Female Agency, History, and the Current Discourses of Representation: Sayyida al-Hurra (Ruler of Tétouan) as a Case Study

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Abstract
Women’s agency and its representation in history and discourse appear, to all intents and purposes, absent, and often distorted. In North Africa, Sayyida al-Hurra, ruler of Tétouan, stands tall, opposing the prevailing and well-established gender roles that are propelled thorough history and entrenched in modern social practices. She ascends to power in a time when the law decreed that sovereignty was strictly male. The present article attempts a comprehensive study and perusal of the biography of Sayyida al-Hurra exploring how she constructs an effective and dynamic agency, and how she transnationally transcends gender roles. Also, the article discursively and thematically studies and analyses the representation of Sayyida al-Hurra in discourse and history in various texts and through different historical periods. This paper critically interrogates the role women like Sayyida al-Hurra play in the deconstruction of entrenched
discourses of patriarchy and androcentric historical discourses. In brief, this research presents a study of language ideology and its impact on history and its modern circulation in texts and the collective unconscious of individuals.

**Keywords:** gender roles, patriarchy, representation, discourse, agency, history.

0. Introduction
The exploration of the early modern world propels an investigation of the interconnectedness of world cultures as opposed to their insulation. The period between the 1400s and the 1800s is known as the period of Exploration, whereby world cultures and their inhabitants started to connect on intercontinental and intercultural levels. The period from the Renaissance to the French revolution is a period of transition from the premodern, medieval age to modernity. The early modern world is a progressive age different from the one that preceded it, characterised by the appearance of secularism, individualism, the advent of democracy and an unprecedented, swift technological advancement. Still, there was no total break from the past as the early modern period is believed to have been deeply connected to its recent past, which Judeo-Christian monotheistic religions, chauvinist ideologues, and polar social roles together sedimented the notion that women were physically and intellectually inferior to men. The idiosyncratic historical shift occurring at the time, and which negates women’s agency and their participation in the creation of history, is thus perceived primarily by the Europeans. That is, the term ‘early modern’ fits rather loosely with other parts of the world where the Western influence had not yet arrived. The Islamic world for instance was living its golden age, thus transcending the grand narratives of the western historical synchrony. However, the Islamic World still witnessed political turmoil which led to significant political and cultural changes from the 14th to late 17th centuries. Andalusia was conquered and erased by the Christians, and the Byzantine empire was vanquished by the Ottomans. Thus, by the beginning of the 17th century, the Muslim world was conquered by three large and powerful empires: the Ottomans, the Safavids, and the Mughals. These newly built empires constitute the cornerstone of the societies of the modern period as known today to the Westerners. This
research is concerned with Andalusia and the subsequent formation of Muslim kingdoms across North Africa after its fall. Sayyida al-Hurra hails from Andalusia. Her family escapes after the fall of the Muslim empire in Europe. After the fall of Al-Andalus, (Andalusia), Muslims in Iberia were either forced into Catholicism or forced to flee. Sayyida al-Hurrah’s family chose to escape to North Africa and remain Muslim. The historical shift occurring in the early modern world, which caused the transition from the premodern, medieval age to modernity affected not only politics but culture and the gendered power relations as well. There were, in fact, stark social and cultural differences between the Muslim world and the Western one in terms of state policy and governance.

The Judeo-Christian monotheistic religions insisted upon both the intellectual and physical inferiority of women to men. This led to the implementation of a social order whereby women were believed to be the property of men and destined to be ruled over. Furthermore, this social order led to the implementation of a discourse which sedimented the notion that women are frail and dangerous creatures who, if unrestrained, are capable of the most horrendous acts. This discourse deeply rooted in Christianity led to women’s total denial of the public sphere. Even within the private sphere of their households, women were allowed very little freedom. The male literature on the loose morals of women, and their tendency to stray, dominated the Western literary canon. Books on the correct, prescribed behaviour for women also sought to precipitate the notion of male dominance and omnipotent control. As a result, patriarchy reigned in the Western world and many women subjugated themselves silently to male oppression. The naturalisation of certain discursive practices of male misogyny, hegemony, and subjectivity (see Foucault, 1975, *Discipline and Punish*; Foucault, 1976, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality*) results in their unconscious assimilation by the people. Being thus surrounded by practices such as the witch trials, forced marriages, accusations of being the origin of sin (Adam and Eve’s biblical story) made women both vulnerable and submissive. The historical discursive constructs of women’s behaviour, and their position in the status quo, is what ensures their subjugation and subsequent retraction of the world of government. It becomes thus apparent that the early modern world was no place where women could construct distinctive identities, or
forge their names in history like their male counterparts. However, some women succeeded in leaving their mark on history. Sayyida al-Hurra, although relatively unknown by many Moroccans and Muslims today, was and remains a great female historical figure. Also, modern history textbooks taught to our youth today in schools and high-schools do not mention her; not even in a paragraph. And yet, Sayyida al-Hurra is an example of a ruler who attained power swiftly and decisively. She affirmed her position both as a woman of renowned might and political prowess both in the Islamic and Western worlds.

This article traces the steps of this exceptional woman. It also highlights how she secured her position transcending all gendered power relations and the established status quo. In short, this paper critically interrogates the role women like Sayyida al-Hurra play in the deconstruction of entrenched discourses of patriarchy and androcentric historical discourses. This brief and concise study of the representation of a female historical figure highlights the internal link between agency, representation, and the agent characterised in history and discourse.

1. Sayyida al-Hurra: The Life and Death of a Woman of Character
Sayyida al-Hurra roughly translates as a ‘noble lady’ who is free and autonomous. In her book, The Forgotten Queens of Islam (1990), Mernissi (1990, 1993) adds a further characterisation to the cognomen of ‘Sayyida al-Hurra’. Mernissi (1990, 1993) states that two queens bore this title: one in Yemen, Arwa bint Ahmad al-Sulayhiyya, and another in Morocco, Lalla Aisha bint Ali Ibn Rashid al-Alami, which is the birth name of Sayyida al-Hurra. Mernissi (1990, 1993) argues that ‘Sayyida al-Hurra’ is a royal title meaning “the noble lady who is free and independent; the woman sovereign who bows to no superior authority” (p. 115). This woman with such power and influence as to bow to no superior authority is exceptional and unparalleled. What is unusual is that people do not remember these ladies today or have never even heard of them. Sayyida al-Hurra is a given title whose discursive representation, both in history and the collective world of culture, demonstrates the extent to which Muslim women in the early modern world held unsurmountable power and influence. However, while to the Muslim world and Moroccans, Sayyida al-Hurra was a ruler of no equal, to other monarchs, especially of the western world, she was a pirate queen. She lived off piracy and theft. The West accuses Sayyida
al-Hurra of terrorising the Western Mediterranean Sea. Like Mernissi (1990, 1993), Labbady (2009) contends that Sayyida al-Hurra is an Andalusi-Moroccan ‘heroine’ who still occupies an important position in Morocco’s and North Africa’s history and folklore. Lala Aisha’s distorted image in the Western world neither diminishes her sovereignty nor her mark on early modern history. However, the discourse utilised to describe her achievements seeks to portray her as a violent, wayward woman. As a monarch, she is represented as oppressive and a thief.

Sayyida al-Hurra, Hakimat Titwan (ruler of Tetouan) was born in 1485 and died July, 14th, 1561. She was governor of Tetouan and ruler of the city-state between the years 1515 and 1542. Grimau (2000), a Spanish historian and academic, argues that Sayyida al-Hurra is considered one of the most influential figures of the Islamic west. Her influence grew even stronger when she allied her forces with the Turkish corsair Oruç, known to the West and the rest of the world as Barbarossa. As a result of this alliance, Lalla Aisha controlled the Western Mediterranean Sea while Barbarossa controlled the Eastern (Klausman, Meinzerin, & Kuhn, 1997; Qazi, 2015). In 1515, Lalla Aisha becomes the last woman to hold the title ‘Al-Hurra’ in Islamic history. She held this title following the death of her husband, who was ruler of Tetouan (Klausman, Meinzerin, & Kuhn, 1997; Qazi, 2015). Sayyida al-Hurra later marries the Amazigh King of Morocco Ahmad al-Wattasi, but declines to leave Tetouan to complete her marriage ceremony. Ahmad al-Wattasi thus leaves the capital Fes to join his betrothed. This instant marks the first and last time in history that a King of Morocco marries away from the capital, Fes (Klausman, Meinzerin, & Kuhn, 1997; Lebbady, 2009; Qazi, 2015). Sayyida al-Hurra declines to leave her post in order to demonstrate her unwillingness to renounce the governance of Tetouan. She thus ensures that she equals her husband the King in governance and power position. Sayyida al-Hurra affirms her will to rule both to the people and her future husband.

As a child, Lala Aisha flees the Spanish Reconquista with her family. She witnesses the waves of fellow Andalusi women, men, and children escaping from Spain and finding refuge and safe haven in the North of Africa (Verde, 2017). This collective exodus of her countrymen would leave a mark on the still young, but vehement Aisha. Her father, Moulay
Ali Ibn Rashid grants his daughter a distinguished education, notwithstanding the fact that she was a woman; which at the time signified the special position the father must have had for his only daughter. She thus becomes fluent in many languages including Castilian Spanish and Portuguese. The renown and eminent scholar Abdullah al-Ghazwani was one of her many instructors (Lebbady, 2009; Verde, 2017). At age 16, she gets married to a man 30 years older than she was at the time. He was a friend of her father and a man of exceptional repute. This man was then the governor of Tetouan and its founding father Ali al-Mandari, himself an Andalusian Moorish refugee (Grimau, 2000; Verde, 2017). Other resources state that she was rather married to al-Mandari’s son, al-Mandari II (Boom & Park, 2016). Whether she married the father or his son, historians report that Sayyida al-Hurra is a woman with a mind of her own. Her intellectual prowess, strength of character, and education firmly established her reputation as a political leader, of a moral fortitude that subjugated her to no male supervision or control. Lebbady (2009) opines that Sayyida al-Hurra was not only independent of male influence, but that she was fully trusted by her male relatives. This mutual trust which does not obey the laws of gender power relations of the time, Labbady (2009) contends is a prominent feature of the majority of Andalusi-Moroccan women in general. To Lebbady (2009), Sayyida al-Hurra was a woman who knew how to behave, how to rule, and how to respond to each and every situation. Lalla Aisha needed no male supervision or monitoring. She could rule independently and firmly.

The decision to marry al-Mandari was sagacious. As the wife of the Ruler of Tetouan, Sayyida al-Hurra served as a de-facto co-regent of the city state (Mernissi 1990, 1993; Grimau, 2000; Lebbady, 2009, Verde, 2017). Concurrently, Sayyida al-Hurra appoints her brother, Ibrahim, as a vizier to the Wattasi Sultan (Verde, 2017). Thus, the Rashid family becomes one of the major key players in the unification of Morocco against the fast-growing imperial greed of Spain and Portugal. Sayyida al-Hurra thus demonstrates that she is not simply an individual with a desire for sovereign power equal to men, but also a Muslim woman with a great love for her country and a voracious desire to see it strong and unified. Sayyida al-Hurra constructs a female identity of a monarch who holds her country’s best interests at heart. Her need for unity, and the ascendance of Morocco as an independent
Muslim nation in the North of Africa attests to her leadership skills and genuine need for coalition. While trying to fend off the continuous rebellions of the Saadi tribesmen, al-Wattasi dies between the years 1515 and 1519 (Verde, 2017). The precise date of his demise remains unknown. It is around this time that Lala Aisha assumes the title of the Sayyida al-Hurra which the Westerners thought was her real name (Verde, 2017). The appellation Sida al-Horra appears in contemporary Spanish records as a given name to Lala Aisha (Verde, 2017). This shows that settlers at the time had very little knowledge of the Islamic law or its system of governance.

However, the reign and power of Sayyida al-Hurra do not endure. Just like any other sovereign in history, Lala Aisha’s fall from grace is swift and permanent. Her equivocatory and irresolute political relations with the Portuguese in Ceuta induced its governor to sever all economic ties with the merchants of Tetouan (Grimau, 2000; Verde, 2017). The locals then started to question the efficacy of her rule. Some even complained that it was her ‘temper’ and ‘pride’ (Chamarro, 2004; Verde, 2017) which caused their business to deteriorate. Simultaneously, Sayyida al-Hurra’s son in law, Moulay Ahmad al-Hasan al-Mandari was plotting with the Saadis anticipating the downfall of the Wattasi’s reign (Verde, 2017). In 1546, Ahmad al-Hasan arrives in Tetouan with an army and overthrows Sayyida al-Hurra (Verde, 2017). Lala Aisha surrenders and retires to Chefchaouen where she lives off the rest of her days until her death on July 14th, 1561. Sources state that she lived twenty more years in Chefchaouen before her death (Boom & Park, 2016).

No personal writings or records of her production were left for us to peruse today. Her might, elegance, intellect and Andalusi-woman pride are eloquently put in these lines by her fellow countrywoman, the 11th century poetess, Wallada, daughter of al-Mustakfi, ruler of Cordoba (Mernissi 1990, 1993; Klausman, Meinzerin, & Kuhn, 1997; Boom & Park, 2016; Lebbady, 2009). Wallada decorously reifies Sayyida al-Hurra’s fortitude and poise, and those of all Andalusi women in these lines:

Worthy I am, by God of the highest,
And proudly I walk, with head aloft.
2. The Discursive Representation of Sayyida al-Hurra in History

In Mujeres Piratas (2004) (‘Pirate Women’) the Spanish historian and academic German Vasquèz Chamorro, does not refer to Sayyida al-Hurra either by name or by her royal title (Sayyida al-Hurra). Chamorro (2004) uses the generic nouns ‘mujer’ (woman) and ‘reina’ (queen). This marks an obvious instant in discursive representation where influential women like Sayyida al-Hurra are intentionally distanced from their social power. Chamorro (2004) thus puts more emphasis on the ‘gender’ of the sovereign rather than her political position. He uses the lexical term ‘queen’ which is fraught with pejorative connotations of absolute rule, and tyranny. Queen is the feminine word for King, which is an adjective often related to monarchy and ‘male’ monarchical rule. In the same respect Chamorro (2004) states that the city-state Tetouan attained unequal prosperity, rarely heard of in North African history. Yet, he attributes this affluence to the riches of gold and goods coming off the ships of the Spanish and the Portuguese. Here, Chamorro (2004) accuses Sayyida al-Hurra of piracy. He claims that she was a ‘pirata’, (a pirate) whose riches and might came from theft. This clearly shows Chamorro’s (2004) hidden intake on Muslim women leaders. A woman like Sayyida al-Hurra could not have ensured her people’s prosperity through honest means. It had to be theft and piracy. Chamorro (2004) neglects to add that the goods coming off the ships of the Spanish and Portuguese were winnings of an ongoing war between the North of Africa and imperial Europe. Chamorro (2004) historically decontextualises the alliance Sayyida al-Hurra had with Barbarossa. He intentionally overlooks the political context of the time, and the true intentions of Sayyida al-Hurra in favour of a mere desire to acquire economic capital.

Women leaders around the globe and of different time frames, have most of the time been obscured from history books. Carefully crafted historical discourses, mostly produced by men, disparage these women’s exploits. They render the achievements of women like Sayyida al-Hurra insignificant and incidental. Concurrently, Mernissi (1990, 1993) argues that women heads of state were ‘purged off’ the pages of history (pp. 3-4). These women were denied historical existence, and so their stories or at least their version of these stories never reached discursive debates of representation. That is, they hardly ever reach history books, especially those taught in schools and
universities. The very little amount of information we have today on Sayyida al-Hurra was produced and circulated by men, most of whom were Westerners. As opposed to Chamorro (2004), Mernissi (1990, 1993) utilises ‘Muslim Queens’ to connote grandeur, strength, and fortitude. She contends that Muslim Queens from the far East to the West, fought and lost thrones, inherited them, or killed to acquire them; these women “led battles, inflicted defeats, concluded armistices” (p. 3). Just like male sovereigns, these queens had either trusted advisors, or fully counted on their wits. No matter the way, these women played the game of politics to perfection. Even in death, they resembled the demises of their most famous male counterparts: some were poisoned and others were stabbed. They died in the same manner of Caliphs (Mernissi, 1990, 1993). Thus, it becomes onerous to decide which of these women heads of states were and which were not. The distinction rests on a complex discursive interpretation of Islam and its perception of women. At a time when politics was an exclusive male endeavour, women like Sayyida al-Hurra ascend to the throne. They determinately declare themselves equal to male monarchs.

*Imam, Caliph,* or *Amir al-Mu'minin* are words that personify the concept of monarchical power in Arabic and simultaneously Islam. However, all three of them describe a male head of state or sovereign; never a woman. Therefore, the permeation of the world of governance where male power relations dominate is indeed, quite an accomplishment. To decode the secrets of women who have attained monarchical power like Sayyida al-Hurra, Mernissi (1990, 1993) for instance, discursively and lexically separates what she terms ‘political Islam’ from ‘Islam Risala’ (spiritual Islam) (pp. 4-5). The former is a politically distorted version of Islam which insists on denying women access to the public sphere based on restrictive readings of the Koran and Shari’a Law. The latter is the ‘spiritual’ version of Islam; that is the version of Islam which highlights the equality between the two sexes and capitalises on the honourable position that Koran and Shari’a have, combined, accorded to women.

The titles of *Caliph* and *Imam* are religious in both nature and function. They carry scriptural connotations of piousness and devotion. They also strictly follow Shari’a Law. Caliph and Imam are also masculine adjectives in Arabic with no feminine corresponding terms. Hence,
women are by nature, and by scripture, unable to lay claim to any of these titles. Taking this into account shows that women’s accession to the throne represents a breach in the system as Mernissi (1990, 1993) contends. While no woman managed to be Caliph or Imam, many women assumed the positions of sultana (Sultan, feminine adjective) or ‘malika’ (queen). This shows that Islam does not deny women their right to rule, but only attributes certain duties like Friday prayer and other religious ceremonies to men because of their symbolic significance. The cultural and social conditions of the time must also be taken into consideration when breaching the subject of religious adequacy. Patriarchy and male dominance in the Arabian Peninsula precede the advent of Islam and is not caused by it. Women like Sayyida al-Hurra defy a repertoire of challenging gender roles which denied women certain rights and privileges. These women did not defy Islam. On the contrary, they were proud of their religion and they flourished under it. Women monarchs resited pre-Islamic gender stereotypes and not the religion itself.

Sayyida is a term which lexically juxtaposes with jariya in Arabic. Sayyida is a free woman, a mistress or a woman of noble birth. Jariya is a slave girl. Al-Hurra is the feminine of Hurr, in Arabic. Hurr is a lexical term which semantically correlates with Sharaf (Honour) in Arabic. It connotes aristocracy, the elite ruling class, the dominant social group, and above all, resistance. Lala Aisha assumes the title Sayyida al-Hurra in order to assert that she is a free woman, both in social rank and in management of her city-state. She is a free and independent woman whose governance does not solely stem from her noble birth, but also from her political shrewdness, and education. Sayyida al-Hurra was an educated woman known for her mental abilities and not her physical ones. She thus asseverates that she requires no male chaperon in order to rule her state, not even the Wattasi King of Morocco. During Lala Aisha’s time as governor of Tetouan, the city enjoys unprecedented political stability and economic affluence as stated earlier (Mernissi 1990, 1993; Klausman, Meinzerin, & Kuhn, 1997; Boom & Park, 2016; Chamorro, 2004, Qazi, 2015).

The city’s prosperity rests not primarily on piracy as Chamorro (2004) argues, but on Sayyida al-Hurra’s acute judgement and outstanding negotiation skills. She considered the Spaniards and the Portuguese her
equals both in business and politics. Mernissi (1990, 1993) contends that Lala Aisha’s launch into piracy, and her subsequent alliance with the Turkish Corsair Barbarossa (Oruç Reis), was her distinctive way of easing the humiliation that befell Muslims after the fall of Granada. Her dealings with Oruç (Barbarossa) were motivated by an identity crisis and an insatiable desire for revenge for the loss of her nation, and a not mere acquisition of material wealth. And yet, all this grandeur and strength of character go fairly unnoticed nowadays. Despite Sayyida al-Hurra’s remarkable reign of 30 years, Mernissi (1990, 1993) asserts that:

the Muslim historian treat {...} al-Hurra with {...} disdainful silence: one finds practically no information in the Arab sources about this queen, who exercised power for more than thirty years. (p. 18)

Holding power and using it effectively by women does not rest on beauty as some might argue. And although various discourses dictate the use and extent of gendered power relations, they do not limit them. Political power as Mernissi (1990, 1993) opines was a form of seduction for women in its own right. Islam, as a discursive construct in itself, does not deny woman access to the public sphere. It is the distorted interpretation of it that does. When Sayyida al-Hurra and many Muslim sovereigns like her held power, it was swift and effective, unencumbered by gender roles or unequal power relations. The gender roles established and solidified through discourse do not limit women’s status quo nor do they affect their social power. Through intellect and strength of character, many Muslim women ruled their nations and led them to prosperity and political stability.

3. Agency and Representation: The Birth of Resistance

Issues of representation often take centre stage in contemporary debates. The discursive construction of social actors and their subsequent capability to act within a social context are inextricably bound. As Trustedt (2020) argues, 'agents' do not exist without their personification. And 'agency' does not operate without its substitute representation. That is, the personification of an agent rests on the discursive image constructed on their behalf out in the world of experience. Agency requires a different type of representation, most often based on the behaviour of social actors themselves. Sayyida al-
Hurra personifies Muslim female historical agency. As proved earlier, equivocal contexts of production of two opposing cultures represent this woman. Two polar cultures debate her representation and agency according to already established discourses of gender roles, power relations, and religious polarity. Double, juxtaposed 'representations' complicate the integrity, authority, and contextual presence of the agent. In other words, representation constitutes part of what is characterised by it. It is both a productive and restrictive process. Sayyida al-Hurra enjoys a representative function in which she stands for other Muslim women and queens long forgotten by history books. Sayyida al-Hurrah’s presence, and new characterisation, produces a novel discourse in which women of her calibre regain an empowering social status both in culture and history. However, this same distinctive political agency may be the cause behind her absence from history books. In other words, Sayyida al-Hurra is a female character produced by her juxtaposed representations but also limited by their availability. Very little information is left about her, and whatever is left does not do her justice. The existence of women like Sayyida al-Hurra attests to the ascendancy of women and the decline and inefficacy of male dominance and patriarchal rule. The juxtaposition between male discursive supremacy and female desire for confrontation may hinder female agency and its subsequent representation. For this reason, agency and representation share a conflicted correlation. By exploring palpable discursive formations like gender, culture, and religion, we may grasp how agency and representation sanction and forbid; and enable and constrain the social subjects' capacity to emerge or disappear.

In addition to representation, the study and perusal of the history of ideas, characters and cultures is a complex constellation of discursive relationships which fall under 'influence'. Edward Said (1994) argues that influence is "the connection between the present and the pastness (or not) of the past" (p. 230). Sayyida al-Hurra is a female character belonging to the past whose influence on culture and in discourse endures. Her past construction of female identity challenges the status quo. It also correlates with our present understanding of agency and the subsequent birth of resistance. Thus, the contemporary disparity in power relations between women and men is a cultural and discursive form of agency and representation. It highlights the influence of the past on the present construction of discourse and its circulation. The
circulation of particular texts and their ensuing use appears not only in history but also in the world of experience. However, disparate power relations do not always have detrimental effects. Power produces as well. It leads to resistance. Power brings forth new domains where the marginalised can create their meanings, truths, and distinct identities. Sayyida al-Hurra stands as an example of female resistance construction in a world of male dominance. Her resistance to male rule and power dominance is a product of the dominant discourse of power and gender differences.

4. History and Agency: The Birth of an Identity
Barker (2005) offers a straightforward definition of agency. He declares that "agency is the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices" (p. 448). Barker (2005) surmises that the individual possesses a distinct identity more powerful than the system. The individual transcends the discursive constructions of the system and engages in practices where they prove to be active agents.

History is a social construct in which discourse plays an important part. However, agents can construct and reconstruct their world and world views regardless of the social structure of their world history. What drives the premise of this paper is that structure and agent are interdependent forces – structure influences human behaviour, and agents are capable of changing the social order they inhabit. Sayyida al-Hurra is an example of a woman whose identity formation stems from a social order deeply rooted in religion and the historical context of the period. In this respect, the works of Bourdieu (1972, 1979) attempt to reunite external structures with internal ones. These structures constitute a significant part of what he calls 'habitus'. Bourdieu (1972, 1979) contends that the agent externalises interactions between actors into the social relationships in the field. In other words, the capacity of Sayyida al-Hurra to act within the external structures of her time and discourse practices stems from the formation of the internal structures of her identity. Her agency is a product of her socially entrenched habits, skills, and discursive dispositions.

The history of 'agency' is a history of continuities and evolution. Social actors, acting within a social structure, define their position in the history of worlds and ideas. Agents ensure the growth of their condition in the
status quo and thus the continuity of new meanings given to their role as autonomous characters. Human history is one of exceptionality in the sense that it sometimes, offers examples of social actors who overachieve, defying asymmetrical power relations and conventional social and cultural norms. It is not ensconced in the finitude of events, people, or eras. History is all these put together and more. Humans affect history because of their arbitrariness and their unpredictable social behaviour. The appearance and endurance of Sayyida al-Hurra as a historical figure is due to her arbitrary, unpredictable nature as an acting social agent and a female identity constructed despite crippling power relations and stark gender differences. Sayyida al-Hurra is an example, taken from history, of the possibility of women’s agency and resistance of the status quo. A Muslim woman, sovereign or otherwise, understands her true position within society and strives to preserve and fight for the potential of equity and active agency.

Researchers and the audience today know Sayyida al-Hurra as a woman of many talents and a multi-layered identity. She is a female, a Muslim woman, a queen, a noble lady, and a governor of exceptional repute. The experiences of women and men differ, and so do their representation and agency. Whether Lala Aisha chose the royal title Sayyida al-Hurra or not, I would like to argue that it was utilised to distance herself from the connotations of the words queen and sultana. Sayyida al-Hurra is both a lexical and semantic locution which serves not only as a royal title but also as an expression of this sovereign’s resistance to the hegemonic discourses of monarchy and male monarchic rule. I would also argue that Lala Aisha prefers to stand aloft and distance her governance from that of her male counterparts. She assumes the responsibility of government without ego or pride. And she relinquishes it just the same. The circulation of Sayyida al-Hurra as a royal appellation marks Lala Aisha’s concrete and active presence in the construction of the female identity of the Muslim monarch that we know today.

5. Conclusion
This article is not just about the study and analysis of the discourses that led to the existence and identity construction of such a remarkable female monarch. It is about remembering this lady and anchoring her existence in history and culture. To the collective conscious minds of Moroccan society, this stunning lady does not exist. Cameron (1985)
argues that the discursive practices that characterise language and social
behaviour represent historically progressive ways that define the limits
of femininity and masculinity. Similarly, this paper argues that these
discursive practices that characterise language, culture, and social
behaviour represent historically progressive ways that define the
construction and circulation of certain identities and the obscuration of
others. Lala Aisha’s absence from Arab and Moroccan history books
mark the current, modern representations of female figures in discourse
and history. This is a representation that clearly highlights gender bias
and historical obfuscation. As Moroccans and Muslims, scholars and
academics, grandchildren and social products of such impressive
history, it falls down to us to save Lala Aisha and many female historical
figures like her from oblivion. This process starts with education. From
Primary education to university, our youth need firm and pride-
inducing points of reference to connect them with their culture, with the land, and
the nation. That is why I believe that stories like that of Lala Aisha,
Sayyida al-Hurra, inspire and enkindle feelings of national pride and
unity.

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