmatically it means 'chamber of women'. Women are always safe guarded, secluded, veiled, separated from their own family men and their access to the outer world has been denied for many centuries. They are not permitted to acquire education. They survive in patriarchal society, where all the ideologies established by male. The medieval age spiritual city of Fez and its family harem of the 1940's was a closed tradition is represented in the novel. As a child how Fatima was encountering the experiences in Harem life hood. The story has been spun around Fatima's girlhood and the important women in her life. They are her mother, her aunts and cousins, and her grandmother and her co-wives.

It is described from her view of life as a young girl in the 1940's informed by an adult's understanding without losing the experiences of a child's limited world view and attempts at understanding the world around her. In addition, this memoir is an interesting glimpse of domestic life in mid-Twentieth Century Fez. It is able to provide a very accessible view of the important social and political changes of the time, such as the French occupation of Morocco, World War II, Feminism thoughts, and Moroccan Nationalism. Because the story takes place almost exclusively within the family circle, domestic issues and day to day life figure prominently as well. She comes out of a cocoon which has been established very protectively for few centuries by her ancestors and enjoys her freedom thoroughly at the end of the novel.

Mernissi, as a girl nurtured by motivational and really happened historic events, through the stories told by her maternal relationships probably, she rebels against all the evils she finds. In the story, as the men hold on to tradition, most women argued for equality and change and found

some ways to express their desires. For example, Yasmina, Mernissi's grandmother who influenced Mernissi's life in building rebel. From her grandmother, Mernissi learned about the gender equality, the meaning of confinement in harem, and a causal link between political defeats suffered by the Muslims with the downturn experienced by women.

According to the story, women who lived in harem did not get high education, so women were illiterate. They were required to follow the traditions and cultures that were actually brought up from the patriarchal system.

Findings and Results

Mernissi's grandmother, Yasmina said that the word harem was a slight variation of the word haram, the forbidden, and the proscribed. It was the opposite of halal, the permissible. But her Cousin Chama told her,

"The word "harem," she said, was a slight variation of the word haram, the forbidden, the proscribed. It was the opposite of halal, the permissible. Harem was the place where a man sheltered his family, his wife or wives, and children and relatives. It could be a house or a tent, and it referred both to the space and to the people who lived within it. One said "Sidi Soand-So's harem," referring both to his family members and Tohis physical home. One thing that helped me see this more clearly was when Yasmina explained that Mecca, the holy city, was also called haram: Mecca was a space where behavior was strictly codified. The moment you stepped inside, you were bound by many laws and regulations. People who entered Mecca had to be pure: they had to perform purification rituals, and refrain from lying, cheating, and doing harmful deeds. The city belonged to Allah and you had to obey his Shari'a, or sacred law, if you entered his territory. The same thing applied to a harem when it was a house belonging to a man. No other men could enter it without the owner's permission, and when they did, they had to obey his rules." (Mernissi 1994, 6)

Another character, Mernissi's mother is probably one of the most powerful women in the story. Mernissi's mother taught Mernissi how to do and to survive as women. From her mother, she got the story that told about how to be smart and wisdom. In addition, Mernissi confessed that both her mother and her grandmother who supported her to study in higher education so that women can be independent.

Not only her grandmother and mother who transformed the feminism thoughts to Fatima Mernissi but also both Cousin Chama and Aunt Habiba's stage elaborated plays celebrating famous women's lives with all the women and children of the harem and occasionally the young men participate as members of the production or members of the audience. These plays helped Mernissi to decide that singing, dancing and sensuality were part of the feminists' lives and should not be forgotten; sensuality was a refreshingly natural part of life throughout the story.

Elegantly the prevailing problem of gender inequality made understood to Mernissi, like

"For example, she said, both men and women worked from dawn until very late at night. But men made money and women did not. That was one of the invisible rules. And when a woman worked hard, and was not making money, she was stuck in a harem, even though she could not see its walls. "Maybe the rules are ruthless because they are not made by women," was Yasmina's final comment. "But why aren't they made by women?" I asked. "The men women get smart and start asking that very question," she replied, "instead of dutifully cooking and washing dishes all the time, they will find a way to change the rules and turn the whole planet upside down." "How long will that take?" I asked, and Yasmina said, "A long time." (Mernissi 1994, 63)

Through the story telling they teach how to be a strong woman. And She will also grow invisible wings when she grows as a young woman to escape from the harem life, to see the outer world. Mother and grandmother also concern to encourage Mernissi to be a smart girl, so they enroll Mernissi into high education. Meanwhile, aunt Habiba and Chama present the theatre inside the harem with some messages for women that they must have big dreams about freedom. Finally, mother tries to express Mernissi's desire for equality by let her wear western clothing. Mother wants her daughter at a young age to assimilate into the personal of a western woman to escape the bounded life that she has experienced in the Moroccan Harem. Those are several ways to get equality and freedom as well as men.

Interpretation and Discussion

As an Islamic feminist, Mernissi is largely concerned with Islam and women's roles in it, analyzing the historical development of Islamic thought and its modern manifestation. Through a detailed investigation of the nature of the succession to Muhammad, she casts doubt

on the validity of some of the Hadith, and therefore the subordination of women that she sees in Islam, but not necessarily in the Qur'an.

As a supporter in all her dreams, that has to trespass every boundaries in the name of religious ideologies by the men, the readers could see the character of Yasmina. Once Mernissi asked her,

"Do you think I will be a happy woman?"

"Of course you will be happy!" she would exclaim.

"You will be a modern, educated lady. You will realize the nationalists' dream. You will learn foreign languages, have a passport, devour books, and speak like a religious authority.

At the very least, you will certainly be better off than your mother. Remember that even I, as illiterate and bound by tradition as

I am, have managed to squeeze some happiness out of this damned life. That is why I don't want you to focus on the

frontiers and the barriers all the time. I want you to concentrate on fun and laughter and happiness. That is a good project

for an ambitious young lady." (Mernissi 1994, 106)

Women as an inferior and weak person and men as strong and a smart person always cover the literary world. Till now the point of view which is difficult to prevent is hegemony of men to women. Most of the literary works, men writing are more predominant than women's writing.

Conclusion and References

The men's figure keeps on becoming the authority, and assumed that women considered as the second sex and the subordinated person. But the upcoming feminist writers oppose the men prescribed ideologies (as they say religious and cultural ideology to control women to maintain refined social order) by their great contributions to literature and to the world. They emerge to tackle and cope up certain prevailing abhorrent rules suppress their independence. All the more culture and feminism be the inexhaustible topic for further more research proceedings.

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