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SSC 4302 02 - Senior Capstone for COM

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The Construction of Moroccan Women's Identity in Moroccan Films

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      I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Kenza Oumlil who guided and inspired me through this capstone project. Secondly, I would like to thank Professor Noelia Santos for accepting to be the reader of my capstone, without hesitations. Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to my family and friends for their encouragement and support.

Abstract

This capstone project examines the construction of women's identity in films directed by Moroccan women. It bridges the gap in the current academic research concerning the construction of women's identity in Moroccan films. Using a textual analysis and Stam and Spence's (1985) concept of spectator positioning, this capstone project will analyze the representation of Moroccan women in five films *Adam* (2019) by Maryam Touzani, *Sofia* (2018) by Meryem Benm'Barek, *Apatride* (2018) by Narjiss Nejjar, *Au Pays Des Merveilles (*2017) by Jihane-el- Bahhar , *Ours Dib* (2013) by Sanna Akroud.

The selected films provide an insight into the gendered roles, the contribution of women and men in the public and private sphere, and the power dynamics between men and women. The analysis affirms that not all these films depict Moroccan women in new forms of representation. However, through meaningful mechanisms, the films *Adam* and *Sofia* invite the audience to think critically and challenge these conventional representations.

Keywords: *Moroccan films, gender representation, identity, sexuality, gendered roles*

Introduction:

Multiple mediums of communication convey meanings and build perceptions in people's daily environment. To serve the purpose of this paper, I will focus on the impact of films, precisely, as a medium that builds beliefs and values within societies. According to the author Cloete, in his article 'Film as medium for meaning making,' "Film specifically, is a powerful medium that conveys the values and beliefs of contemporary societies" (Cloete & Cloete, 2017, p. 1). Films are used to allow producers to express themselves, however, how the audience receives and decodes

the meanings illustrated in films is what makes them (films) noticeably influential. Films are seen as medium for 'making meanings'(Cloete & Cloete, 2017, p. 1). To put it another way, films contribute to construct meanings and perceptions in our society. Many studies have examined the construction of gender through films; it is meaningful to analyze the construction of social stereotypes about gender through films (D'Acci, 2004). However, in the Moroccan context, limited research has been conducted to cover the construction of women's identity in Moroccan films. In fact, the two articles titled "Women in Contemporary Moroccan Cinema" coauthored by Saadia Dinia and Kenza Oumlil (2016) and "Constructing Arab Female Leadership Lessons from the Moroccan Media" by Loubna H. Skalli (2011), contextualized this issue of representation in the Moroccan context as will be covered in the literature review.

Since there is a lack of research toward the representation of Moroccan women in Moroccan films, this research paper aims to fill the gap about the construction of women's identities through the five selected films. In this research paper, I will examine the depiction of Moroccan women through Moroccan films. Thus, the research question can be defined as the following: How do Moroccan female filmmakers construct women's identity throughout Moroccan films?

Literature review:

Social Construction of Gender

First, it is crucial to distinguish between gender and sex to not use the two terms interchangeably since they convey different meanings. Sex is contingent on "biology: anatomy, hormones, and physiology" whereas gender is contingent on "psychological, cultural, and social means." (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 2) In other words, sex is a given, whereas gender is

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constructed and achieved based on factors that are identified in the previous definition. According to West and Zimmerman (1987) "doing gender" entails a performance of gender that either conforms to normative gender scripts or disrupts them. In the article, gender is described as "situated doing" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 3) which means that even though the gender is performed individually, its characteristics are oriented, constructed, and produced socially. Also, society expects individuals to behave in a certain way and evaluate them on whether or not they are performing their gender according to those expectations. This is what the two authors West & Zimmerman identify as 'gender assessment.' (1987). The other term that we need to assess is 'representation,' as defined by D'Acci, is "the signs, symbols, images, portrayals, depictions, likenesses, and substitutions" (2004). The second wave of the feminist movement that happened in 1970 has pushed researchers of gender studies to go beyond analyzing women or men characteristics, but to pay more attention to the representation of gender on television (D'Acci, 2004). However, Aubrey noted that this representation is stereotypical. For instance, the images in films portray the relationship between beauty and body image, limiting beauty and sexual appeal to a thin physique (Aubrey, 2006). Ward found that representation of women in films judges them to be excessively emotional and sexual (Ward, 1995).

Women Representation

Women and men are associated with different stereotypes, in which masculinity is associated with being sexual and femininity is associated with being sexually attractive (Grau & Zotos, 2016). To have a more precise description, I would like to refer to the definition given in the article "Stereotypes in Advertising", which defines stereotypes as people's understanding of the genders as different 'social categories' (Grau & Zotos, 2016, p. 761).

Over years, stereotypes become more questionable because they impose specific expectations on one specific group or control opportunities of a group over another which lead specific individuals to be at a disadvantage in our society (Grau & Zotos, 2016). The implication of the use of stereotypes in media is that individuals build their perception of reality based on what was presented in the media due to its dominant role. (Wood, 2013). Concerning the representation of women, they are captured as "decorative objects" (Wood, 2013, p. 36). Women are encouraged to develop certain characteristics such as attractiveness dependence, and powerlessness whereas men are represented as "aggressors" and are also encouraged to develop characteristics of strength, dominance, independence, and violence. These are all characteristics that are favored and validated by our society. (Wood, 2013).

Many researchers have been interested in analyzing the construction of women's identity in media (D'Acci, 2004). However, in the Moroccan context, little research has been conducted to cover this topic. In fact, the Moroccan researcher Kenza Oumlil published an article in 2017 titled 'The Representation of Women in Moroccan Television Talk Shows' where she discussed that the limited representation of women on screen is comparable to that of their reputation as an unreliable source of media" (Oumlil, 2017). While females and males are not equally represented on screen, the stereotypes of a specific group will continue, as they are not given the opportunity to express themselves. Another Moroccan author, Loubna Skalli, confirms the underestimation of Moroccan women in Moroccan media. She states that media fail to represent women and men equally in the sense that women are underrepresented in their 'socio-political identities' and masculine representations are overly exposed (Skalli, 2011).

Regarding the representation of Moroccan women in Moroccan films, a few researchers have investigated this issue. Saadia Dinia and Kenza Oumlil and (2016) in their article titled

"Women in Contemporary Moroccan Cinema" argued that the discussed films in their articles allow for a new representation although they depict the female protagonists as victims. The victimization of Arab women is also discussed in the article "Do Muslim Women really Need Saving?" by Abu-Lughod (2002). She argues that in order to change this perception, we should accept each other, instead of adapting the notion of "saving" that came from the colonial discourse. In fact, Arab women do not need saving, they are capable of make their voice heard and can fight for their rights because they are the only ones who are aware of their struggles (Abu-Lughod, 2002). The notion of 'victims of a patrilineal system' is due to the 'male dominance' or 'masculine domination' which was studied extensively by Pierre Bourdieu. In discussing women's segregation from the public sphere, Bourdieu observed that the 'male dominance' is embedded in daily activities and gestures. For example, women's clothes are not comfortable (heels, skirts..) allowing for little movements (Bourdieu,1999). This is linked to Deborah Tannen's article titled 'Wears Jump Suit. Sensible Shoes. Uses Husband's Last Name'; she described women as 'marked' and men as 'unmarked.' Women are marked by their cloths, appearance, bodies, and makeup. It illustrates how much harder it is for women to make a decision without being judged. (1995)

Theoretical framework:

This research paper will be based on two theoretical frameworks as follows: representation theory by Stuart Hall to explore the process of producing meanings in a language to construct representation; the other framework is within gender studies where we will explore notions and ideas that are associated with women's representations.

Cultural Studies and Representation:

According to the theorist Stuart Hall, cultural studies provide an understanding of the current situation. He states that it "provides ways of thinking, strategies for survival, and resources for resistance to all those who are now in economic, political, and cultural terms" (Hall, 1990, P22). Within cultural studies, he discusses how culture shapes our identities and builds understanding toward the surrounding environment. He defines representation as "using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent the world meaningfully, to other people." (Hall, 1997, p. 15). Representation plays an essential role in producing meaning within a culture, it involves the use of images, signs, and language, but its implication is beyond that. In fact, Hall's article explores the process by which the meanings connect to the notion of representation within a culture. Constructionists argue that we use signs to produce meanings and communicate with others. Language can use signs to refer to the 'reality', but they can also be used to refer to an imaginary element. So, language does not always reflect reality. In fact, Hall considers language as "a system of representation" through which we communicate "the mental representation." (Hall,1997, p.17) He concluded that representation does not mean whether or not the media reflects the reality, as this indicates that there is only one reality; instead, he believes that representation can produce many meanings. In fact, according to Hall, the notion of representation is created by the audience. In other words, it is the audience who give meanings. He stated that by emerging stereotypes, meanings can be modified and adjusted to serve specific purposes. (Hall, 1997)

Critical Theories of Gender

Cirkensena & Cuklanz, (1992) identify five myths that are associated with conventional notions of femininity. According to these myths, women are closer to nature, (mostly in physical shapes and reproductive function.) and are emotional rather than rational. Women are confined /limited to the private realm. For example, women are always captured in houses and never outside. Women

are seen as objects not as minds (Cirkensena & Cuklanz, 1992). Society expects from women to illustrate these myths or framework of femininity through their daily behavior. This is what Butler called the "performativity of gender" meaning that gender is socially constructed, embedded, and maintained through the collective performance and practice by the individuals of the society. The way a person acts, walks, or talks is the practice that one performs, either to meet the expectation that society associates with gender, or to disrupt 'normative gender scripts' (Butler, 1988). However, if one fails to perform their gender the way society constructed it, it is probable that one will suffer from punitive consequences. In other words, we are forced to perform gender in a way that pleases society if we want to prevent punitive consequences (1988).

Hooks, in the book "*Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*", invites the reader to reconsider the history of black women within the American feminist movement. In fact, the call for 'sisterhood' failed due to the lack of black women's inclusion. This sisterhood did not address issues related to race, color, and racism. Hooks claims that in the feminist movement, white women assumed that they were the leaders when it came to resisting against male dominance and that black women were not interested in the women's feminist movement. (Hooks, 1981) In fact, the lack of contribution of black women in the feminist movement, was not because they were less interested or unaware of women's struggles but was due to the 'politics of colonization' in the United States; it was challenging for a black woman to take the lead in a movement. (Hooks, 1981) Similarly, Mohanty through "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism." addresses the implication of inclusion of feminism in the Third World's movements. While she acknowledges that should not generalize about feminism in Third World, she supports the construction of an imagined community for better inclusion through the common struggles.

(Mohanty 1991). She considers that the concept of 'intersectionality' which refers to the notions of 'race', 'nation', and 'social class' as important factors of what makes a woman. (Mohanty 1991)

Methodology:

In order to examine the representation of Moroccan women's identity in Moroccan films, I have adopted a textual analysis, more specifically the structuring absences and exnomination to study the language and images used in the selected films. The former means to analyze what is lacking in the text; as for the latter it means to study the 'dominated ideas' that became part of the norm in a society (Bainbridge, 2011). These textual analyses will be supported by the previous literature. Furthermore, the concept of spectator positioning introduced by Stam and Spence (1985) has allowed us to study the point of view from which the story is told. This concept highlights which character the audience relates to. This is important because it identifies the ideologies and beliefs of the audience and how they perceive gender in reality. In addition, I have used primary data through observation. The films were selected based on the following criteria: all films were produced between the period 2013 and 2020 and were made by Moroccan female film makers. The reason behind this criterion is to analyze how Moroccan female film makers have constructed gender identity in the last few years. Also, all the movies had to be filmed within a Moroccan context. In addition to this, films had to have either participated or won national and/or international prizes and recognitions. In fact, the film *Adam* garnered many awards, such as the following: Prix un certain regard (2019), Prix du Jury, Prix de la Mise en Scene, and Best Performance (2019). Also, it represented Morocco in the Oscar competition for Best International Film in the year 2020. As for the film *Sofia*, it received the Prix un–Certain Regard, Sofia Shadi

Abd El Salam Prize for the best film, Prix de la Mise en Scene, Un Certain Regard, Prix du Meilleur Acteur, Certain Regard, and the Fathy Farag prize.

Moreover, the film *Apatride* participated in the 68th edition of the Festival International du Film de Berlin. Also, the film *Au Pays Des Merveilles* represented Morocco in the 4th edition of The Gulf of Naples Independent Film Festival in Italy and the festival Figueira Portugal in 2018. The film *Ours Dib* won two awards: the award for best direction and the prize for best female performance. All the films had to be popular according to the Box-Office of the Centre Cinématographique Marocain (CCM) and the protagonist character had to be a Moroccan woman in order to put a focus on the feminine perspective of the construction of women's identity in Moroccan films.

Synopses

The film plots must be briefly outlined in order to facilitate meaningful discussion before any further analysis is presented. The film, *Adam,* depicts the suffering of a young woman who left her village to escape the shame of pregnancy outside of wedlock. Samia (played by the Moroccan actor Nisrin Erradi) is looking for a job and housing to survive along with her nine-month fetus in her belly. Samia will is helped by Abla (played by the actor Lubna Azabal.), a widow who sells pastries and raises an eight-year-old child. A rapprochement gradually takes place between the two women and changes the obscure life of Abla. The film was directed by the Moroccan filmmaker Maryam Touzani in 2019

The second film, *Sofia,* depicts the life of a young girl who lives with her family in Casablanca. Following to a hidden pregnancy, one day, she feels an extreme pain in her belly, and realizes that she needs to give birth immediately. Sofia finds herself in a violation of the law when

she gives birth to a baby out of wedlock. The doctor in the hospital gives her 24 hours to present the identification papers of the father of the child before notifying the authorities. Sofia and her family entered a long battle to provide the identification of father. The film was shot in 2018 by Meryem Benm'Barek.

The third film, *Apatride*, was filmed in 2018 by Narjiss Nejjar. Hénia is extradited with her Moroccan father from Algeria, who died after a couple of months of his forced exile. After the death of her father, Hénia tried to return to Algeria to meet her mother. Because she did not have any identity papers, she could not cross the borders. Then an old blind man, who spent his life in France and now had returned to his home country of Morocco, is introduced. His sister asks Hénia to take care of him. She accepts and surprisingly falls in love with his son who rejects her after having intercourse. He then returns to France to join his wife. The father proposes to Hénia who accepted to marry him in the hope of procuring identity papers, so she can return to Algeria.

The fourth film, *Au Pays Des Merveilles*, tells the story of Leila, a rich and spoiled woman who lives a luxurious life thanks to her rich husband, as a politician in a village in the High Atlas Mountains. After his death, she is obliged to go to the village to bring his corpse back to Casablanca for the funeral. During this little adventure, she is accompanied by her driver, Boukal, and a few members of Boukal's family. They then encounter some troubles.

The fifth film, Ours Dib, (عرس الذيب), was filmed in 2013 by Sanna Akroud. It tells the story of a woman, El Kamla, who lost her son Idris. She is forced by her father to marry Haji Ismail. El Kamla, is obsessed with finding her kidnapped son, but her husband does not let her go outside. Due to this, she suffers from a psychological crisis.

Analysis and Discussion:

Representation of Moroccan women in films:

Women confined in the private realm:

All selected films in this analysis portrayed women as confined to the private realm. The majority of the scenes that involve women are filmed inside houses. The film *Adam* (2019) portrays Abla and Samia at home, and the only scene where we see the protagonists outside their home is in a scene at [34:00] when the outside world is presented; I observed that it is loud, scary, dangerous, and dominated by males. Abla and Samia work from home which makes their life revolve around the house and housework. Most of the scenes are either depicting them baking pastries to sell or doing chores. In the scene at [50:00] Samia and Abla evoked the tradition of women not going to the cemetery for the funeral. Samia said, 'We do not even have the right to grieve.' Samia expressed her sadness and regret because she had to stay at home during the funeral of her husband. She was not allowed to spend the last few minutes with her husband because women are not allowed to go to the cemetery. This scene perfectly illustrates how women are not allowed to peacefully grieve just because they are confined indoors.

In the film *Apatride,* Hénia is mostly shown inside the home doing chores similar to Samia and Abla in the film *Adam.* Hénia is mistreated by her husband; she is more of a maid imprisoned by her hope of getting identity papers to return to Algeria. Hénia could not find a safe and welcoming place. Inside the home, she is bothered and mistreated by her husband and outside, she is harassed by the *gendarmerie* because the outside world is designed and dominated by males. Neither the inside nor the outside world could represent a safe, relaxing, and welcoming environment for Hénia.

In the film *Ours Dib,* El Kamla was obsessed with finding her son, but, as a woman, she was forbidden from going outside. She had to escape, every day, from her home. But when her husband discovers her transgressions, she is abused, mistreated, and raped by him. The scene at [1:02] illustrates rape inside marriage; it was a brave act by the filmmakers to tackle this taboo on TV. In this scene, El Kamla says to her husband "it is you who imprisoned me, it is you who pushed me to jump the walls." In this film, El Kamla is imprisoned and jailed inside just because she was a woman. The house, where the family lives, is big and fancy, but there are no windows to the outside world. In one of the scenes, El Kamla is told that a woman goes out only twice in her life; when she is going to her husband's house and when her dead body is taken to the cemetery. However, unlike the stereotypical relationship between the wife and her mother-in-law, this film portrays a beautiful relationship between these two women. The mother-in-law provides support and consolation, because she, too, had to suffer from being confined inside the home when she was younger. In the scene at [18:42] she tells El Kamela how much pain she was in because she was forbidden from going outside, and how she spent all her days captured inside. The two women suffered from being imprisoned for the simple reason that they are women. This illustrates Mohanty's contribution to feminism in the Third World. The two women managed to create what she called 'imagined community' based on their common struggles (Mohanty 1991). They had to go through the same path and faced the same struggles of being confined in the private realm which strengthened their bond.

This analysis exposes that women in all the selected films are obliged to stay in the private realm. They are not allowed to go outside as the public sphere is designed and dominated by men. The finding is coherent with one of the myths discussed in the study of of Cirkensena and Cuklanz (1992), that speaks about how women are socially expected to stay

home, confined to the private sphere where men are welcomed to go outside. The discussion of the public sphere remains incomplete if we do not link it to the media, as this latter has become another dimension with which to measure the contribution of women in the public sphere. According to Oumlil's article titled "representation of women in Moroccan television talk shows," women are in need of better representation in the media which confirms the idea that male domination affects not only women's bodies, but also public (public services, cafes…) and virtual (media) spheres. Skalli confirms that "the public sphere has remained the self-acclaimed space of male absolute power and dominance [because of] the male-dominated politico-religious centers of power in Muslim societies." (Skalli, 2006, p. 38)

Marriage is the savior of women' reputation:

The film *Adam* starts with Samia trying to get a job as a hairdresser. She gets suspicious looks from others, and the business owner is reluctant to accept a woman who is thought to have a bad reputation. Seeing a pregnant woman looking for a job and housing provokes a lot of doubts in Moroccan society, which associates her primarily with the fact that she is not married. It is true that Abla provided help to Samia and she was more accepting of Samia's situation compared to other people, but she also represented the stereotypical and conventional view of Moroccan society. In the scene starting at [13:33] where the first interaction between Samia and Abla happens, Abla offers housing to Samia for a few days. She says, while avoiding eye contact, 'I will offer housing for you only for a few days, the time to look for the one who made you pregnant.' The wording of this statement implies that women are seen as sexual objects and that the act of having sex comes from the males. Also, the filmmaker had Abla avoid eye contact with Samia to illustrate the idea that she is not moral and does not deserve to be seen. Another example from a scene at [41:00], Samia receives harsh and judgmental looks from other women who

assume that she is immoral just because she is pregnant outside of marriage. At this point, she is new to the neighborhood and they do not even know if she is married or not. Their assumption is enough for them to judge her. This scene also captures the importance of men's presence in the life of women. Men should be present with women in order for them to be respected, valued, accepted, and validated by society.

The film *Sofia* tackles the same issue as in the film *Adam*, but it focuses more on how the law views the subject of sex and pregnancy outside of marriage. In fact, the film starts by displaying the Moroccan article number 490 that states the following: "All persons of the opposite sex who are not related by marriage, and have sexual relations with each other, are punishable by imprisonment for one month to one year." Similar to the protagonist Samia in the film *Adam*, Sofia finds herself pressured by both the harsh judgement of the society for no longer being virgin, and the complexity of the Moroccan law. The film illustrates this complexity in the scene at [30:00] where the police officer explains the different cases according to the law.

1. If Sofia was raped, then the rapist gets five years in jail.

2. If they both agreed to have sex, then they are both sentenced.

Omar, the potential father of Sofia's child, accepts to marry her even if he knows that the marriage would fail just to escape from jail. The film reveals the social hypocrisy when Omar's mother pushes him to marry Sofia when she senses an opportunity for social upgrade. At the end, they discover that Omar is not the father of the child. In reality, it is Ahmed, the potential business partner of her father. However, they insist on organizing the marriage with Omar to prevent rumors and protect their social status because marriage; in Moroccan society; is a social pillar, whatever the circumstances.

The film *Apatride* also depicts marriage as the only source of hope. Hénia married an old blind man in the hope that this marriage would eventually help her to procure identity papers, so she can return to Algeria. Hénia also enters in this marriage to find a house in which to live and someone to cover her needs. For Hénia, marriage is the only way to get her life together, however, this marriage makes her suffer physically, as she is mistreated by her husband and emotionally never attached to.

In the film *Au Pays Des Merveilles* Leila's husband is the savior that provided her with the life of luxury that she always dreamed of. She lives in a beautiful house in a wealthy part of Casablanca, has a luxury car and driver, and wears only brand cloths and accessories. However, this is derived from her husband's fortune. In fact, the film opening includes a conversation between Laila and her husband's cousin. The husband's cousin warns Laila that she does not belong to their family's social class and that she is a materialist woman who accepted to marry just to save herself from the misery she was suffering from.

In the film *Ours Dib,* El Kamla is forced to marry because it is a shame for her to stay without a man. The opening of the film portrays her going to her husband's house, and she says to herself, "My father forced me to marry," which implies that she is not only forced to marry to save her family from shame, but even the choice of whom she will marry was not hers. In the scene at [46:00] she tells her husband that it was her father's choice, and that she never wanted to be married to someone she did not know.

Marriage is seen as the source of hope that saves women from being seen as bad, saves them from their misery, and most importantly saves their reputation. Thus, women need to preserve their reputation through marriage.   Marriage is often seen as the happy ending for women in most Moroccan films, which carries with it implications that marriage is the only savior.

This limits the portrayals of Moroccan and Arab women as needing to be saved. As referred to earlier, Abu-Lughod considers the question, "do Muslim women really need saving?" She proposed that, instead of viewing women as voiceless and needing to be saved, we should take into consideration the implications of the Third World's problems. Arab women are able to raise their voices and speak out as they are the only ones who know their own struggles (Abu-Lughod, 2002). The concept of marriage as the savior of women's reputation and honor finds its roots in religion. The prophet Mohamed (pbuh) in Islam married 11 wives for multiple reasons. He married Sawdah bint Zam`ah to be his housewife and to take care of his daughters. Then, he married the daughter of Abu Bakr, 'Aishah, to reinforce his relationship with Abu Bakr, despite her being just 6 or 7 years old. He married two daughters of his companions, Umar and Abu Bakr, so that they can earn the honor of belonging to his family. He also married Umu Salamah, a widow, and Juwayriyah bint Al Harith for political reasons. Women had to be protected and maintained by the surviving Muslim men. (Ezzat, 2009). Islamic society thought of marriage necessary for women be protected and saved. The question that needs to be addressed now is how to change this representation to counter the ordinary norms rooted in religion taking into consideration that it is very complicated to convince someone to revolt against religion as it is considered sacred.

Women dominated by men:

In the film *Apatride,* Hénia was only limited to doing chores and taking care of her husband. Her husband was the decision maker. She was also physically dominated by him. She was mistreated and beaten by her husband. Unfortunately, Hénia was depicted as passive and incapable of protecting herself. She had the dream of returning to Algeria to see her mother, but in reality, she had no control over the fulfillment of that dream. She chose marriage to become

closer to her dream, but after that she recognized that her destiny was in the hand of her husband who provides food and housing for her.

In the film *Au Pays Des Merveilles Film,* we feel that Laila was happy after the death of her husband. She was finally free, and in one of the scenes she said "you [referring to her husband] made me suffer." From the way she was referring to her husband, it is clear that the relationship between them was not good. Laila refused to wear white to express the grief for her husband, rather she rushed to get rid of his body.

In the film *Ours Dib*, the male character was the figure of power in the film. Whenever he enters the house, everyone is frightened and terrified. The first interaction between El Kamla and the new husband, Ismail, was agonizing. They did not talk or introduce themselves to each other. Instead, he asked her to prepare herself to meet his mother and to wear blue because he likes it. Through the film, there was no dialogue or understanding between the couple. Instead, the only scenes where there was an interaction between the two was only the male giving orders or warning the female. He did not only oppress her emotionally, but also physically. In the scene in which the protagonist is raped by her husband illustrates how he was very violent toward her; he was dragging her on the floor while she was screaming. No one could intervene since he is a dominant figure inside and outside the house. However, it brings the question on the impact of this scene on the audience and whether we can go against violence by depicting violence in films.

The films *Adam* and *Sofia* expose the patriarchal society in which the male should be present to provide the identification papers for the child. Without the presence of the male and his confirmation that the child belongs to him, the child will be denied since the female alone will not be able to get the identification papers for her child.

These scenes reveal the various portrayals of domination of men over women through violence, lack of financial independence, rape, and mental abuse. The analysis shows that women are abused whenever they show resistance, which brings us to the "honor crimes" in Arab societies. These honor crimes are not new to Arab societies where, under the name of being conservative, many women were and still killed every day. Just a few months ago, the hashtag "Save Manal, sister of Qamar," was a trend on social media. The hashtag refers to a Saudi woman who was killed and buried by her two brothers because she had a public Snapchat account. Her sister, Qamar, was asked by the authorities to stop writing about this story on social media (Cathrin Schaer, 2021.) Any attempt of women resisting conventional norms may have consequences, statistics are lacking, and a proper investigation is ignored when it comes to honor crimes because Arab societies still view these crimes as acceptable.

Israa Ghrayeb, a Palestinian makeup artist aged 19 years old, was killed by her male relatives because she posted a picture of herself and a suitor on social media. In 2020, a Jordanian girl aged 14-year-old was murdered by her brother because she created Facebook page (Cathrin Schaer, 2021.) Manal, Qamar, and Israa are just cases that became publicly known; there are other women who were murdered in silence. It is clearly noticeable that the murderers in these cases are males who are performing violence as a reaction to the resistance of women attempting to change the 'norms.'

For Bourdieu male dominance defines the characteristics given to women and men. For example, as it was discussed in the analysis, conventional daily activities for female are associated with the household, taking care of children, staying at home. It is what West and Don Zimmerman (1987) called 'doing gender.' Men are more encouraged to speak up, be aggressive, and defend themselves whereas women are expected to be quit and calm. The violence coming from a male is

appreciated and accepted in society whereas violence coming from a female is viewed as aggression. The same action is interpreted differently based on sex. In the article 'Can an Angry Woman Get Ahead?' the author analyzes the perception of anger based on sex. It was stated that "woman's anger should be seen as internally caused." In other words, when a woman is angry, we must link the reason to her. For example, we can say that she cannot control herself or she is just overwhelmed whereas a men anger must be linked to external causes, for example saying that "the situation is frustrating" (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008, p1).

Spectator Positioning

According to Stam and Spence (1985), the point of view from which the story is presented and the perspective from which the sound and images are presented to the audience impact their identifications with the different characters in the film. In the film of *Adam* and *Sofia,* it is easier to sympathize with Samia even if she is forbidden in society. The sympathy for Samia came from the way the director films her. The camera places emphasis on the stretchmarks on her skin and her belly. The emphasis on the belly was for the purpose of creating an emotional response from the audience that will push them to question the future of that innocent baby in her belly.

Apatride encourages identification with the protagonist Hénia through the silent scenes that illustrate her internal suffering. The filmmaker did not rely on words to communicate the protagonist's pain, rather she relied on silent scenes that depicted her in a dark room all alone.

From the opening of the film *Ours Dib*, the filmmaker invites the viewer to identify with the female protagonist. The film starts with a scene illustrating El Kamla hallucinating about her kidnapped child. In fact, the whole movie was a flashback on El Kamla's memories. The opening scene makes the audience identify and emotionally connect with El Kamla before even knowing the whole story. Also, the language used in the film is powerful, indirect, and full of subtle nuance.

However, since the language is derived from the old Moroccan Darija, the Moroccan audience might feel nostalgic to hear this language and identifies with it.

It is important to point out that some of these films illustrate women protagonists in these oppressive situations precisely in order to invite the audience to critique those situations and circumstances. They allow for new forms of representation through their subversive treatment of these themes. For instance, in the film Sofia, Omar was manipulated by Sofia into marrying her, which gave her a more powerful position and a resistance approach. Meryem Benm'Barek utilized the conventional idea that marriage is the savior of women's reputation to empower the protagonist while illustrating the flaws in Moroccan law. In this film, the male character was weaker, and the female protagonist had a more powerful position that allowed her to choose her own destiny. However, I am still skeptical about how the female directors in both films *Ours Dib* and *Aux Pays Des Merveilles,* represented women. In the previously mentioned scene of rape, I wonder if, by depicting conventional violence toward women, the films would invite the spectator to re-consider and think critically toward women's depiction or would it just reinforce the conventional representation. The Film *Ours Dib* portray women as oppressed inside the private realm while *Aux Pays Des Merveilles* depicted them as dependent and upholds marriage as a savior, however, in both films the dynamic was not changed by the end of the film. The females were shown in these representations until the last scene in the film. For instance, in the film *Aux Pays Des Merveilles* the protagonist is still depending on her husband's fortunate to finance her expanses, she is still has no professional skills, job, or her own financial resources. It is true that the mechanism is used in the films invite the spectators to sympathize with the female protagonist, however, they do not give them any powerful position to revolt against the conventional ideas. This is not true in the films *Adam* and *Sofia*. In the film *Sofia*, the female protagonist had a stronger position than the

male character toward the end of the film. In the film *Adam*, the female protagonist becomes independent toward the end. Regarding the film *Apatride*, the female director failed to direct the film toward a feminist perspective. The director adapted the male gaze theory developed by Laura Mulvey which refers to the depiction of women as sexual objects for pleasure in the visual arts. The use of the male gaze in the film could only reinforce the already existing conventional representation. It was interesting to observe that the director as a female also adapted that male view, so that she, as a woman, was sexualizing another woman and normalizing the idea of viewing women as sexual objects. To conclude, based on the selected films, the construction of women's identity in Moroccan films is unstructured and chaotic. Some of the female directors as Maryam Touzani and Meryem Benm'Barek in the film *Adam* and *Sofia* were able to bring the audience to re-consider the conventional representation while Narjiss Nejjar, Jihane-el- Bahhar , and Sanna Akroud in the films *Au Pays Des Merveilles*, *Apatride*, and *Ours Dib* failed to show the feminist approach in their films by keeping the female protagonist in weak positions which reinforced these conventional representation.

Limitation and future directions:

The limitation of this academic research was most apparent in the relative lack of academic research that addresses women's representation in Moroccan films. The lack of articles in this context made it challenging to gain insights and knowledge about the current representation. Another limitation was in the very few films directed by female Moroccan film makers. Also, all the female protagonists are not dark-skinned, and come from an Arab ethnicity which does not allow for women's inclusion and diversity. For future directions, an extended research in the Moroccan context as well as a broader choice of films directed by Moroccan women should be

provided along with diverse protagonists' characteristics including the language, accent, and ethnicity. This will allow for more inclusion and provide a deeper understanding of Moroccan women's representation in films.

Conclusion:

The five selected films: *Adam* (2019) by Maryam Touzani, *Sofia* (2018) by Meryem Benm'Barek, *Apatride* (2018) by Narjiss Nejjar, *Au Pays Des Merveilles* (2017) by Jihane-el- Bahhar , and *Ours Dib* (2013) by Sanna Akroud represent the construction of women's identity. Based on the analysis of the selected films, this research suggests that the films *Adam* by Maryam Touzani, and *Sofia* by Meryem Benm'Barek were able to bring a feminist perspective into their plot by involving the power dynamic of the female protagonist through showing the whole picture of the different scenes by the end of the film. However, the films *Au Pays Des Merveilles* by Jihane-el- Bahhar and *Ours Dib* by Sanna Akroud failed in bringing the feminist perspective to their films since they did not empower the protagonist and kept the same rhythm until the end; this only reinforces the typical representation which did not allow for a meaningful construction of women's identity in Morocco. The spectator positioning was used to create significant connections between the spectator and the female protagonists who might be rejected, condemned, and blamed in society in both *Adam* and *Sofia*. However, the protagonist was highly sexualized in the film *Apatride* which does not support the idea that the Moroccan films directed by women, specifically, aim to have any feminist approach in their films. From the findings of my research paper, it appears that the construction of Moroccan women's identity is unstructured in the sense that not all the female filmmakers tend to use any feminist approach to allow for better representation in their films. For future directions, a larger academic research in the Moroccan

context should be presented as well as a larger inclusion of women, taking into consideration the different ethnicities and languages in Morocco. Furthermore, a wider choice of films directed by females should be provided. In a nutshell, a few of the selected films managed to invite the spectators to think critically about the conventional representation of women in Moroccan society, while others reinforced it.

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