

REVIEW

Femininity, Masculinity, and Sexuality in Morocco and Hollywood: The Negated Sex

Osire Glacier

Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017

ix + 193 pages. ISBN 9783319532851

Reviewed by KATJA ŽVAN ELLIOTT

Osire Glacier's new book on "the Negated Sex" explores the issue of gender-based violence in Morocco through Moroccan literature written in French and Arabic. Glacier refers to an extensive corpus of more than seventy contemporary novels written by both Moroccan female and male authors. Glacier uses these works as a sociological lens through which to analyze gendered stereotypes, societal expectations toward men and women, and patriarchal sexuality. In addition, her book is a powerful, unflinching, and personal critique of Morocco as a misogynist state and society that could only be written by a Moroccan woman who grew up, experienced, reflected on, and finally revolted against a state that dehumanizes women from birth. Indeed, the book gives the impression that this is more than merely an academic study of gender relations in contemporary Morocco. Rather, it is Glacier's personal quest to raise her feminine voice against her birth state, men, and society, all of which tried (in vain) to deny her that voice and intellect and to erase her femininity. Finally, the book reads as an affirmative demonstration that Moroccan women (can) own their bodies, minds, and lives.

The three theoretical axes of the book are the body, the intellect, and life, each one explicating how state and society dehumanize Moroccan women. Throughout the book Glacier argues that the patriarchal order and masculinity expect women to negate their selves, emotions, and ambitions. In the chapter on negated body, she powerfully argues that while "sexuality is not the domain of women" (29), it is "the ultimate act by which men are meant to express their power" (33) and demonstrate their hypermasculinity. Such ideas are, oddly and lamentably, perpetrated by making public and open discussion on (healthy) sexuality a taboo to the point that sexual education is not only banned from school curricula but also banished from discussion in many homes. Instead, boys learn about sex and gender relations "on the streets, with playmates and classmates, and often in the context of

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prostitution" (28), with the recent addition of pornography. In contrast, girls learn about sex on their wedding night, which is "a profoundly violent experience for women" (47). Ideas of femininity, masculinity, sexuality, and marital relations that are thus inculcated into boys and girls are those of *his* domination and *her* subordination, of *his* pleasure and *her* displeasure, of *his* need for it and *her* servicing that need, which have to be achieved at all costs, even through such violence as beatings, harassment, and rape. Glacier poignantly concludes that, "alas, rape culture will persist as long as sexuality continues to be associated with masculine domination, with an abusive and terrorizing masculine power, with women's subjection, and with a violence suffered through forced penetration and the humiliation experienced by victims" (46).

The dehumanization of women is further explored in the chapter on the negated intellect. Glacier argues that to reproduce a masculine order, girls have to be beaten into docility and servility (88). The aim of such "education by fear," she unapologetically states, is "the extortion of women's human potential before that potential can be formed" (89). This critique of the patriarchal state of affairs culminates in her last chapter on the negated life, where she evaluates the institution of marriage as represented in novels, Moroccan proverbs, and legal codes, such as the penal, family, and labor codes. Glacier rightfully concludes that "a marriage is a transaction between men, involving a woman, in a community of men" (133). Since the bodies of "people born with a vagina" are there to serve men, society and law stigmatize and violate single, divorced, and widowed women. They are "rejected merchandise" and "defective" (134), since fathers give their daughters to other men; men share prostitutes, participate in gang rapes, and endorse and/or engage in polygamy; and overall the institution of repudiation allows women to "purchase their freedom from their husbands" (147). Finally, Glacier turns her critique toward the authoritarian state for reproducing enormous socioeconomic disparities and concludes that the state enables men to control their wives and children, since they cannot control anything else. Patriarchy and misogyny thus allow the regime to maintain its power and uphold the status quo.

Glacier builds on and expands Fatima Mernissi's unflinching critique of the Moroccan state, religion, and patriarchy. For instance, she asserts that "the relationship between spouses is hardly distinguishable from prostitution: a sexual and economic exchange between partners conducted within the framework of marriage and made to look respectable" (52); or "a collective ritual surrounds the wedding night because the blood of a deflowered woman symbolizes a sacrificial act by which people born with a vagina become a sexualized body that belongs to another. In other words, this 'celebration' is a ritualized sacrificing of virgins" (48). While Glacier uses Michel Foucault's idea of biopower and Simone de Beauvoir's work as her main theoretical frame, readers familiar with Mernissi's writing on sexuality and patriarchy will be sadly reminded of how rooted patriarchal ideas continue to be in Morocco despite decades of feminist activism and significant legal reforms.

This book is a call to "rehabilitate women's humanity" (172) and thus a welcome addition for those interested in how patriarchal regimes are reproduced: students of gender and politics and of course area specialists focusing on gender in North Africa and

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the Middle East. Unfortunately, Glacier's discussion of patriarchy in Hollywood, despite its placement in the book's title, is based on the analysis of only one film (*Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, 2005). A stronger comparative analysis would contribute to dispelling the myth of Muslim (or "other") patriarchy and to demonstrating that patriarchy is much more universal than Westerners would like to believe.

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