The Incarcerated Female Subject(ivity): Resisting Gendered Trauma

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of gender, trauma and resistance within the Moroccan prison apparatuses during “Years of Lead” (1956-1999). Moroccan female detainees have challenged the view that they were passive. They have aligned themselves up with the resistant voices to meet the horizons and expectations of post-colonialism—as an emancipatory project. This paper is premised upon the analysis of the female testimonial writings left by some of the leading female voices during the “Years of Lead” in Morocco: Mustapha Kamal, Susan Slyomovics and Fatna El Bouih’s Talk of Darkness, (2008), Khadija Marouazi’s The Biography of Ash (2000) and Michèle Fitoussi and Malika Oufkir’s Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail, (2001). Following François Lyotard (1995) and Barbara Harlow (1987), this paper conceives of these writings as a form of resistance. Writing and revealing what Cathy Caruth refers to as “insidious trauma” in her 1995 book Trauma: Explorations in Memory is essential for the recovery of the postcolonial subjects from the trauma of the arbitrary and political incarceration. The female resisting subjectivities are reconstructed in their prison writings. In so doing, female political prisoners resist what Gayatri Spivak refers to as “epistemic violence” in her 1988 text “Can the subaltern Speak?” that Moroccan society exerts on female subjectivities. By articulating their voices of trauma and resistance to
the patriarchal discourse (re)shaping and reshuffling their subjectivities, Moroccan female prisoners foreground a feminist/political consciousness. Finally, this paper suggests that these female prison writings should be parts of the Moroccan postcolonial feminist theorising.

Keywords: Trauma, resistance, gender, “Years of Lead” prison writings, Moroccan Cultural Studies

0. Introduction

The traumatic human experience of the 20th century is a mere reflection of the impact of power on the course of history, society, culture, international relations and politics. Power relations have always been shaping human relations, forms of government and domination, social class and cultural hegemony. When Morocco got its “independence” from France in 1956, there were many calls from Moroccan activists to meet the premises of “independence”. This paper departs from Robert Young’s definition of postcolonialism as constitutes a critical response to the new world system conditions. It struggles for autonomy, real independence and self-determination (2016, p. 59). During that period, many male and female activists and dissidents were arrested and imprisoned for their dissident and antagonistic subject positions. As a postcolonial condition, “Years of Lead” Morocco cannot be analysed outside the framework of such ubiquitous relations of power. The inequalities and the simultaneous oppressions exerted on the Moroccan post-colonial subjects were meant to shutter their agency and deny their subjectivities. Since power abuse generates and provokes resisting voices, post-colonial Moroccan activists and the “Years of Lead” dissidents have offered their own ways of resistance to all forms of oppressions that they have gone through. Retrospective autobiographical and other self-writing responses (like memoirs, diaries, and autobiographies) to the postcolonial trauma offer the traumatised victims a sense of agency and self-empowerment to recover from the trauma of their imprisonment.

The birth of the Moroccan “resistance literature”, to use Barbara Harlow’s terminology (1987), marked the appearance of many female dissident and activist voices. Female resistance literature aims at generating what James Scott refers to as the “Hidden Transcript” and at foregrounding and therefore redefining the structures that underlie the
Moroccan patriarchal society. The 1980s, noted Suellen Diaconoff (2009), was the period when female Moroccan prisoners’ voices were articulated. It was the period when political female prisoners started to write. They broke and fought what Paulo Freire in his 1968 Pedagogy of the Oppressed calls the “culture of silence”. These women have challenged the view that they were passive. They have aligned themselves up with the male resistant voices to meet the horizons and expectations of post-colonialism, as it “claims the right of all people on this earth to the same material and cultural well-being” (Young, 2003, p. 2).

Recent female prison testimonies on the "Years of Lead" trauma have brought the issue of gender and state sponsored violence against women into public and academic attention. Such prison testimonies write opposition and activism against gender-based violence and trauma of the political dissidents who spoke truth to power. Women have exercised their agency, however. They were not silent, as comes to be interpreted by their total absence in the academia during the “Years of Lead” Morocco (1956-1999). They offered resistance to different traumatic and unspeakable forms of oppression and violence. Moreover, they empowered other women to share and articulate their traumas as well, Rabia Bannouna’s 2003 Tazmammart: mandhour nisai (Tazmamrt: A feminist perspective) is a case in point.

1. The Incarcerated Female Subject: Resisting Gendered Trauma

“As far as we are concerned, you’re now a man. Therefore, we treat you the way we treat men.” El Bouih, Talk of Darkness

The simultaneous oppressions that the Moroccan “Years of Lead” dissident women were subject to presuppose foregrounding a “free” space to articulate their insidious traumatic conditions and voice their subject positions vis-à-vis the inequality and state sponsored violence that surrounds the post-colonial world. In the post-colonial Morocco, female dissidents and prisoners have addressed such issues in their “resistance literature”. Writing allows the female dissidents and prisoners a sense of empowerment and agency to resist the gendered trauma and violence that they faced in the prison apparatuses.
To articulate the approaches that this paper adopts, it should be highlighted from the very outset that the paper has recourse to many approaches developed in the major field of cultural studies. It is a free interplay of gender theories, trauma theories and subjectivity. Though it argues and calls for a merely local and organic Moroccan feminist discourse, this paper draws also upon the findings and the scholarship of other feminists and gender as well as subjectivity theorists (like Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, respectively). Given the intersectional framework and nature of these issues (gender, trauma and subjectivity), this paper also investigates the identity politics or the subjectivity of the traumatised female prisoners within the patriarchal prison apparatus. The rationale behind theorising “subjectivity” is due to its interrelatedness with trauma. According to Kelly Oliver in his *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (2001) “trauma is part of what makes subjectivity othered” (p. 7). Female prisoners undergoing the “Years of Lead” trauma have their subjectivities refashioned, reshuffled and othered in the overwhelming prison apparatus.

As an interdisciplinary field of study and a travelling theory, trauma studies goes beyond its epistemic border. Before the emergence of the contribution of many scholars in the field, trauma studies used to be approached only from other perspectives, i.e. psychiatry, psychology, medicine, etc. Now thanks to the influential works by Cathy Caruth (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996)), trauma studies, as a travelling theory, has neither confines nor borders. Cathy Caruth and other scholars like Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub have devised new approaches of trauma studies in literature and critical theory. These trauma studies theorists have replaced their focus on finding the relationship between war, captivity and other incident-incited trauma and/in literature and other forms of expression. Problematic, though, is the possibility of narrating and representing such trauma (Gilmore, 2001; Judith, 1997).

Since cultural studies approaches investigate how power relations are exercised and perpetuated (Hall, 1996 & 1997), this paper examines the intersectionality and the interrelatedness of gender, trauma and power. The female prisoners of conscience of the turbulent “Years of Lead” were subject to power abuse and trauma because of their gendered subjectivities. Narrating and writing such experienced trauma is,
however, beyond the ability of the survivors. It is even beyond the language to represent it. It is unpresentable as Gilmore (2001) asserts that:

> Crucial to the experience of trauma are the multiple difficulties that arise in trying to articulate it. Indeed, the relation between trauma and representation, and especially language, is at the centre of claims about trauma as a category...language fails in the face of trauma, trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency. Yet at the same time, language about trauma is theorized as an impossibility. (p. 6)

Despite the fact that trauma is difficult to articulate, survivors carry some trauma symptoms or what is referred to as post-traumatic stress disorder. They make recourse to writing and sharing their trauma testimonies. Writing, as argued before, allows them agency to articulate their subjectivities. It is noticeable that Moroccan prisoners of the “Years of Lead” have authored numerous autobiographies and other self-representational forms of writing to narrate their trauma. Such choice of autobiographies is attributed to the fact that, as argued and put forwards by Ursula Tidd in his “Exile, Language, and Trauma in Recent Autobiographical Writing by Jorge Semprun,” (2008), autobiographical prison writings and trauma writings share some characteristics. Both forms of writing give voice to an “absent other” or what Mary Mason calls “other voice”. Such voice is excluded and othered that it constitutes a kind of hidden transcript and testimony. With this variety of voices of trauma, the victim/witness or in some cases narrator subvert the singularity of the experience.

As for the female subjectivities, it should also be highlighted, following Cultural Studies approaches (see Hall, 1996, 1997 & Baker, 2003), that identity is socially, culturally, and institutionally assigned to all subjects. Political discourse contributes to the construction of identities. They are part of the analysis of the discourse. Like identity, gender is also a social construct that is assigned to the institutions and social and cultural practices. Collectively, they produce discursive practices within which gendered subjectivities and other subjectivities are constructed and produced. In his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation)” (1971), the French Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser, theorises this process through which
individuals are conceived as ‘knowing subjects’ as interpellation; he argues that “ideology hails or interpellates individuals as (its) subjects” (p. 22).

Subjectivity is shaped by the subject positions that the discourse of power compels its ‘subjects’ to take up. This process of identifying oneself as a “free” resisting and active agent is what these prison writers painstakingly foreground. As prisoners of conscience, Moroccan prisoners of the “Years of Lead” generate dissident narratives and discourses to raise the consciousness of other women to exercise agency and resistance. As the incarceration affects the way prisoners view their subjectivities being processed and (re)shaped, the conception of subjectivity is useful for the analysis of their prison writings; prisoners’ performances and behaviour inside the prison apparatus are regulated and disciplined which gives birth to new refashioned subjectivities. Even the way these prisoners are interpellated, traumatised and treated is dictated and framed by the subjectivity and subject position of the prisoner.

As far as the Moroccan prison status quo is concerned, it is worth mentioning that Althusser’s notion of interpellation is pertinent to the analysis of female subjectivities. As it articulates its approaches, this paper should also acknowledge that Althusser’s approach towards power relation is problematic. Since this paper probes some forms of resistance that female prisoners have offered to the overwhelming trauma circulating their subjectivities, Althusser develops no theories of resistance. Yet his contribution to theories of power views that the “state” is not the only one to blame for reconstruction of the oppressed subjectivities. In line with this argument put forwards by Althusser (1971), prisoners themselves help sometimes interpellate and construct themselves, as individuals, into subjects. Althusser argues that by means of ascribing and imposing a socially determined role on subjects, ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals into “concrete subjects” or in Foucault’s terminology “good boys” (1982). Consequently, subjectivity is the product of dominant ideology.

In his 1982 article on “The Subject and Power” Foucault outlines three modes of objectification through which power is exercised and “human beings are made subjects... the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the "good boys" (p. 777).” Prison as a
A repressive state apparatus helps, by force or otherwise, interpellate the female prisoners into subjects to the state’s ideology. The way in which the female prisoners are perceived in this apparatus is ideologically inspired. Consequently, as subalternised, as used in *Subaltern Studies* (1983) -- being subordinated in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way (Guha, p. viii) -- and silenced subjects, female prisoners are traumatised by the state ideology that shapes their subjectivities. In his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) Michel Foucault shows how the body of the prisoners becomes the object of regulation. It is an arena of target and power. Foucault (1975) writes “the body...is manipulated, shaped, trained, which [the body] obeys, responds, becomes skilled and increases its forces” (p. 136). Yet, the body is not always submissive and obedient; there is always the possibility of resistance. As he himself argues elsewhere ‘where there is power there is resistance’ (Foucault, 1990, p. 95). The first step towards resistance has been the ability of these prisoners to ‘speak truth to power’. Foucault theorises the by-product of manipulation of the body as “docility”. This latter is a situation that is attained by means of the ‘general formulas for domination’, that are exerted on prisoners (Foucault, 1975, p. 173).

Prison, as a repressive state apparatus, is part and parcel of the network of power. It aims at depriving subjects from their agencies and accordingly disciplining them. These female prisoners make use of writing to restore their stolen traumatised subjectivities. Such resistance to these overwhelming apparatuses aims at generating a body of knowledge to redefine the “female” identities. In the poststructuralist theory of discourse, the emphasis, however, is replaced on the discursive practices within which such “knowledge” is produced and resistance is offered. In so being, and in line with the argument put forwards by Herman (1997) about the unrepresentability of trauma, this theoretical paradigm disputes the possibility and scopes of narrating one’s trauma within these regulations. Put differently, it answers the question of how Moroccan female political prisoners identify and assign agency to themselves regardless of their subaltern subject positions in the patriarchal post-colonial Morocco. Furthermore, this paper analyses how these female prisoners or female subjects that are shaped and constituted by and within the neo-colonial patriarchal discourses manage to serve as agents of resistance.
To construct such subjectivity and maintain ‘docility’ in prison, disciplinary power makes use of many techniques. Foucault (1975) refers to these techniques as “the means of correct training” (p. 170). In this respect, in his *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault contends “The success of disciplinary power derives no doubt from the use of simple instruments; hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it, the examination” (p. 170). The female prisoner is subject to all these means of regulation. “Everything in this world is subject to surveillance. The guard was watching her through the peephole” (El Bouih, 2008, p. 31). ‘Hierarchal observation’ is carried out by a constant ‘gaze’ at the individual, say, the prisoner. Drawing on feminist tradition and critique, when a “female” body is under the male ‘gaze’, voyeurism, objectification, fetishism, women as the object of male pleasure and bearer of male lack come along (Snow, 1989, p. 30). In prison, women are usually subject to this male ‘gaze’ which is almost patriarchal, ideological, and phallocentric. A female anonymous political prisoner says, “You feel the gaze of strange men always around you. You can do nothing, you cannot even be minimally at ease because there is the gaze of men on you” (Slymovics, 2005, p. 90). It is this authority of the prison guard that mitigates the agency of the female prisoner. It evokes the binary opposition: the prisoner is always guilty, criminal, and the like; whereas the prison officer/guard is always innocent, ordinary, and even infallible. The female prisoner is always panopticised and put under the surveillance of male power. Moreover, this prisoner remains always subaltern and deprived of voice.

The perception of women inside the prison apparatus as a mere subject of power brings the issue of gender politics to the fore. Gender is a social and cultural set of assumptions as well as practices that regulate the construction of male/female subjectivities and the social reactions that govern them. Given that gender is a social and cultural construct, the female prisoners identity is defined within the dominant patriarchal discourse. However, masculinity and femininity as forms of gendered identities are constructed and represented under this biological determinism. Prison, as a disciplinary and regulative space of power par excellence, is not immune from such social practices. Male and female bodies are subject to this gender bias and distinction. Given the heterogeneous ontology of the Moroccan society which is said to be
patriarchal, this subordination of one sex (woman for instance) is dictated by the social discourse.

In contemporary feminist discourse, sex/gender distinction is outmoded. Drawing on a poststructuralist theoretical and critical paradigm, contemporary feminists argue that there is no access to the biological “truth” of the body. The naturalness of the sexed body is only a mythical credo. In this respect, Judith Butler (2006) argues that:

Gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which “sexed nature” or “a natural sex” is produced and established as “prediscursive,” prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts. (p. 10)

These sexed bodies are per se socially constructed, following the argument of Butler. This alibi of the biological determinism contributes to the play of the subordination of women. Female subjects as such are believed to be physically and psychologically weak. Such discourse always favours men over women. It also attributes leadership to men. Moroccan female dissidents and prisoners, who have been firmly fastened by oppression and state sponsored violence, have also struggled against male chauvinism. They fought against a despotic hegemonic discourse shaping them during the “Years of Lead”.

There is an intricate relationship between violence, gender and subaltern subjectivities. This latter is the ultimate outcome of both violence and gender relations. El Bouih’s 2008 Talk of Darkness helps carve out a space where she—and other political detainees-- could voice the voiceless women and their traumatic experience that deeply marked her during detention. It reveals the ongoing silencing and what is referred to before as “means of correct training” of the female prisoners during the “Years of Lead”. This transitional period is marked by different historical trajectories in the Moroccan history. Trauma, silencing and violence exercised on these women have flowed from their biological sex. As argued by Judith Butler (2006), before the biological sex of the prisoners is also problematic. It provokes more power abuse and disempowerment. As female subalterns, dissident women and prisoners of conscience “tried to speak though it was forbidden” (El Bouih, 2008, p. 9). Such violence that denies women
agency and voice has accentuated the need of the Moroccan feminist and activists to write and voice the silenced trauma and atrocities of the “Years of Lead”. Women who witnessed the “Years of Lead” trauma elucidate resistance to the violence and the “culture of silence” that shaped the female subjectivities.

De facto, there are many factors that determine and shape the subjectivity of whatever subject. One’s voice is no exception. It plays a pivotal role in constructing one’s subjectivity. There are even some limitations and boundaries that women, for instance, should not transcend, so far as articulating their voices is concerned; for instance, writing used to be only a male privilege (Smith & Loudiy, 2005, p. 1082). What women were left with was silence. Fatna El Bouih (2001) asks us to:

Remember that the model for all Moroccan females is the woman who lowers her eyes, never raises her voice, whose tongue "does not go out of her mouth," as in the Moroccan proverb "ilfum mesdud ma duxluh dbana" (into a closed mouth no flies can enter). Girls are raised with: "Samt hikma u-mennu tfarraq ilhikayem" (silence is wisdom and from it comes even greater wisdom). (p. 42)

In line with Judith Butler’s contribution to gender studies-- that lies in her ability to go beyond and deconstruct the gender/sex distinction, by coining the concept of “performativity”—the prediscursive construction of the female body shapes the way patriarchal Moroccan disciplinary apparatus views the “model” women, a silent and devoiced one. By critiquing Simone de Beauvoir, Butler deconstructs the socially constructed binary of sex and gender as biological and cultural, respectively. For Butler (1986), the sexed body cannot determine the individual’s identity. Any given identity is socially and culturally ascribed. At this level, the body of the individual shapes their identity. As dictated by the Moroccan society, all women should fit into the “model” female subject that “lowers her eyes” and most importantly “keeps silent”.

Gender is also related to the behaviour of the subject. That is to say the actions and the act ascribed to a person determine his or her subjectivity. The discourse shaping him or her interpellates them into refashioned and re-gendered subjectivities. Butler, as mentioned before,
deconstructs this cunning discourse. Individuals are “disciplined” to define masculinity and femininity with regard to their sexed bodies. The “regulatory practices” that prison agents exert on women like “body search” and psychological violence are meant to highlight the fact that women have transgressed and transcended the socially established borders of politics, dissidence and activism. The price they have paid for such attempt to challenge the dominant male is a gendered trauma and violence. Khadija Merouazi (2000) says that “I cried violently, as I never did before, when the whip came down my body”. Many other women like Khadija have been subject to such physical and psychological violence. Such violence shows the male chauvinism to assign dissident voice exclusively to male subjects.

As argued before, trauma is roughly unspeakable. Yet, making use of what Foucault calls the ‘power of writing’, female prisoners of conscience could communicate such situations, say gendered trauma related symptoms or what is referred to as post-traumatic stress disorder. In her 1997 seminal work on Trauma and Recovery, Judith Herman argues that:

It is very difficult for the observer to remain clearheaded and calm, to see more than a few fragments of the picture at one time, to retain all the pieces, and to fit them together. It is even more difficult to find a language that conveys persuasively what one has seen. Those who attempt to describe the atrocities that they witnessed also risk their own credibility. To speak publicly about one’s knowledge of atrocities is to invite the stigma that attaches to victims. (p. 2)

In these prison narratives, the “Years of Lead” trauma survivors are invited to articulate their trauma experience. Following Herman’s line of thought, the “other voice” that prison writers invite to voice their trauma is also questionable; they simply happen to be victims who witnessed such atrocities of the “Years of Lead”. They risk the credibility of their own voice. Yet, a close reading of the female prison writings suggests that prison writers use some techniques to communicate the unspeakable collective memory of trauma. Repetition and slips of the tongue are among two techniques that trauma survivors
make use of to come to terms with the past and communicate their traumas (Butler, 1990, p. 273).

Merouazi’s and El Bouih’s prison writings contain many repetitions and sometimes parapraxes. For both of them, repetition in a humorous way indicates the ridiculous experience and the atrocities committed against them. This emphasises also the inconsistencies that characterise the Moroccan regime and prison apparatuses. Silencing is a means of traumatising and subalternising. Prison is an arena where even antagonistic and opposite things (must) reconcile. Silence and screams are the same. They mean the same and almost nothing for the prison agents and officers, but for El Bouih and her comrades it is an anathema and challenge. They have fought and broken silence. Moreover, El Bouih’s narrative point of view shifts from the first person to the second person. Every so often, she slips up into slips of the tongue. These metaphorical slips include “our shared life, excuse me, our shared death” (p. 14) and “you saw light, excuse me, the darkness” (p. 66). These parapraxes, in Freudian psychoanalysis, come as an outcome of hidden thought. They evoke the reader’s attention of a belated trauma of incarceration and how painful and devastating such trauma has been. This indicates also that there are some instances of pain and torture which El Bouih and Merouazi cannot go into describing. More than that, language cannot adequately convey this traumatic situation, given that trauma is unspeakable. These slips of the tongue show the effects left by this trauma; it reveals the posttraumatic stress disorder experienced by these female prisoners of conscience.

The aforementioned prison writings chronicle some of the gender dynamics and gender-based violence exercised on female detainees to perpetuate the power relations underlying the Moroccan ‘discipline and punish’ apparatuses. Not only have these female detainees challenged this hegemonic discourse, but they have also subverted the dominant gender norms; that is, they have engaged in the political sphere, which is believed to be a male realm. As one of the prison officers says addressing El Bouih:

You want to change the world, strip woman of her natural skin, erase differences… a woman belongs in the harem, and only the harem. The woman belongs in the home and her role is to
reproduce life. Anything else is an aberration, a deviation from nature. (p. 38)

Similarly, Laila in Merouazi’s *Biography of Ash* is subject to the same symbolic violence. One of the prison officers says to her “أش خصك أعز” (p. 143) “What do you want, O, naked one?”. Such verbal violence can be interpreted as the patriarchal discourse that shaped the post-colonial Morocco. This is simply because they get involved in political issues. El Bouih and Merouazi highlight the deep dimension of the view that prison is meant for male activists. This psychological violence or say trauma destroys their subjectivities. At this level, it is also safe to argue that these female dissidents are making a call for women’s empowerment by generating a kind of “political consciousness” and resistance. Fatna El Bouih (2008) reports what the torturers and prison officers say to the arrested female activists and dissidents “"Do you see those young women who want to enter the world of politics and take on men's work?" (p. 80). Such questions are meant to provoke female dissidents and activists. It is also meant to mitigate their agencies and reduce their subjectivities to nothing.

Apart from the psychological trauma of incarceration, female subjects have also been subject to physical violence and assault. Malika Oufkir, for instance, was subject to a worse physical violence which is related to rape. Being in a very weak position to resist and defend herself, Malika has resolved to endure the assault of a prison officer. She says:

> He pressed himself against me, and began to grope my breasts and bite my mouth. He lifted up my blouse. I could hear him panting like a rutting animal, he smelt bad, his breath was offensive, his body was crushing me, but I was incapable of fighting back. I was powerless: I couldn’t scream or defend myself in any way without frightening the others. (p. 172)

Using the oft-repeated Saidian phraseology, prisoners should ‘speak truth to power’ to reveal the blanks, the silences, and the *non-dits* of rape and sexual trauma experienced by female prisoners. It is only by writing about such trauma that prisoners could reveal and address the taboo issues that used to be “*hshouma*” (shame). This state sponsored violence that was exerted on these women is meant to mitigate and undermine the subjectivity of the female dissident. Yet the very first attempts of writing such trauma is contestatory and antagonistic to the
master narratives. As argued and put forwards by Nawar Al Hassan Golley in her 2007 edited book Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity through Writing:

Risking censorship slander, or possible imprisonment, the Arab woman writer is a dissident, crossing into the traditionally male space of language. Such violence of sacred sexual/textual space impinge on a woman's honor (sharaf), which is contingent on her silence and invisibility, and challenge both cultural concepts of women and "the master narratives" that always assume the speaker is male. (p. 185)

The prison writings under analysis provide the male perception of female identities within a repressive state apparatus. The representation of gender relations in prison is at the centrality of El Bouih’s Talk of Darkness. The title of the French translation of the memoir is very telling; it is Une femme nommée Rachid (A woman named Rachid). Oxymoronic as it might be, the French translation of this prison memoir suggests male subjective attributes could be attributed to female prisoners. El Bouih has her subjectivity refashioned and her name masculinised as “Rachid”. “From now on your name is Rashid,” (p. 5) says El Bouih’s torturer. Moreover, as she mentions in an interview with Fatima Merinssi, it is “Rashid N 45”. Other female political prisoners who have been subject to gender-based assault include both Widad Bouab and Latifa Jbabdi. In prison testimony "The Prison that Was a Refuge after the Isolation in Police stations" Widad Bouab has undergone the traumatic assault, “Thus they chose a man's name for each one of us. Mine was Hamid” (p. 80). Similarly, Latifa Jbabdi in her prison testimony “The Police Station, Torture, Prison, and Torturers” that concludes Fatna El Bouih's Talk of Darkness says that "to mask the presence of women in the detention center, they gave us men's names. I was called Said, Twil, or Doukkali" (p. 86).

Attributing such numbers to prisoners is meant to mitigate the political prisoners’ subjectivities and deny their agencies. The prison apparatus is not satisfied with female engagement in politics. This is simply because “وجد امرأة بالسجن هو خروج عن المألوف بالنسبة للمجتمع و العائلة” (p. 79) “the existence of women in prison is not common to society nor to family” adds Merouazi. Such hegemonic practices and gendering of space and subjectivities exerted over female detainees are attributed to
the patriarchal discursive practices that assign leadership and dissidence only to men. In these cases, there is one conclusion that could be drawn from such hegemonic practices: resistance, dissidence and activism are only attributes of men. This argument brings to the fore the claim that women are supposed to stay in the harem. Such refashioned subjectivities have not disempowered the prisoners, on the contrary, these prisoners have recovered their agency and spoken ‘truth to power’ as active agents.

Since these forms of power abuse and verbal as well as physical violence aim at perpetuating power relations that underlie the relationship between man and women, female activists and dissidents of the years of lead Morocco have offered resistance in theory and praxis. As for this latter, El Bouih and Merouazi were arrested for their membership in a Marxist Movement. El Bouih’s trauma is articulated from the very beginning of her memoir. As the title suggests, Talk of Darkness, denotes that she is blindfolded. She adds that “We became acquainted with each other in silence and darkness” (2008, p. 11). This is echoed in Khadija Merouazi’s Biography of Ash “لا لون لها غير السود” (2000, p. 68) “Prison days are certainly successive and have no colour other than blackness.” Both El Bouih and Merouazi are used to silence, blackness and darkness. This is the price they have paid for their praxis and for their courage to voice themselves and speak truth to the male power.

Malika Oufkir’s prison autobiography title Stolen Lives is also very telling. It is another way of saying stolen subjectivities. This novel is not only about Malika, the General Mohammed Oufkir daughter, as the original French title (La Prisonnière) (The Prisoner) might suggest, but it draws its significance from the inclusion of the other oppressed voices, i.e. her little siblings. In fact, Stolen Lives does address the trauma of the whole Oufkir family. Yet at its core is a deeper cry of gender-based violence. Not only have the Oufkir family experienced trauma inside prison, but their trauma goes beyond the walls of prison. No one wants to host them as they escape from prison. For the whole family, the outside world is as dark as “another prison, even if it resembled a real house” (Oufkir, 2001, p. 285)

The trauma of imprisonment is rampant. It affects the prisoner and all his/her “free” family. As a state apparatus, prison exerts a systemic
violence on the member of the prisoner’s family. Ilham, the daughter of a Moroccan female detainee, is a subaltern subject who is born unfree; being born in this dark prison, this clean-handed female subject has never known freedom or the outside world. Ilham’s mother is silenced. The mother, as El Bouih (2008) describes, is a “powerless [who] did not utter a word—prison had tied her tongue—even when she was in labor there were no powerful drugs to ease her acute pain” (p. 59). This traumatic status quo is meant to remind the dissidents of the high price of speaking truth to power. In his *Femme- Prison Parcours Croisées (Women prison, Crossed Paths)*, Nour Eddine Saoudi (2005) documents the traumatic consequences experienced by the female relatives of the detainees:

L’arrestation d’un militant politique au Maroc entraîne souvent des conséquences imaginables pour son entourage, parents et amis (...) Par leur sensibilité et leur émotivité particulières, les mères, les épouses et/ou les sœurs sont généralement les plus affectées par ce douloureux événement qui dure parfois de nombreuses années. (p. 8)

(The arrest of a political activist in Morocco often leads to unimaginable consequences for his entourage, family and friends (...) In particular sensitivity and emotionality, mothers, wives and / or sisters are usually the most affected by this painful event which sometimes lasts many years.)

Like Fatna El Bouih who offers the space for agency articulation of some subaltern female prisoners, Nour-Eddine Saoudi attributes the same agency to the silenced political prisoners to voice the trauma of their relatives. Political imprisonment evokes an ongoing trauma that the family member of another political prisoner undergoes. Oum Hafid, for instance, says that “j’ai été arête et torture parce qu’ils n’ont pu prendre mon mari recherché” (p. 57) “I have been arrested and tortured because they have not been able to arrest my wanted husband.” This woman experienced the same trauma of incarceration that her husband would experience had he been arrested. This upholds the claim that women also aligned themselves and helped resist the hegemonic power that circulates the postcolonial Moroccan dissidents.

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1 Our translation
2 Our translation
Given that prison is a patriarchal and repressive state apparatus, the subject position of women becomes weak. The very first act of articulating their trauma is a form of resistance. Writing helps articulate and voice the antagonistic subject position of women who have been silenced, subalternised and traumatised. Going back to *Resistance Literature*, Barbara Harlow suggests the political prisoners' testimonies "are actively engaged in a redefinition of the self and the individual in terms of a collective enterprise and struggle" (1987, p. 120). Speaking of the redefinition and reshuffling of the gendered subjectivities, Moroccan female dissidents and prisoners have generated a good number of scholarship to redefine the female subjectivities.

These prison accounts are detailed experiences of trauma and torture in the Moroccan prison apparatuses under the regime of Hassan II. Given the period and the conditions under which they were generated, Moroccan prison writings are crucial in shaping, defining and foregrounding a feminist discourse in Morocco. They are meant to redefine and reshape the patriarchal structures of the Moroccan female identities. Their active involvement in activism is an ultimate answer to the gender-based segregation and violence that they usually experience in the society. They want to voice and articulate their agencies in the political field.

The recent academic turn towards the gender issues provoked serious engagement with the postcolonial conditions of the Moroccan activists in general, and the Moroccan female activists and dissidents in particular (see, for instance, Diaconoff, 2009; Badran, 2011; Charrad, 2001). These prison narratives generated a new discourse on/of gender dynamics. Many activists and later-on-prisoners have picked up the pen and started to fight back in their own way. The female prisoners of the turbulent “Years of Lead” could not be intimidated nor controlled. They were uncensored and defiant subjectivities. They have not observed the regime’s "red lines" but they have transgressed them and joined the other counterpart by generating feminine voice.

Some of these outspoken Moroccan female political prisoners and feminine voices include Latifa Jbabdi, Maria Zouini, Khadija El Boukhari, Fatna El Bouih, Widad Al Bouab, Fatema Okacha, Rabea Ftouh, Saida Menebhi and many others who have already spoken “truth to power” and articulated their screams of consciousness. Given their
subject position as active agents who articulated their opposition and dissidence from within and without the state apparatuses, these women have generated and foregrounded the Moroccan feminist discourse. These women are at pains to approve themselves by asking an existential and Shakespearean question, a crucial one being “to be or not to be.” Malika also highlights the need to join the women rights movement: “had I been free, I would have followed those women. I would have been an activist like them” (Oufkir, 2001, p. 167). Activism and resistance to such gender-based practices has been an existential necessity for the “Years of Lead” Moroccan women.

So far as activism is concerned, these women believe that they have been traumatized not because of a crime they have committed but because they have principles and generate consciousness. The following excerpt from Khadija Merouazi’s Biography of Ash summarises the trauma of a certain reality that lasted for years and inspiration, hope and dream of a better reality.

(Despite our conviction that the arrest was our paid tribute for our principled convictions, we still bet deep down in ourselves on women who share the burden with us. We all dream of a woman who is pushing us out of the darkness, like light that shines in the darkness of the prison. It doesn't matter that the candle burns, what matters is to illuminate the prison, to illuminate just a corner of my cell that I dyed yellow so that the light condenses. My night is my light, but it refuses to be a mere bridge to cross….).

The moment the post-colonial Moroccan women activists have aligned themselves with the other voices of resistance to speak truth to the oppressive power, they knew that would cost them so dearly. They want to burn like candles to illuminate and get out of a blinding-absence-of-light place, to borrow from Tahar Ben Jalloun. This take will help pave

3 Our translation
the way for the rest of the other women get out of the darkness of oppression and tyranny by simply believing strongly in the principled convictions. This echoed also in Fatna El Bouih’s prison autobiography “they'll try to eradicate our ideas and our principles, they won't succeed if we hold out” (p. 10). It is this persistence to be dissident that exacerbates their traumas in prison since they were conceived of as passive agents who are transcending the “red lines”.

2. Conclusion

To conclude, these female prison writings bespeak the complex interplay of trauma, gender and (dis)(em)power(ment). This interrelatedness perpetuates power relations, which are even accentuated more in prison as a disciplinary and regulatory state apparatus. Trauma and violence experienced by female prisoners are justified by the claim that women should not access the political realm. Despite the epistemic, physical and symbolic violence exercised on these female prisoners because of their gendered identities, Moroccan female detainees have offered different means of resistance to have a voice of their own. They have not been passive anymore; they have been active, activist and dissident.

Writing is a means of resistance and a site of agency. It has allowed these female detainees to voice themselves and articulate the specificities of the female activism as well as imprisonment during the “Years of Lead”. To contest the dominant male narratives and reconstruct the collective traumatic memory of the subalternised, silenced and traumatized female subjectivities, Moroccan female prison writers have generated what Suellen Diaconoff refers to as the ‘house of women’ as opposed to the “house of men.” Prison trauma narratives offer the victims of the “Years of Lead” a theoretical alternative space to voice their political and discursive silences. Writing is a form of discourse and (em)power(ment). It is a space where the gendered subjectivities and identities are negotiated and redefined. It is within this framework that this paper tries to investigate how the Moroccan political prisoners’ voice engage in their political empowerment.

Apart from the main objective of these prison writings, female dissident and prison writers try to bridge the “memory gap” of the “Years of Lead” traumatic experiences which have been silenced and unvoiced. They accentuate the need to reconsider the history of post-colonial
Morocco. Such past history is fraught with many exclusions and unsaid traumatic atrocities. These female prisoners write explicitly about their torture and trauma of imprisonment in order to come to terms with the past atrocities of the regime. Such hegemonic practices and atrocities over female detainees are based and attributed to the patriarchal practices.

As advocates of women's rights in Morocco, many of the aforementioned dissidents have authored many books. By dint of bearing witness, offering testimony, explaining and showing how the postcolonial Moroccan women have proved that they are not passive any more, but they are active as comes to be interpreted by the number of accounts they generated during the turbulent period. Moroccan dissident women have subscribed their voices to the male resistant ones and have also produced some of the Moroccan “hidden transcript”.

In line with previous arguments put forwards above, when trauma survivors experience this kind of alienation and loss, their trauma is reinforced and even perpetuated by other related symptoms. That’s exactly the same repercussions and aftermaths of the colonial trauma. In so being, the colonial discourse is still deferred in the so-called post-colonial Morocco. These conditions of alienation of identity crisis are also experienced in the “Years of Lead” Morocco. What exacerbates the trauma of the Moroccan “Years of Lead” prisoners is that it was gendered.

In so being, these writings implicitly reinforce the aim of this paper to inscribe these voices of emancipation and the coming-to-feminist consciousness to a situated organic, and appropriate Moroccan feminism. Finally, to reiterate Virginia Wolf’s famous essay “A Room of One’s Own,” Moroccan female prison writers have already had voices of their own and accordingly started to write.

**References**


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