

SELECTIVE TRANSLATIONS OF RACHIDA SAQI'S

"Marocaines en mâle-voie"

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DECLARATION

I, Mariah Hubbard, declare that this thesis is a product of my own original work and has not previously in part or in its entirety, been submitted at any university for a degree.

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ABSTRACT

My selection from Rachida Saqi's "novel"¹ "Marocaines en mâle-vie" consists of a series of vignettes or sketches of Moroccan women and the difficulties they have to endure, some of which are unfamiliar to non-Muslim readers.

Of the twenty-six texts she wrote, sixteen have been chosen to cover a number of different circumstances in which Moroccan Muslim women exist, with two being dedicated to children and men.

Choosing the flower as a metaphor for woman, and the Rose in particular, Saqi encourages Moroccan women to break the chains that have fettered them for so many generations. She urges them to leave behind submissiveness, ignorance and superstition and to form an integrated, never-ending circle against the oppressor, the "phallogocratic" machine.

Saqi believes that women have the power within them to overcome past traditions, if only they would dare to take the initial step. A change in mind-set is what is required so that Moroccan women can regard themselves as autonomous, capable of independent thought and self-sufficient - able to lead their own lives.

Saqi's thesis is that for far too long, in Islamic Moroccan society, the male has been cosseted and pampered from birth onwards by an "army" of women at his beck and call; starting with his mother, then sisters, wife (wives), daughters, secretaries, mistresses and so on.

Saqi's feminist writings aspire to encourage her Moroccan sisters to take the first step towards self-liberation by questioning critically their behavioural responses to a hitherto unchallenged patriarchal social system.

¹It is doubtful whether this work can be said to fall strictly within the genre of the novel, but Saqi and her publishers have chosen to call it such.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Contents</u>	<u>Page</u>
Dédicaces - Dedication	1 - 6
Avant-propos - Foreword	7 - 9
Prologue	10 - 12
La Maligne - The artful wife	13 - 14
L'éternelle angoissée - The constantly anxious wife	15 - 18
L'équilibrée - The well-balanced wife	19 - 21
"La suspendue" - The estranged wife	22 - 23
Les divorcées - Divorced wives	24 - 31
Rose des vents - Rose of the Winds	32 - 39
Les mères célibataires - Unmarried mothers	40 - 41
Les enfants - Children	42 - 43
Les hommes - Men	44 - 47
Le rêve - The dream	48 - 54
Amalgames et nuances - Blends and subtleties	55 - 56
Un petit grain de sable - A little grain of sand	57 - 64
Epilogue	65
Glossaire - Glossary	66 - 68
Conclusion	69 - 70

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Primary text cited
2. Other works cited

MAROCAINES EN MÂLE-VIE

The title can be translated as “Moroccan women in a man’s world”. However, there is a play on words here since the sound “mâle” in French resembles that of “mal”, signifying bad or evil. Hence “Moroccan women in a bad man’s world” could be envisaged as an appropriate title.

Dedication

How long, little lilac flower will you stand in this opaque crystal vase where you will be force fed with chemical fertilisers and artificial light, deprived of sunlight and torn away from the natural nourishment of your roots?

The best thing that these roots could tell you yet again, is to cling on to these leaves, to suck to the very last drop their sap which is not always lilac pink, but which has been used to blacken them with evil. The sap will quench your thirst.

For all flowers in seed, in bud or in bloom, already buffeted by spring breezes, and also for the flower of old age.

For all flowers portrayed in paintings, on display in salons and in art galleries.
For parched, faded, dried, crushed, trampled or buried flowers.

For wild and cultivated flowers, crystallised roses of the deserts, snowdrops and rockery flowers, cactus flowers and those in cemeteries.

For flowers in the depths of the seas and for those that suffocate, rootless, in narrow vases.

For the flowers of “Az-zahr”, peach blossom and ladies of the night.

For all these flowers and also for forgotten flowers, a hardy flower dedicates this bouquet of

pansies and does not throw them only flowers. Nor does she weep for them.

For all the Little Princes in the grass.

For all “blue flowers” and for those who understand the language of flowers.

But also for all those men who see in these flowers only a honeymoon, an ornament for the home, or the fruit tree’s garment, made into pot-pourri...I bequeath this basket of cares.

Commentary

Rachida Saqi dedicates her work, “*Marocaines en mâle-vie*” to women, whom she likens to flowers.

Her first image is that of a single lilac placed in an opaque, crystal vase, containing artificial plant food and deprived of natural light. Saqi urges the lilac to draw strength from the sap of its leaves, not yet contaminated by tinted, unnatural elements, as she would encourage Moroccan women to draw strength from their inner selves and to understand that this sap, their feminine nature, has traditionally been manipulated to make them appear evil.

The use of alliteration of “b” and “p” in “aux pétales déjà bercés par la brise du printemps”, which I have maintained in my translation in “*already buffeted by the breezes of spring*”, evokes the sound of the wind moving through the petals and implies the effects of the trials of everyday life.

We understand from the range of flowers to which Saqi dedicates her work, that it is intended for all women, at whatever stage in life: children, young girls, mature and elderly women.

Saqi extends her dedication to still life - to paintings of flowers hanging in salons and galleries - again an unnatural setting for a creation of Nature and symbolising the artificiality of women on display in Moroccan society which, according to the author, relegates them to the position of decorative items.

The description of parched, faded, crushed, trampled or buried flowers characterises neglect,

abuse or abandonment of women by their partners.

Saqi's imagery of the "wild" and "cultivated" flowers describes rural women and sophisticated city dwellers, the Gypsum Desert Rose which endures extremes of heat and burning sands, whilst the delicate snowdrop, in contrast, survives the harshness of winter to burst forth every spring; the flowers of the rockeries that grow between stones, on walls and along sand dunes, tenacious and adaptable, proliferate in bursts of colour; cactus flowers that sometimes bloom only every few years and then only for a day; the flowers of remembrance, placed at the graves of those departed. All flowers have their place in the universe and their own specific habitat, as indeed, do all women.

Saqi compares the flowers swaying in the "depths" of the ocean in all its vastness to the restrictions of the flowers confined to "narrow vases": the emancipation of women on one hand and their repression on the other.

In her reference to the flowers of "*Az-zahr*", Saqi may be referring to a specific garden or park where peach blossoms and "ladies of the night" may be found. It should be noted that "*Zahr*" means "*flower*" in Arabic. Alternatively, "*Az-zahr*" sounds very similar to the French word "*hasard*" indicating chance or fate. In choosing to address the flowers of "*Az-zahr*" Saqi could be indicating that fate plays an important role in women's lives.

"*Dames du Soir*" could be the *Brugmania Solanaceae* or Moonflower, a warm climate shrub, with a large bell or trumpet shaped flower, fragrant at night and white or pinkish in colour. The implication here is that Saqi includes in her dedication those women who dispense their fragrant favours at night.

To all women, even those who go unrecognised, Saqi dedicates her work, described as a "bouquet" of pansies for remembrance. There is a play on words here as "*pensées*" in French mean both "pansies" and "thoughts". She does not cast only "flowers" at her readers, (which is either a reference to the European custom of the newly married bride throwing her bouquet into the crowd of wedding guests or alternatively, an appreciative audience tossing flowers on

to the stage to applaud a particularly fine performance) but is also throwing the “thoughts” contained in her text, which she hopes will encourage self-examination and critical analysis.

Saqi believes that her work will influence her readers to think for themselves and thus she will have no need to weep for them. Saqi invites all women to take up her challenge to “break the traditional mould”.

Saqi describes herself as “une fleur vivace”, a hardy flower, which in horticultural terms means a plant able to grow in the open air all the year round. In other words, she is a survivor who empathises with her readers, but who will not encourage their weaknesses.

Her reference to the Saint Exupéry’s “Little Prince” refers to the description of the Little Prince throwing himself on to the grass and weeping for his “Rose without thorns”.

“Blue flowers” mean sentiment, in the language of flowers, the cornflower indicates delicacy. “Be not impetuous: my heart cannot be stormed”. (cf the reference to “Fleur bleue” or Arab crooner) in the glossary. In French, this expression also refers to someone who is over-sentimental.

The Snowdrop bears the message: “I make another bid for your love”.

Throughout, Saqi has chosen specific flowers for their particular connotation; for example, peach blossom for beauty and delicacy, ladies of the night with their signification of prostitutes, as already mentioned. Indeed, there is a multi-layering of connotation here since the “Ladies of the Night” could refer not only both to a particular flower and to prostitutes but this could also be a reference to Muslim women who must be veiled by day and can only emerge at night in the privacy of their homes.

In her last phrase, Saqi criticises men who view their wives as sexual conquests, as adornments for their homes and as objects who sacrifice their own fulfilment to the needs of the family, to husbands and sons in particular.

Saqi closes her dedication with the beautiful metaphor of bequeathing to these men a “basket of cares”. A basket normally contains gifts or delicious fare, but in this case contains only worries, since Moroccan men may well have reason to worry once the women in their lives have been alerted to their latent power.

AVANT-PROPOS-FOREWORD

Of course, not all men in Morocco are tyrants which is rather comforting. Unfortunately, there are not enough of them to make an impact for this to be reassuring.

Several of them have spoken out and condemned the precarious circumstances of Moroccan women. They have, without doubt, aroused the attention of various minds and women can only thank them for this.

Yet it is up to these very women to take on the duty of speaking out and of making themselves heard.

This text does not pretend to be a rational and detailed analytical study, but seeks to be a realistic, overall picture describing the everyday existence of contemporary women, as seen through the eyes of one woman amongst so many.

This work is not, then, in any way a call for women's revenge against men, as certain people might interpret it, rather the contrary.

It tries, first and foremost, to remind Moroccan women of their share of responsibility in the entrenchment of the system.

If some women readers do not find themselves in this review, it is because they must be well hidden and that is also deplorable.

Those who are unconcerned are undoubtedly deceiving themselves or are still comforted by delusions.

It is also shameful to observe that in a society which considers itself democratic and claims to compete in the global economy, the fundamental role that women should and are able to have, continues to be ignored.

How much undeveloped talent, repressed genius, stifled brain power and squandered energies lie hidden amongst these women.

The waste is immeasurable.

COMMENTARY

In her foreword, Saqi concedes that not all men in Morocco are oppressors but that there are insufficient of them to make any real impact. Although some men have condemned the dependency to which women are subjected, Saqi believes that women should be the driving force against such oppression.

Alliteration is used effectively in the phrase "*prendre la parole*", the letters 'p' and 'r' conveying the impression of strength, in speaking out forcefully.

Saqi denies that her work is intended to incite women to take revenge against men, but she is vehement in her belief that women are partly to blame for the deep rootedness of their dependent state. She refuses to accept the passivity of those who are unconcerned by their lack of status and of those who are steeped in delusions. She likens their attitudes to veiling the face - hiding away from something that they do not want to confront.

Saqi concludes by declaring that the current status of women in a so-called democratic society is shameful. She deplores the total lack of recognition of female capabilities, talent and drive, resulting in neuroses and the stifling of women's energies.

Given the inequality between the sexes in Morocco, Saqi is justified firstly in mobilising women into thinking for themselves and secondly in maintaining that many women do not wish to change the status quo, being satisfied to live in a "comfort zone". She is also correct in her assumption that wasted female talent and resourcefulness can lead to psychological disorders. Haussmann and Halseth, in their journal article "Re-examining women's roles: A feminist group approach to decreasing depression in Women", in *American Psychologist*,

1983, found that a re-examination of women's role expectations, challenging role stereotypes, expressing anger, and bonding and networking were crucial in the process of the group which fostered self-respect, awareness of choices, and assertiveness in previously depressed rural females.

In another study by Hare and Rachel on "Family Structure, Fear of Success; Internal-External Locus-of-Control", also in *American Psychologist*, 1983, it was concluded that psychological problems that have a higher prevalence in women than men have not received appropriate attention; these include problems of marital and family relations, reproductive problems, physical and sexual abuse, depression, and problems associated with eating disorders. Pathological environmental stress results from prolonged powerlessness or women's inadequate socialisation.

A Journal Article, "Somatic neurosis in Muslim women in India", *Social Psychiatry*, 1980, describes a chronic neurotic syndrome among Muslim women in India with predominantly somatic multiple symptomatology. It is suggested that the syndrome is distinctive in its clinical features and in the cultural background of the patients.

PROLOGUE

*Man is the hunter
And woman his delight
Silken and shining
Creatures of the chase
We hunt them so
For the beauty of their skins
That they love us
When we bring them down.*

“Song”
Alfred, Lord Tennyson
(1807-1892)
England.

A century later.....

In complete control and without poetry, many of our men persist in relishing the pleasures of this hunt, in single-minded packs, sadistically enjoying the wounds of their victims, whilst sipping their blood during the very instant of death.

Depersonalised and alienated, our women make the task easy for men, by putting an end to their own lives and to those of others, after digging their own graves with their enslaved hands.

To write is one way of speaking without being interrupted.

Jules Renard

(1864-1910)

COMMENTARY

The Prologue is a French translation (translator unknown but possibly Saqi herself) of Tennyson's "The Princess: a Medley" section (v) but the original poem is not a "song". Tennyson puts the following words into the mouth of a red-blooded, old warrior.

*"Man is the hunter; woman is his game
The sleek and shining creatures of the chase,
We hunt them for the beauty of their skins;
They love us for it and we ride them down.
Wheedling and siding with them."*

Perhaps Saqi views the poem as being the "Song of the Hunter". Tennyson's verse is lusty and good humoured, implying that both the "hunter" and his "prey" enjoy the thrill of the chase; it is an exciting sexual game and as Tennyson puts it: "they love us for it". "Wheedling and siding" are words associated with fawning dogs and imply that men cajole or coax women, whilst pursuing them. Women are described as "sleek and shining creatures" hunted for the "beauty of their skins". Such words reveal an admiration of the physical loveliness of the female.

Saqi believes that a hundred years after the death of the Poet and on another continent, nothing has changed. Moroccan men still dominate without the saving grace of poetic lines. She employs alliteration of 's' in the lines: "*à savourer en meutes solidaires les plaisirs de cette chasse, jouissant sadiquement des blessures...en sirotant le sang...*" the sibilant sounds of the 's' suggesting decadence, prolonged sadistic pleasure following the exhilarating chase. Saqi continues the theme of the hunt by using the word "*meutes*", or packs, which are associated with hounds hunting in packs. She emphasises the solidarity of the pack or male bonding to revel in the gaping wounds of their prey, whilst sipping the creatures' blood. The use of the word "*sirotant*", or sipping, yet again implies a leisurely decadence or perversion, in contrast to drinking in hasty gulps. The victim suffers more intensely if the hunter prolongs the death agony. In addition, Saqi is exploring the theme of sadistic pain and the pleasure gained on the part of the sadist.

Exasperated, Saqi criticises Moroccan women, totally alienated and subservient, for helping

the men to achieve what they set out to do, by digging their own graves with their fettered hands or hands of slaves.

Saqi has chosen to use the words of the Prologue to expand on her own addendum in prose, to goad her contemporaries into action against “digging their own graves”.

The quotation by Jules Renard indicates that Saqi believes that her writings will have far more influence than speech because her works can be read and re-read.

I have chosen to retain the titles “Prologue” and “Epilogue”, because for numerous Anglo-Saxon readers there would be an echo, albeit distant, of Chaucer’s “Canterbury Tales”. Saqi’s motivation is, like Chaucer’s, to portray vividly, easily recognisable social stereotypes, i.e. ‘The Constantly Anxious Wife’.

LA MALIGNE: THE ARTFUL WIFE

Uncomplainingly, she allows her husband to lead his life without any restrictions, but meanwhile she takes revenge on his wallet; there's no way that she will let him skedaddle with the loot. The more he is "*m'zlout*"¹, the less will remain for possible competitors.

With great care, she builds up capital in gold for her security, to provide for the ill winds of fate. What with the bowing and scraping and the "*nâam Sidi*"², she does not waste her time languishing but makes a circle of friends with whom she can release her pent up feelings as often as possible and avoid against being seduced by illusion.

She titivates and looks after her health. Her maid is there only when her husband is out, so all the praises are for herself.

She digs deeply into her husband's pocket for money to pay the "*f'kih*"³. Her husband can do what he wants, except remarry.

Should he fall seriously ill, she gets the upper hand and unfreezes her dish of revenge. She teaches her daughter to be suspicious, but she feels more comforted by her son.

It's just that little matter of inheritance.

COMMENTARY

Saqi's stereotype of "*la maligne*" differs from her other stereotypes of Moroccan wives, in

¹ Stripped of his possessions

² Understood, your Grace

³ Poorly educated man who claims he can cast bad spells or conjure up evil spirits

that she is extremely critical of this woman. In fact she portrays her as being evil in nature, caring only for herself. She steals from her husband to shore up her own financial security and also to pay the *f'kih*, emphasising her dependence on superstitious practices. Outwardly she is obsequious towards her husband at all times and feigns spending all day toiling in the house. In reality, she employs a maid, while her husband is at work and spends her time gossiping with like-minded friends. Saqi uses the term "*copines*", implying familiarity, rather than "*amies*", a more "formal word" which might imply a more genuine friendship. She is vain and self-absorbed with her own health, so that she can outlive her husband.

Saqi conveys the extent of the malevolence of "*la maligne*" in the phrase: "*elle prend le dessus et décongèle son plat de vengeance*". This sinister metaphor conjures up the image of a meal partially cooked in advance at her leisure, laced with botulism and then served up to the sick man in an attempt to finish him off.

In turn, the artful wife teaches suspicion and deviousness to her daughter. Towards her son, however, she feels some affection. In North African, Muslim societies only the man can inherit. Her affection towards her son is, therefore, self-seeking.

L'ÉTERNELLE ANGOISSÉE: THE CONSTANTLY ANXIOUS WIFE

It's a marriage of convenience.

She could be the second (or the umpteenth) wife of a divorced or non-divorced man.

Obsessed with the notion that her affluent husband, obviously much older, may at any moment treat himself to some young flesh, she only has eyes (and they're loving ones) for him and she is all honey, even with her viper of a mother-in-law.

To put it plainly, she makes herself a shell of icing coated with "superglue".

Well aware of how fragile this construction is, she does not lower her guard for a fraction of a second: women in search of this kind of windfall are two a penny, she tells herself.

For a wealthy man whether he be divorced, widowed or even married, is more sought after nowadays than the elixir of life.

After all, she should know.

So, she embarks on a relentless fight against the passage of time; between sessions at the beautician, with Zaza the Yorki, tinting her hair at the salon, her mobile at hand, for all to see, the aerobics sessions and expensive jewellery prominently visible, she seems very busy, dashing around, to the point of exhaustion.

She no longer eats so as to keep her figure and never breastfeeds her children to preserve her bust line. This does not prevent her from mutilating her body early on, by operation after operation, to please a husband who, in a manly fashion, revels in displaying his wrinkles, his paunch and his grey hair. And anyway, the more fat and ugly he is, the more reassured she feels. Only just!

In fact, she is so anxious that it makes her condescending and bitter. She believes that she must involve her husband in everything: my husband does this, my husband does that; she is annoying and boring.

She spends without counting the cost, not that her husband minds that she so charmingly gets rid of money too easily acquired. Designer clothes, convertible limousines, garish jewellery, theme parties, preferably by her water-lily covered pool - she saw that at Mme Tazi's - her motto is to intimidate at any cost.

Sometimes, to give herself a clear conscience, she has recourse to black magic. Libyan or African.

One can never be too cautious nowadays.

And what about her children?

Not being able to be in two places at once, she sees them only when necessary. The rest of the time, generously paid nannies and governesses, (preferably English speaking to prepare the children for the American school), take over.

She has an obsessive fear of the day when menopause comes knocking at her door, with its retinue of discomfort, insecurity and doubt.

In the meantime, all other women are her inferiors or her competitors, hence potential enemies.

This is always in relation to her husband, of course.

For, on close examination, she has absolutely nothing else in her head apart from her husband, tranquillisers and trivia.

COMMENTARY

Saqi discusses the fears of “*L'éternelle angoissée*” who devotes her existence to safeguarding her status as second wife of an affluent man. She lives in constant fear of losing him to younger “flesh”, a somewhat crude description. Saqi uses the English term “superglue” to describe the exterior facade of “*l'angoissée*” who is only too aware of her precarious situation, yet is determined to hold on to him whatever the price.

When translating, it is vital to find equivalent proverbs and sayings, an example of this being Saqi's reference to “*les femmes en quête de cette aubaine se ramassant à la pelle*”.

In English, the saying would read, women in search of this kind of windfall are “two a penny”.

Saqi describes the attempts of this Moroccan wife to delay the effects of time in her “*lutte acharnée*”. She portrays images of leisure and wealth, beauty sessions accompanied by Zaza the Yorkie, a decorative, exotic, little dog, a fashion accessory. The mobile at hand is a symbol of sophistication, modernity and of a woman who is always busy. Luxury jewellery is displayed for all to see and envy. Strict diets and plastic surgery are some of her strategies to enhance her physical perfection. Perversely, the more ugly her husband, the more content she is, because it makes her feel better about herself - she seems younger by comparison.

“*L'angoissée*” is extravagant, spending her husband's money in a reckless manner on designer clothes, parties and outward manifestations of wealth. She is out to impress her contemporaries. She resorts to black magic as a safeguard, indicating her reliance on superstition, just in case. Here is an example of the contrast of two cultures - modern Western and traditional African superstitions.

This woman's children are taken care of by well-paid employees and she sees little of them. Naturally, they will attend foreign schools, available to those who can afford such education,

because this is another means of impressing friends and family.

Her days are filled with trivialities and tranquillisers, when doubts about her eternal youthfulness begin to gnaw away at her self-confidence.

The constantly anxious wife has never been given the opportunity to become self-reliant. She has been brought up to believe that marriage to a wealthy man is her only object in life as a means of survival. For this reason she takes extreme measures to preserve her beauty and desirability, at much cost to her inner tranquillity.

Saqi's titles are past participles (in the feminine as indicated by the *é*) of verbs used as nouns, i.e., "L'éternelle angoissée" that I have chosen to translate by inserting the noun "wife"; for example, "the Constantly Anxious Wife" instead of "the Constantly Anxious One". I have done this for two reasons, for sound and for better encapsulation of the idea of a character study.

“L’ÉQUILIBRÉE”: THE WELL BALANCED WIFE

She is the rare pearl that has fallen into the perfect jewellery case.

Spoiled by a considerate husband who also proves himself to be a model father, she brings up her children in exceptional stability.

She succeeds brilliantly in keeping up appearances: the mother-in-law has her dose of social pleasantries and of being part of the family; the children grow up learning respect for others and with equal opportunities. They each have their own bedroom and toys: dolls’ tea sets, nurse’s uniforms and all sorts of dolls for the girl; balls, electronic games and cowboy outfits or policeman’s uniforms complete with revolver, for the boy.

They are so happy and fulfilled! Every evening, their mother reads them a story. For the girl, “Little Red Riding Hood” and “Snow White”, for the boy, “Gargantua” and “Tom Thumb”.

They both have the right to the same outings, the same school, the same attention, but not of course, to the same company.

With the onset of puberty, things become complicated. She does not understand why her younger brother may come and go freely whilst a curfew is systematically imposed on her.

Faced with her sulks, her parents, after consultation between themselves, allow her to go out in the evening but escorted by her brother who must not take his eyes off her.

Her outings depend thus on the boy’s good will and he refuses with good reason, to have his sister always at his heels. Negotiations then begin, followed by conditions, then concessions, which result in giving up.

Their mother comes to the rescue to console her darling daughter; she explains to her that the street is full of shady people and the girls who dawdle there are shameless, unlike the “*brat n*’

nas”,¹ who must remain worthy of their position. What would people say of her, as a mother, who until now had kept up appearances. Of course, they would say that she was a bad mother!

The adolescent daughter feels both aggrieved and guilty and takes this gentle restriction of her freedom very badly. Thus she feels alienated by her body and her sex which she starts to detest and dreams only of the day when she will offer them up to the first Prince Charming who comes along to free her from this prison.

Her despondency is reflected in her school results; the opposite to those of her brother, the very one whom she used to beat in all subjects. He goes to a top university overseas.

She marries a Prince who becomes less and less charming. He had first been her confidant, to whom she recounted her difficulties with her parents and now he turns these against her and reminds her of them at every disagreement!

When he is happy, he gives her real dolls and real crockery. But why is it no longer so much fun as when she was a child?

She promises herself that she will raise this question with her mother.

COMMENTARY

Saqi describes the well-balanced wife as a “rare pearl”. In turn, she has chosen a “perfect” husband and her children grow up in an atmosphere of stability and tolerance. Even her mother-in-law is made welcome and afforded every courtesy.

The picture of perfect harmony is almost too good to be true. Saqi hints at this when she says “they are all so happy and fulfilled!” the exclamation mark indicating a suggestion of irony.

¹daughters of good families

The children are socialised into their respective gender roles, the girl playing with dolls and dressing up as a nurse; the boy playing with electronic games and wearing a policeman's uniform or cowboy outfit.

With the onset of puberty, restrictions are imposed on the girl. She is no longer independent to come and go as she pleases. Saqi emphasises that her parents discuss the matter of their daughter's freedom together. It is a just decision, underlining the equality of the marriage. The mother applies gentle pressure to her daughter in order to achieve the girl's compliance, the end result being that she is confused by emotions of guilt and of feelings that the situation is unfair. The only recourse is for her to meet the first "Prince Charming" who will sweep her off her feet and away from the prison of restrictions.

Ironically, the girl who is the academic achiever initially, begins to falter and her less able brother overtakes her to go on to attend a premier university overseas.

The young girl marries her Prince and the story should end "they all lived happily ever after" but Saqi relates how the prince "*devient de moins en moins charmant*", a play on words as he "becomes less and less charming".

Saqi uses the term, "*vraies poupées*", real dolls and "*vraie vaisselle*", real crockery as opposed to the fantasy world of the little girl playing with dolls and dolls' tea parties, to indicate that she is now a mother with a home to run.

Ultimately, it is the "rare pearl" of a mother who bears the blame for deceiving her daughter, albeit in the name of "love"; in socialising her daughter in the traditional submissive female role, and failing to encourage her in her studies, as the young girl experiences a sense of 'loss'. Married life complete with babies and domestic duties is no longer 'fun' - the fun she enjoyed as a child. She has lost out on her freedom - she has been married off too soon, as an escape mechanism rather than a real choice.

“LA SUSPENDUE” : “THE ESTRANGED WIFE”

Neither married, nor repudiated, she is neither rejected nor desired.

Her husband leaves her and goes away to lead his ineffectual life elsewhere. He belittles her, but keeps her in his sights. If she makes the slightest mistake, the law is enforced¹, for she is not allowed to make mistakes.

Like a sated cat playing with a mouse, he knocks her to the ground and pretends to move off, but whacks her again as soon as she tries to get up. He lacerates her with his claws, rolls her on the ground, but never lets her go. He repeats the process at the slightest breath of life.

He keeps an eye on her, an eye filled with a barrage of scorn, hatred and brutish retribution.

Like the hostage who eventually becomes attached to her kidnapper, she remains there, left to her own devices and paralysed with fear, torn between the desire to see the father of her children return and wishing him an awful death; this would finally release her from this horror, even though she knows that after the release, the road ahead would be very difficult.

To crown it all, she would wear the white garments of mourning, were he to die before her.

COMMENTARY

Saqi employs the use of the negative, “ni” in “*ni mariée ni répudiée...ni rejetée ni voulue*” to emphasise the totally negative state of the estranged wife. She is virtually in limbo - not rejected, not accepted, but still subject to the laws of “*M'rat R'rajel*”.

The simile of the cat and mouse game, enacted between man and woman is very apt. The cruel animal merely dazes the mouse, plays with it, never allowing it more than a few seconds of freedom, prolonging the agony until the cat sees fit to end the game. Equally the husband

¹The Man's woman; he is her master and she is his possession

does not really intend to free his wife, he wants her as his plaything, unable to make a fresh start for herself. She, in turn, is torn between the wish for reconciliation for her children's sake and the desire to sever all connection with her husband, even if it is by death.

White garments of mourning are worn in Islamic countries as opposed to the traditional black garments in Western societies. In this instance, "*la suspendue*" does not question tradition and mourns someone whom she does not love.

LES DIVORCÉES: DIVORCED WOMEN

Whether they are illiterate, salaried, intellectual or perpetually worried, they perceive their divorce as a rejection by society as a whole.

Their common denominator is exclusion.

Many ex-housewives find themselves in the service of those who are still married, others become clairvoyants themselves, beggars or prostitutes.

The most fortunate live off their parents, others are exploited by a boss.

If she is employed full time, the Jill of all Trades leaves her children at her mother's: if she works the occasional day, she may leave them to their own devices from sun up to sun down, under the inattentive eye of neighbours.

Guaranteed delinquency.

As for the clairvoyant, she sometimes goes to work in foreign countries because even overseas Moroccan women cannot do without her services.

She does not come out of it too badly; she has even bought a car and employed a maid, but it is her son who holds the reins.

The prostitute drowns her sorrows in alcohol, between two spells in prison, picking up and passing on all sorts of infections.

Her children are to be found on the streets, sniffing polish to try and forget the cold, hunger and lack of love.

The salaried woman, already worn out when she was married, bears children with decayed teeth.

She has returned to the guardianship of her father or failing that, of her brother, whom she sometimes also supports. But at least she finds her children at home in the evening.

Their father has remained in “his” apartment, calmly eating fresh meat.

The woman to be the most pitied is the eternal worrier.

She who was accustomed to fashionable receptions and to frivolous luxury, finds herself totally idle, and is not able to make herself useful.

Even those “friends” on whom she lavished parties, have closed their doors in her face, while their husbands have run to her side immediately - without the knowledge of their wives, of course.

As vulnerable as a dead leaf in deepest winter, her life swirls at the mercy of the winds and of predators.

Her children have chosen their father.

The intellectual woman finds herself marginalised by all who call themselves couples.

If she has children, she struggles to keep their heads above water, whilst their father, has abandoned them with impunity, scorning even to pay maintenance for them, as pathetic and ridiculous as this might seem.

If, by virtue of the law, she sets a lawsuit in motion, the matter is postponed for light years.

The more their mother is stripped of her rights, the more their father is avenged, the children being the only means he has of doing this.

With the reform of the parental custody law, children are used as weapons against their own

mothers.

She does not remarry so as not to lose them and brings them up quite alone, despite all obstacles.

At adolescence, the law gives children the right to choose the parent they want to care for them for the remainder of the custody, until the age of majority.

Their father turns up and begins to seduce his adolescent child, taking advantage of the youngster's fragility.

Then begins unequivocal corruption with money, plenty of money, whatever it takes to make him dependent: cigarettes, alcohol, clothes or clubbing.

His mother, informed of the child's absenteeism from school, tries to communicate but only meets with resistance. She uses her authority and suddenly she realises that she no longer has any influence.

Being a responsible mother, she discusses this with the father, in order to find a solution.

Quite content at having poisoned the relationship, he then grasps the opportunity, clinches the deal with the child without his mother, takes him to a lawyer who gets him to sign his decision to go and live at his father's house.

The mother can chase after him, but nothing will come of it. It is the child who decides - decides his own delinquency. His father has found the means of enraging his mother, through him; nothing else has much significance any more.

Thus, not only has she never received any maintenance because of the procrastination of the courts, but in addition she sees all the upbringing she has undertaken, destroyed by a manipulative, irresponsible, petty father.

Her life thus becomes hell. And she is the one who is called a bad mother. What recourse

does she have against such a father?

In this way, the children are torn apart and picked up again one by one, as they grow older.

Disheartened, she gives up and suffers in silence.

When the child is more cunning, he raises the bidding, flitting from one parent to another as the mood takes him.

It is he who controls the game. He is the ball. In complete instability.

When the child is more sensitive, he blames "himself" bitterly for having abandoned his mother.

Sometimes, he is forced into action by the father, if he wants to have a passport, or study abroad. The usual blackmail.

The working woman who divorces has also to face up to the humiliation of harassments on all sides, as if her body, not having returned to her father after her husband left, belonged to whoever wanted to take it. Beginning with those who knew her when married and who are themselves, well and truly married.

She keeps all her harassers happy and gently pushes them away for fear of a violent reaction, with the excuse that in our country, a rejected man can be as dangerous as a wounded, wild boar.

Confronted by her financial independence, they are all sheepish. What can they offer her to make her mouth water? They cannot even make her dream of travel because she has a visa without their help. So they rack their brains. Eureka! Feign mad passionate love for her, send gifts, tell her on every occasion that she haunts their dreams, that they have become teenagers again, that they fantasise, even when praying, that they are ready to leave their "horrible" wives for her. In their lack of originality, they do not suspect that she has heard it

all before, that she looks on their mumblings with amusement tinged with pity. How unhappy, insecure, disarmed they are faced with so much self-confidence. In the end they call her frigid. But how can she not be, faced with such impotence?

Her reputation then becomes her main interest. Safeguarding it from slander is her first concern.

Even when she keeps up her friendship with a few female friends, their husbands, pride wounded by her rebellion and also to remove their wives from contagion, resort to sowing discord, often by circulating all sorts of improbable rumours.

Their wives, very unsure of themselves, have no other alternative but total rejection of the black sheep.

And the other woman who believed that she had taken all precautions in stipulating in the marriage contract that her husband would have no right to bigamy..... without her agreement. When faced with a fait accompli she felt cornered; to opt for divorce or to agree to share. Of the two evils she believed she was choosing the lesser. It was out of the frying pan and into the fire.

She was given rights with no after-sales service. A poisoned gift on a silver platter.

She now understands why the “clever wife” plays at being an ostrich and a Jill of all trades who clings on desperately. They prefer to burn gently rather than drown themselves in that vast ocean crammed with pitiless sharks, where the horizon reveals neither ship nor boat, nor even a small plank to support them if they are tired.

Her endurance is in vain, since her exhaustion is pre-programmed.

Divorcees with several pieces of luggage, use them as a life jacket and succeed, not without difficulty, in pushing their children to the shore.

Those who carry less allow themselves to be taken by the currents towards other horizons, where the ships are equipped with lifeboats in case of shipwreck.

The naïve rise to the bait of the first fisherman, whoever he might be, the main thing being to believe in happiness.

Exhausted, the others allow themselves to sink down to the depths of the abyss, where they are torn apart by predators and then finally throw themselves entirely into their grinding jaws, intoxicated by the intensity of pain.

COMMENTARY

Saqi describes the common factor of all divorcees as exclusion from society. This is a sociological phenomenon in North African, Muslim societies.

Some struggle to survive by working as maids, clairvoyants or prostitutes. A few are fortunate enough to be supported by their parents.

Those employed as maids are forced to leave their children to fend for themselves, which can result in delinquency.

The woman who appears to thrive and even prosper is the clairvoyant who feeds on the superstitions of Moroccan women living abroad.

The prostitute's children suffer the most, being deprived of the basic necessities - shelter, food and love.

Saqi refers to the salaried woman, already worn out when she was married, bearing children with decayed teeth. This graphic image conveys the impression of inadequate nourishment and lack of vitamins in pregnancy, which in turn is passed on to the malnourished baby.

The employed woman, although exploited by her boss, returns to her father's home where her children will at least receive some form of authority. Saqi remarks pointedly that the father of the children remains in "his" apartment, eating fresh meat, a luxury denied to his children and enjoying this luxury without any qualms of conscience.

In Saqi's opinion, the constantly fearful woman is most to be pitied, because she who once entertained lavishly and was accustomed to opulence, now finds that as a divorcee, she is no longer sought after by her "friends", whose husbands proposition her.

The intellectual divorcee is ostracised by married couples according to Saqi: a reference to the untenable position of the single woman in Moroccan society.

She struggles to support her children since their father refuses to pay even meagre child maintenance. Saqi describes the dilemma of a divorcee who refrains from re-marrying so as not to lose her children and yet, at adolescence, a child may choose with which parent he would prefer to live. The father then who resurfaces only at that moment, proceeds to tempt the child away from his mother's control, away from his studies. The situation deteriorates further when the child signs a legal agreement to remain with this father. The mother has lost the struggle.

The frustrations of the independent divorcee are of a different nature. She is harassed by a multitude of admirers who finally decide that she must be frigid because she spurns their advances. Eventually, even her female friends reject the "*brebis galeuse*".

As for the woman who believed that she had dealt with the question of bigamy prior to her marriage, she now realises that such precautions were futile. Her husband had always decided to take a second wife regardless of any stipulation to the contrary in the marriage contract.

According to Saqi, a divorced woman has been handed "*un cadeau empoisoné sur un plateau d'argent*". The "gift" of freedom but at what cost? Saqi speaks of a "vast ocean crammed with pitiless sharks" - the fate of the lonely divorcee. Her concluding sentences are filled with

images regarding the ocean, ships, lifeboats and fishermen describing the hapless fate of a divorced woman in Moroccan society who risks being “torn apart” by predators.

This text has been difficult to translate, mostly because of the difficulty in accessing adequate knowledge of local Moroccan customs and also the many metaphors and proverbs which are used, some of which are unfamiliar. The fact that there is little recourse in law to recoup arrears in maintenance is unheard of in Western countries - where erring fathers can be prosecuted for not paying and not paying on time. Non-payment of maintenance is common in South Africa, however.

The proverb “*elle ménage le chou et la chèvre*”, “she looks after the cabbage and the goat”, cannot be translated literally. An equivalent meaning has to be found - in this instance, “she keeps all her harassers happy”.

The phrase, “she left the fire behind, but did not see the ocean which was waiting for her”, could translate in English as being “between the Devil and the deep blue sea”, or “out of the frying pan into the fire”.

Saqi’s image of a vast ocean full of shipwrecks, pitiless sharks, lacking even a plank on to which to cling, is quite exaggerated to the point of becoming ludicrous. Nautical images, such as “life jackets”, “lifeboats” and “fishermen” are sustained throughout the last six paragraphs of this vignette, but the effectiveness of this technique is possibly diminished because it resembles an inventory.

ROSE DES VENTS: ROSE OF THE WINDS

Rose, thirsting for love, she asked only to be watered for her to blossom.

Rose wandering in the vastness of an uncaring universe, she hoped only to be tamed by the Prince whom her heart has loved, to the point of madness.

Rosewhite parched for love and filled with hope - Love's silence has transformed her into a crystallised Desert Rose. Right to the end of her dream, she has let herself be deceived by desert mirages.

Everything that she was offering to others, like generous and kind perfumes was, in reality, merely the rapture of a sensitive soul who dreamed only of being acknowledged as a loved one. For throughout her short life she has been tortured by doubt. A lack of ever having heard this adored Angel, this idolised Master, to whom she offered up body and soul, whom she served, pampered and loyally advised, without asking anything in return, a lack of never having had the joy of hearing him say to her, even just once, that he loved her.

But, far from resenting him for this, she doubled, then tripled her efforts to seduce him, to the extent of flirting with perfection.

Unmoved, he revelled in his role of executioner of hearts, satiated with his eyes closed to the immensity of love that she bore in her heart as a daily offering for him.

Bored with such an excess of self-sacrifice, he felt neither the interest nor the need for meeting her expectations.

At night, Rose folded her little golden buds around her velvety stem and in stormy weather, protected them by wrapping them delicately in the softness of her silken petals.

By day she changed into a busy bee, without a sting, gathering nectar all day long, fertilising the sterile, sweetening the bitter, carrying a load on those fragile wings that seemed to be too

heavy for others of her kind. Boundless love filled to the brim a wounded heart which screamed in silence her need to receive love.

All the nectar droplets that she sipped here and there as she buzzed around, did not succeed in quenching even one of her cells of the thirst for Love which was haunting them.

So she persevered again and again until she had tamed the most hard-hearted, gained the confidence of the most reticent, warmed the frostiest of looks and attracted by her kindness all who had pushed her away so unjustly.

But what of the heart of the man for whom she lived and breathed?

As long as these words were left unsaid, all the languages of the universe remained silent, soundless, hollow, imperceptible and without echo.

Alas so thirsty that her throat was dry and sore, the bee drowned in her own boundless love.

The Irony of fate.

Without a single thorn and with her petals crumpled from having given too much, Rose wilted in the freshness of her innocence. Her velvety stem, stuffed with chemical fertilisers and lacking beneficial sap, began to bend. Without a stake to support her heart, in frustration she has taken her last leave. Her petals are scattered to the four corners of the universe like a compass rose in the wind and, leaving her orphaned children to the mercy of the currents of air and shivering, without her sweet protection and warm caresses.

Even though the bee had tried to resist, inflating her lungs to the point of breaking her wings, the air threatened to escape immediately. So as to delay the inevitable flight, the bee held him against her sides allowing a hoarse whisper of resistance mingled with cries for air. She was fighting with all her strength to keep him close to her for as long as possible, even if he

suffocated her, even if he beat on the walls of her bronchial tubes to get away.

Every day she filled up with air. Without ever losing breath until the point of exhaustion. On the brink of oblivion she drugged herself with cortisone to regain height. She beat her wings strongly, determined to remain constantly in the air, available, useful, active, again and ever thus in search of recognition.

From drugs to insomnia, the road was short and straight. Predictable and unavoidable. Without any complaint she had used these wakeful hours to become intoxicated with knowledge and understanding. Thus she had succeeded in overcoming her illness, cruelly aggravated by lack of sleep, because she was indeed sick.

Sick from Love revealed in broad daylight by some reassuring words, sick from cryptic words of Love, sick from Love in every sense of the word. Not the love of her children, which was innate, but the love which she had hoped would enrapture the heart of the man for whom she existed.

Without losing her smile, she had busied herself with countless jobs, hoping to extinguish the fire which was relentlessly consuming her.

She took an overdose.

The same drug which had robbed her of sleep had also deviously blocked those oxygen-hungry vessels to the point of a thrombosis. Then what was bound to happen, happened straight away.

A very tragic ending, and yet a very logical one. An ending so predictable that it leaves one with an after-taste more bitter than death.

A single sentence could perhaps have altered fate - the utterance "I love you!" All the more so because the man she wanted to hear this from, even if just to gauge its impact, is breathtakingly lyrical and sensual.

Oh cruel pride, deadly pride, you kill love at its roots.

"Silenced love - censured love"

"Unspoken love - amputated love"

"Miserly love - cruel love"

"Veiled love - blind love"

"Bartered love - unhappy love"

"Restrained love -unrecognised love"

"One-sided love - unrequited love"

"Illusionary love - unrealistic love"

"Costly love - mortal love"

"Posthumous love - futile love"

"Belated love - useless love"

"Sorry love - sterile love"

"Illegitimate love - idealised love, by death revealed"

"For ever too late!"

From up above does she hear him weeping for her star? Did he only understand its brilliance because suddenly he was plunged into darkness?

Who can profit from the posthumous recognition of an artist whose work may well become a sensation, if he himself has lived in the black misery of understanding? The question begs to be asked! Evident to everyone, except, sadly, to himself.

Better late than never, they will reply, because that is what makes the world go round.

Slim consolation for artists, poets, roses and bees who are in search of enlightenment here and now.

Even if the wrong is made good after death, it will continue under another guise into infinity as long as the earth is populated by “intelligent” humans.

Sleep in peace with the angels whom you resemble, Rose of the Winds. Your name which suits you so well up above, has become mere mockery here below. It will remain, however, in the hearts of all the roses and all the bees in the world who remember and gently salute you.

This is for all those women who are neither roses nor bees and all those men and women who believe in angels.

If, one day, you hear a delicate humming in the air, if your senses are aroused by a subtle perfume in the atmosphere, if you suddenly feel light of heart and blessed by a smile, know that Rose of the Winds in passing by - give her my best wishes.

COMMENTARY

The title “Rose des Vents” is complex. It signifies “Rose of the Winds” and also a Compass Rose, a circle of the principal directions marked on maritime charts. The title is thus a play on words as it portrays the rose with petals scattered to all corners of the earth by currents of air or winds.

I have chosen to call the Rose “she” rather than “it” because Saqi creates an extended metaphor for women around this flower.

Saqi continues her theme of the Rose symbolising women and paints an image of the flower thirsting for affection so as to burst into bloom. Another image of the Rose adrift in an uncaring world, dreaming of her Prince is a reference to St-Exupéry’s “Le Petit Prince”. Saqi includes this reference because of the unrequited love experienced by both “Rose des Vents”

who yearns for her adored Angel and the Little Prince who weeps for his Rose without thorns. The beautiful description of the White Rose, parched for love and yearning for the experience of love, over the years becomes transformed into the crystalised Desert Rose. The alliteration of the 's' in the phrase "*elle s'est laissé illusionner par les mirages du désert*" appears to rebuke gently the futility of such unrequited love. The repetition of the mellifluous 's' evokes nostalgic sentiments.

There is perhaps an analogy with "Blanche Neige" or "Snow White" in "Rosewhite" or the Desert Rose, as Snow White was always waiting for the handsome Prince. All the preceding paragraph evokes the language of fairytales.

The use of the phrase "*senteurs généreuses et bienfaitantes*" gives the impression of a drifting fragrance imparted by the Rose, in other words, the generous nature of a sensitive heart, whose only desire is to be loved.

"*Ange adulé*" et "*Maître vénère*" are excessive descriptions of the loved one.

The phrase "*bourreau des coeurs*", executioner of hearts, is apt since a callousness is revealed, resulting in utter boredom towards such an outpouring of emotions.

The poetic description of the Rose folding "*ses petits boutons d'or*" or little golden buds around the velvety stem and how she protects them against inclement weather, refers to the storms of life and the need for the Rose to safeguard her children against them.

By day, metamorphosis occurs and the Rose becomes an industrious bee, but a bee without a sting, a further reference to a defenceless nature. Again I consider the bee to be "she" in English rather than "it" because the bee is a metaphor for Woman.¹

On page 52, ninth paragraph, Saqi's sentence, "*Tant que cette phrase lui manquait, tous les langages de l'univers restaient muets, insonores, ceux, imperceptibles, sans écho*" appears incorrect. There is surely a typing error here, and the word, "*creux*" or "hollow" is what is intended, rather than "*ceux*" or "these".

¹This choice is necessary in English because very few nouns have a gender. In French, the substantive "bee" is feminine.

There is another typographical mistake on page 55, second paragraph of the text, where an exclamation mark appears after the word “*question*”. It should appear at the end of the sentence after “*malheureusement*”.

On page 53, first paragraph, there is an inconsistency in the text, in that Saqi’s sentence starts, “*Et la rose*”. In every other instance she uses the capital, e.g. “*La Rose*”.

Saqi’s phrase “*un trop-plein d’amour débordant d’un coeur blessé*”, re-emphasises a boundless love spilling over in the desire to be recognised, but a love which can never be expressed, but is instead, forced to “scream in silence”.

The word “*douceur*” has two meanings: sweetness as in sweet honey of the bee and gentleness. I have chosen “gentleness” or “boundless” to indicate the selflessness and infinite capacity of her love.

The image of the diligent bee sipping nectar to quench her thirst is poignant because, in reality, she fails to do so.

The tiny bee, tenacious in her quest has “*gagné la confiance des plus réticents, réchauffé les regards les plus glacés*”, here alliteration of “r” conveys the sound of a buzzing bee.

The Rose without thorns in Saint-Exupéry’s “*Le Petit Prince*”, portrays a vulnerable woman with no defences, buckling in an artificial environment without a “stake” to support her, a play on words, since often roses do require staking and wither without a trellis on to which to cling.

The Rose is compared to the Compass Rose with her petals scattered in all directions, abandoning her children to their own devices, unprotected and deprived of her maternal care.

The bee, however, puts up sterner resistance, attempting to capture her prey, even though at great cost to herself.

In the sentence, “*Chaque jour elle faisait son plein d’air et à chaque jour son tuyau d’échappement*” proved problematic. As a translator, I had to try and imagine what the author means rather than translate word for word, because the actual words chosen could appear ridiculous in English. For example the direct translation is: “Every day she filled up with air and every day her exhaust pipe. Without ever losing breath”.

Saqi extends the theme of metamorphosis describing the bee as though she were a woman, dosing herself with cortisone to maintain her balance. Fortified with drugs and ever determined, she becomes stabilised and thus dependable to all who make demands on her, and constantly in search of recognition. The bee or woman proceeds down the slippery slope to sleeplessness; she takes advantage of her insomnia to study or learn. Thus she succeeds in rising above her illness, exaggerated by lack of sleep.

I have found this chapter difficult to translate because of the various metaphors and lyrical language employed by Saqi.

On page 54, third paragraph, “*La même drogue qui lui avait volé le sommeil.....*” is another example of far-fetched metaphor. To talk about “oxygen-hungry” veins is unrealistic indeed.

LES MÈRES CÉLIBATAIRES: UNMARRIED MOTHERS

Guilty by definition, the unmarried mother endures society's pitiless stare with the resignation of one condemned to death, whereas she is escaping imprisonment.

The father of the child vanishes; he melts, unpunished, into the crowd. If prevention is fantasy, then the genetic age is wishful thinking.

Like it or not, she must pay for the rest of her life, the price of fleeting pleasure which she gave to an "amorous" dissolute.

If this were not enough, her illegitimate child is unrecognised by society. He, too, must pay for his father.

No family name, no birth certificate, no school, no work, no life.

A living reminder of shame. He is hidden away.

Faced with this frightening prospect looming ahead, the unmarried mother finds herself forced, through love for her child, to give him up at birth. Between the orphanage and adoption, an abandoned child has more chance to live a reasonable life.

Father and mother unknown.

COMMENTARY

Saqi relates the pitiful state of the unmarried mother, shunned by Moroccan society for indulging in an illicit relationship with her "*amoureux*". She questions the word "love" since it may be love on the part of the woman, but the man is merely taking advantage of a vulnerable innocent.

She describes effectively the action of the child's father as "*s'est fondue dans la foule*",

melting into the crowd, like wax, having no substance, taking no responsibility for his actions. Methods of birth control being unavailable to young girls, there is no way in which pregnancy may be prevented, because birth control on the part of the man is unthinkable.

Saqi is making the point that if the concept of birth control is pure fantasy, then the ability to control population growth - hence unwanted children - is even more out of reach to Moroccan women.

Not only does the unmarried mother pay for her "sin" but her illegitimate child also suffers the consequences. He simply does not exist under Arab law. He has no right to a family name and thus is deprived of a birth certificate, without which he cannot attend school, gain employment or exist.

The unmarried mother has no option but to give up the child she loves at birth, for adoption, or to be placed in an orphanage, where his prospects of leading a normal life are far better than remaining with her.

The reference on page 57 of the text to "*la fille-mère*" has a pejorative connotation in French, implying that the young woman is loose. Saqi does this in order to indicate the attitude that Moroccan society would adopt towards a young unmarried mother. On the other hand, the phrase "*jeune fille*", young girl, conveys no negative significance.

Les enfants: Children

Children are the main characters in an endless series of pretences.

They are the excuse for getting married, the excuse for staying together, the excuse for walking out, for coming back and for quarrelling.

The husband leaves his wife with the excuse that she is sterile, whereas he has given her his STD. An infertile wife would damage his precious virility.

The wife has several children with the excuse of increasing the husband's responsibility, but also as an excuse for inheriting.

As soon as divorce is mentioned, children are the excuse for revenge; they are then used as a shield. Their mother refuses to remarry with the excuse of looking after them. Their father remarries, with the excuse of having other children but gets back his first children, with the excuse that their mother has remarried as well.

The stepmother ill treats them as soon as their father's back is turned, with the excuse that they remind her of the first wife's existence, which she is trying to blot out.

After the age of 35 the young woman is nothing but a wreck, with the excuse that she can no longer have children.

The wife is reduced to a breeding machine, without body, sex, pleasure, brain or speech.

With the excuse that her husband has decided it to be so.

COMMENTARY

In translating, I have chosen the plural form, "children", in order to avoid the gender specific 'he' or 'she'.

Saqi describes the child as the “hero” of an unending stream of pretence. In a cynical vein, she chooses to use the word “*prétexte*”¹ repeatedly to illustrate the game played by the adults involved, in which the child or children are used as pawns. Father, mother and stepmother all have their own devious reasons for exploiting the child.

The most despicable example given by Saqi is that of the husband who leaves his wife because he considers her to be sterile, when in reality, it is he, himself, who has given her a sexually transmitted disease thus rendering her sterile. Of course, in the eyes of Moroccan men, it is the woman who is sterile, not the man who is infertile.

However, Saqi does not hesitate to criticise the wife who gives birth to several children with the excuse that it will make her husband more responsible, whereas her ulterior motive is for the children to inherit from their father and hence her own well-being is assured.

Even the children’s stepmother is not above neglecting them, her excuse being that they remind her husband of his first wife, a memory that the second wife is attempting to erase.

Saqi relates how after the age of 35, a young woman is virtually written off, because she is considered to be past child-bearing age. In Saqi’s eyes, a wife or woman is considered as nothing but a machine for procreation, without any independence, or thought processes. Her excuse is that man has decided that she should exist in this manner when in reality, it is the woman who has allowed herself to become a breeding machine.

There is implied criticism here from Saqi - a feminist call for women to “s’assumer”, to take responsibility for their own identity, actions and evolution.

¹Pretence or excuse

LES HOMMES: MEN

*“That which goes without saying
is even better when said”
Talleyrand (1754-1838)*

Moroccan men are not going to deny the fact that they find this system suits them perfectly. To see each of them surrounded by an armada of females, in this case, mother, sisters, wife (wives), daughters, charladies, mistresses and secretaries; to see them thus, pampered, spoiled, mollycoddled, clothes well pressed, waited on, listened to, feared, waited for, revered, fawned upon, singled out, protected, shared, fought over and dreamed about..... one would be inclined to believe that their minds, stimulated by so much feminine attention and completely free of humdrum worries, would be in a position to beat all the records of ingenuity and, as a result, of productivity too, thus propelling the country to seventh heaven.

But then, why is it not like this?

Have their heads swollen to the point where their brains are found floating dangerously in their craniums or have the foundations beneath their feet been eaten by termites?

Something as astonishing as it is worrying is that their productivity is definitely not proportional to the number of women who are at their beck and call.

To give just one concrete example, when a building worker begins his working day at 5.00 am and finishes at 5.00 pm, he is working a 12 hour shift. His wife will have slaved from 4.00 am until 10.00 pm. But this is not the question. What one gleans from this is that the work of this labourer is very visible, concrete and tangible; one only has to see all those buildings which are springing up everywhere like mushrooms.

Now let us go on to the example of a senior town council employee. He starts his day at 9.30 am, breaks between 11.30am and 3.30 pm and finishes his long day at 6.00 pm. His secretary gets started at 8.30 am, his own wife assisted by two servants, starts at 7.00 am, and finishes at midnight. With four women at his disposal, not to mention others who work at the town

council, why are the town's thoroughfares so disgracefully damaged that they are smashed open at every junction, thus allowing heaps of rubbish to pile up?

However, it is quite clear that the building on the corner is progressing without delay. And what is the same town council employee going to do in this building under construction? Is he the owner of it? How can he finance it when he complains of being very badly paid for the work that is expected of him?

This town council is, however, well represented when it is a question of dividing up the town's pavements to rent them out to guardian angels, always ready to come and wave goodbye to each driver who pulls away.

Supposing that this town council collected only 10 DH per day per guardian angel and in (under) estimating the number of these angels at 5 000 to only one town council, the annual takings could climb to about two thousand million!

Would it be too much to ask that these same pavements be made a little cleaner for these very drivers who already pay taxes, road tax, thousands of guardian angels - whom they would happily do without - before swelling the funds of the town's coffers?

Whoever said that Chinese was the most puzzling thing in the world, has surely never considered this problem.

COMMENTARY

Saqi prefaces her text with a quotation for Talleyrand to support her opinion that it is better to speak out about contentious issues rather than to look the other way.

Moroccan men, according to Saqi, are surrounded by an "*armada*" of women. She chooses a naval metaphor to convey the sense of a flotilla of women, protecting the male.

In sarcastic vein, Saqi enquires why, when their every need is taken care of and with no worries to preoccupy them, they are not more productive. She gives the example of a construction worker with a twelve hour shift, and a wife who toils for nineteen hours, long after he is asleep. Yet the worker's labour is visible for all to see, a building springs up and progresses on a daily basis whereas the work carried out by his wife goes unseen and is therefore unacknowledged.

Saqi continues in her critique with the example of a senior official who, as she puts it, starts work at 9.30 am, takes a "break" between 11.00 am and 3.00 pm (four hours) to finish his "long" day at 6.00 pm. Sarcasm is her weapon here the word "*pause*" or break, is inappropriate for a four hour session and her choice of her word "long" to describe a truncated working day, is deliberate. "Long" is more appropriate for the number of hours that the labourer's wife slaves.

The verb, "*a démarré*", usually applied to motorised vehicles or machines, has been translated as "to get started" or "to get going" indicating that the secretary has to commence work before her manager arrives, in order to organise his agenda. It also implies that the secretary is like a machine, de-humanised.

Saqi is amazed that the main thoroughfares of the city are neglected to the point that rubbish spills over into the roads, when the senior official has so many women and employees to carry out his orders, enabling him to dedicate his energies to the solving of the city's problems.

She intimates that corruption is present when the corner building is shooting up so rapidly. It just happens to be the property of the same senior official who complains of his inadequate salary.

Saqi describes the role of the "*anges-gardiens*", always present awaiting a hand-out, in the pretence of waving goodbye to motorists. It is interesting that she chooses a Christian term to describe the car guards. Space is rented out unofficially to the guards and they, in turn, contribute to the funds of the town council. She queries again why the main thoroughfares of

the town cannot be made more salubrious for motorists who pay a number of taxes and yet the town council has ample funds to cover the costs.

Sociologically the presence of car guards is very much an African phenomenon, and would be quite readily understood by those living in Southern Africa.

Saqi's conclusion is that even the Chinese language is less complicated than what goes on here in a typical Moroccan city.

LE RÊVE: THE DREAM

“Each to his own”.....
I, myself, work while sleeping
and I find the solution to all problems
when dreaming.

Jacques Prévert (1900-1977)

Oh! If only women could for one little moment put themselves in the place of men!

Nonsense. Madness.

On Saturday night, an exhausted *superwoman* drops into a troubled sleep and begins to dream
....that all women in the world are on sabbatical for one year.

She dreams that she gets up at eight in the morning, rested and ready to give her children a
cuddle. Once everyone has gone, she sits on the sofa to enjoy a cup of coffee, at leisure. Her
husband has ironed his shirt, then woken, washed and dressed his offspring, served breakfast,
taking care to fill the little one's school bags with their snacks, kissed them at the school
gates, and watched them go through the door, before starting his day's work.

Meanwhile, for her part, our *happy* woman takes a shower to the soothing music of Kazem
Saher. Then she goes out for a stroll in the street, to take air and buy some magazines.

The kiosk is dreary and dusty. Outside, other than some grey, faded newspapers, she finds
nothing much. And for good reason. The top models are on strike. The newspaper seller
languishes in his shop. Drowsy with boredom and face twitching, he complains of a restless
night because of the baby's fever, his youngest daughter's nightmare and the eldest son's
homework which took until late. To crown it all, business is not going well this year.

She pops over to the pharmacist who is watching the comings and goings. As he has no work
to do, he makes conversation. Business is not what it used to be. No one's buying the
cosmetics that used to be such a money-spinner. She thinks to herself that women, now well
rested, no longer need make up to hide their exhausted appearance or their wan complexions,

nor creams to prevent those wrinkles caused by depression. Their hair is shining, she tells herself, no need to go and have one's hair done on Sunday, to be presentable on Monday. In fact, she had realised this on her way past. The unisex salon is no longer functioning- it is only (for men) now and as men don't have haircuts more than once every two months, the salon is not doing well.

At about 11.30 am she goes past the market where she sees several tousled men, hidden by their shopping baskets, buying anything they can, because they are in a hurry to go and pick up the children before returning home to get the meal. It is a problem even to order a pizza; too many phone calls and not enough staff: no dishwashers, no switchboard operators, no waitresses.

Her husband left his work thirty minutes before rush hour to do his shopping. He was so tired at work this morning that he scarcely made any progress. He could not stop thinking of what he was going to prepare for the children's lunch, of not forgetting the milk for the baby, the snacks, bread and above all the flowers for his darling wife.

As soon as he kisses her, he sets to work with his usual smile. He sees to it that the children wash their hands, prepares and serves the food, and clears the table before washing the dishes. He prefers to do this just after eating, not in the evening..... too bad about the nap. Afterwards he takes the children back to school, before returning to the office, where he makes his own coffee as his secretary is not there. He is a lawyer and deals only with small matters for business men. Many factories are coming within a hair's breath of bankruptcy and are not paying their workers: production is poor since all the female workers are on leave.

Less divorce, less demands for child allowance, less polygamy. On the contrary, men would really like to become single again. Furthermore, no new marriages on the horizon. In any case, celebrations make no sense without fashion designers, *neggafat*¹, cleaners and cooks.

¹ Women who dress and adorn the bride

And then, marrying a woman to get landed with all those chores, one has to have a sense of sacrifice or else be completely out of one's mind.

His brother, who is a doctor at the hospital is tearing his hair out, since only male nurses are working.

His cousin is an important business man. He employs a male domestic and a driver, but he is no longer able to travel as his clothing business is not doing well. Besides, it is too dreary on the plane without the smiles of the hostesses.

At the heart of the business it is chaos. Without his secretary, he has to be there at eight o'clock sharp in order to man the switchboard. Male secretaries are so incompetent. And also when they answer the telephone and say that the boss is not there, the callers at the other end of the phone have the disagreeable impression that he is there but that he is disguising his voice. He might just as well act and answer the phone himself, saying that he is there, but that he is very busy, which can be guessed from his cantankerous and irritated voice. He prefers to sort out the files himself, rather than see the sulky face of his barely awake desk tidier who, to top it all, has the name of a piece of furniture. A desk tidier! That's all he needed.

If the top model is on leave then there are no more models at all. Women no longer desperately try to be like Claudia Schiffer. They have forgotten her, it is as simple as that. Top fashion designers are all dead. Women blossom in their femininity without being subjected to advertising. Each one creates her own fashion according to her own wishes and personal tastes, without being obliged to follow any standard rule. Women accept themselves and love themselves just as they are. Men are, moreover, so whacked at the end of the day that they are incapable of noticing whether a black pudding or a canon is lying beside them.

No babies born this year: women are taking precautions. The gynaecologist is racking his brains. There aren't even any sexually transmitted diseases, as men have become faithful by force of circumstance. Even the prostitutes have ceased their trade.

Less marital problems, less neurosis, less sickly children, less drug addiction and less HIV/AIDS.

Children find themselves in a family situation more often, their mother is completely available to give them all the attention and the love required for their development. The channels of communication are open because the TV is no longer there to distract them. Of course, there is no more TV since there is no more advertising to sponsor the programmes. The models who used to sell washing powers, margarine and disposable nappies are on leave.

Little by little, her husband gets himself organised. He neatly arranges her things on coming home from work, puts the soiled washing in the laundry basket and does not forget to empty his ashtray. He racks his brains to vary the menu and courteously welcomes his mother-in-law and thinks twice before inviting friends over, and as for his wife, he is extremely aware of taking the children out on Sunday so that she can re-charge her batteries.

In any case, if he is not happy, he can just go to his mother's. But that would be hardly any better.

She regains confidence, consolidates, recycles herself, and re-evaluates herself.

Bang! Bang!

She starts. It is her husband who is banging violently on the door. Dead drunk as usual.

Bang! Bang!

*Achkoun?*²

Back to reality.

COMMENTARY

The use of the quotation by Jacques Prévert as a preface to the text is to show that everyone has a different method of working out problems; Saqi chooses to follow in the footsteps of

²Who is it?

Prévert and finds the solution in her dream for women.

Saqi's "Dream" displays a humorous side to her writing, as she dares to expand the limited boundaries of Moroccan women's lives. She elaborates on the theme of a "*super woman*" who dreams of a different existence. The English expression "*superwoman*" was made famous by Shirley Conran, in her guide to Household Management for "today's woman" but in this instance Saqi is more likely gently satirising the average wife and mother.

The dream is frivolous, since it is in complete contradiction to reality, to the extent of absurdity, in "Alice in Wonderland" vein. To rise at 8.00 am well rested, for a busy mother, is not the norm. Equally, for the mother to recline on the settee, whilst enjoying her coffee is the epitome of leisure. This is a tongue-in-cheek, feminist daydream.

All the every day tasks normally undertaken by the housewife, such as ironing shirts and getting the children ready for school, are now carried out by her husband in a reversal of male/female roles - something quite daring in Saqi's publication.

She expands her theme of leisure, describing the lengthy shower taken whilst listening to the seductive tones of a popular crooner. Our heroine takes a stroll, implying that time is of no importance. Her aim is to sample the fresh air and to buy some magazines. Again the concept of leisure is evoked. However, the newspaper kiosk is "*triste et empoussiéré*"³. There are no new magazines for sale because all the top models are absent, implying that without them, magazines are not published - hence less income for the magazine sellers. Additionally, pressure is put on women by the media to imitate the models. As for the models themselves, from a feminist viewpoint, the female form is exploited by male moneymakers. Again an example of rôle reversal - the newspaper agent is tired after an exhausting night looking after his three children with their various competing demands.

Our heroine converses with the pharmacist who relates the same state of affairs. Business is

³ Sad and dusty

slow because women no longer require cosmetics to beautify themselves - nor do they frequent their hair stylists. Because they are well rested, there is a healthy glow to their complexions and their locks shine with a natural lustre. Emphasising her point still more, Saqi comments on the lack of business in the unisex salon because the women clients are staying away and only men require hair cuts from time to time.

The image of dishevelled husbands shopping frantically before going to fetch the children is amusing. Without female staff, even the fast food outlets are running at a snail's pace, unable to function adequately.

The harassed husband, with so many tasks to complete, sets to work with "*son sourire habituel*"⁴. In other words, this is what is expected of the conventional wife - she must be selfless, toiling constantly for the family and has not even a remote chance of a nap.

Subjugation of women erodes the family unit. Saqi dreams of less divorce, less demand for child allowance and less polygamy. Women are on strike. In every sphere, nursing, travel, business, the absence of women causes hardship to the point that a businessman has no faith in his male secretaries. In other words, women are competent and men incompetent. In the French text, second paragraph, page 2, the word "*secrétaire*" has a dual meaning: a male or female secretary or a bureau desk. The reference to "the name of a piece of furniture" does not work in English unless a term such as "desk tidier" is used.

Saqi almost wistfully describes how the "*top models*", (again she uses English for emphasis and also because the power of advertising is essentially Western) are no longer in demand. Women have shaken off the idealised concept of beauty and are daring to be themselves, "blossoming" in their femininity. "*Les femmes s'acceptent et s'aiment telles quelles*".⁵

⁴His customary smile

⁵Women accept themselves and love themselves for what they are.

Her comment about “*un boudin*” or “*un canon*”⁶ refers to phallic symbols. The former implies a fairly flaccid penis and the latter, a hard erection. Normally, the roles are reversed: the husband demands conjugal rights but his exhausted wife is incapable of being aroused.

Saqi is using sexual images deliberately to provoke her readers into acknowledgment of her comments, whether they find them shocking or not, as reaction is what she is seeking. She is also mirroring how men speak among themselves of women’s physical attributes.

On a more serious note, because women have taken control of their lives, they are not forced into pregnancy; nor do they suffer from STD’s. Even prostitutes have ceased to trade because there is no demand.

Saqi believes that male fidelity results in a better marriage relationship, more healthy children, less drug addiction and above all, less HIV/AIDS. She postulates that fewer children in a family will mean that the mother gives them her undivided attention without the distraction of TV, since without the revenue from advertising, TV can no longer continue. Within the circle of domestic harmony, the *superwoman* regains her self-confidence and re-evaluates her priorities.

Alas, the dream is shattered by the hammering on the door. The husband, drunk again, has arrived home.

Saqi’s chapter “*le rêve*”, is playful in tone yet serious in intent. She desires above all the emancipation of her Moroccan sisters to live their lives as they would wish, but in her heart she realises that this is a far-off dream.

The French expression “thinks three times” is translated in English as “thinks twice”.

⁶A black pudding or a canon

AMALGAMES ET NUANCES: BLENDS AND SUBTLITIES

"There is no victory more difficult or more worthwhile than over oneself"
Homer

Fellow women, oppressed or otherwise, whoever you are: mothers, sisters, daughters, friends or even enemies, whether you like it or not, your cause is now one and the same: interwoven, connected and entangled.

Oppressed women, from all walks of life, the machine is racing, breaking out, insane, diabolical, cruel and murderous.

I am not going to say "good luck!" to you. I take this to be an expression of pity from someone who watches you "risking all".

Neither will I use the word "hope" because it is the equivalent of waiting and doing nothing. Even less do I like the verb "to fight against" because it implies that there is a winner and a loser.

What I would really like is for people to say to me without judging me or telling me what to do: "Go, forge ahead, if you believe it in the depths of your heart".

This implies courage and the hope of a peaceful demonstration in which everyone would play a part.

It is madness that a few words can change a whole existence; even, and above all, that of a little grain of sand, floating in this vast universe.

COMMENTARY

"Blends and subtleties" is an apt title to depict Saqi's notion of the delicate nuances which unite women together in their fight against "*la machine*" or male domination.

Saqi believes that women have to believe in themselves and come together in an attempt to

make themselves heard. She does not agree with futile sentiments of “good luck” or an expression of “hope”. She is impatient for action but does not like the phrase “to fight against” because of the connotations of winner and loser.

A peaceful demonstration in which all women participate, is what she desires above all.

The metaphor of a tiny grain floating in the universe, powerless on its own, yet when joined with all the other grains of sand becomes a powerful force, is very effective.

The quotation from Homer encapsulates the central theme of this text, that to make any sort of impact in the struggle against oppression, first and foremost one has to win the victory over oneself; in other words to conquer any thoughts of failure and to have absolute faith in oneself.

UN PETIT GRAIN DE SABLE: A LITTLE GRAIN OF SAND

*A tiny little grain of sand.
A minute and unimportant little grain of sand.*

If I were to be that grain of sand, I would be proud to be the one to block the cogs of that machine.

In my burst of confidence, I would even go as far as to anticipate my delight in thinking that while these oppressors, technocrats and handymen are leaning over their faulty machines, women, all these women, will take advantage of this diversion to hold hands, standing in a huge, magnificent circle, surrounding the oppressors with their heads held high, so that every woman may be “herself”, not this one’s wife, or so and so’s daughter. She will be neither housewife, nor intellectual, nor Jill of all Trades, nor fearful, nor lover, nor clairvoyant, nor prostitute.

In short, she will be a woman.

A circle where women allow the happiness of new found identity to flow through the fingers of their interlaced hands.

Laughter and the delight in discovering that at last they are women before all and above all. A circle of dancing women, freed from bodies thickened by years of slavery, who find at last, the energy and strength to say **ENOUGH!** to this phallocratic machine that holds them prisoners within it.

To spit at the machine all the numbing venom with which they have been filled, since the dawn of time. The venom of suffering, sacrifice, humiliation, contempt and submission.

Venom of tears and of despair.

A graceful and womanly circle singing loud and strong, not for equality but merely for the

right to possess an identity. The right to be themselves and nothing but themselves. To make decisions, to love, study, work and think for themselves.

The right to exist. As an individual. To walk, talk, to ponder, to act independently without being treated as perpetual children, and not to be harassed by predators.

Whereas, what a paradox, their children are given the right to make choices at an age and in circumstances for which they have the greatest need to be advised and guided.

The right to speak without being ridiculed. The right to laugh or cry without being labelled hysterical. The right to be the owner of one's own body and soul. The right to give birth and to breastfeed with joy.

The right to say that their bodies experience not only suffering, but also pleasure, before, during and after childbirth.

To say that women are stable and men are "erratic" whereas it is the women whom the men treat as unstable.

That their menstruation is not unclean but instead, hygienic.

That women are not indisposed, but on the contrary, predisposed.....towards harmony, love and survival.

That menopause allows them to be more in charge. In charge of their bodies which are resting.

Are men ashamed of their beards that could well be filthy?

Men are proud of them, precisely because women do not have beards.

However, far from despising beards, women accept them even when the beards could be unhygienic, offensive and restrictive.

No, women do not want that sort of equality, thank you.

No, not like men, no, not the freedom of blind desire for the strength of power, nor the freedom of corruption, or selfishness, or enslavement of others.

Women want to be themselves, amusing, refined, generous, tender, loving and tolerant.

Feminine but themselves.

They no longer wish to see the world as these men wish them to see it.

They want to see it with their own eyes, to feel, to share, to listen and to take part. Their eyes see men as their accomplices complementing them in their differences, without this power struggle and oppression which only lead to mistrust, unfairness, instability and emotional chaos.

Their eyes see women no longer hating themselves and each other, no longer despising themselves, or offering themselves to their oppressors.

These oppressors who, when all is said and done, are more fragile, when women consider that they have brought the men into the world, have nourished, changed, protected and seen them grow up with so much love and care.

These same men who, in fact, are so afraid of them, of women, because of their power, which men do not possess, of giving life and clinging on to it.

These oppressors, who are, after all, so ridiculous with their machine which they use as a shield against femininity, as revealed in the permanently rounded female form at which

they jeer, and which draws them back constantly to the fear of their brittle masculinity.

These men who, instead of giving life, have invented war and scattered the seeds of death, be it physically or morally, (no matter which). They have even buried their women alive.

Let women (in a graceful dance) discretely spread by word of mouth the fact that they have made these men and it is they who can re-make them.....

Differently.

If women who denounce injustice, begin by prohibiting favouritism of their sons.

If the daughter no longer has to wait on her brother.

If she is no longer destroyed by fatalism from birth.

If she is not systematically cut off from knowledge and information.

If the mother, already worn out, no longer gets out of bed late at night to serve dinner to a son returning from a drunken binge.

If the mother-in-law is no longer shocked to see her "darling" son help his "idle" fiancée.

If women in their thoughtlessness, cease encouraging all that degrades their role as women, from blind acceptance of witchcraft to reactionary advertising, from haggling over dowries to ostentatious weddings.

If the battered wife, harassed or raped, accuses her aggressor and denounces him instead of despising herself.

If she breaks the resigned silence of shame.

If, although cowed, women hold out their hands to pick the **flower of freedom**, that has grown on the tombs of their grandmothers, and offer it to their sisters, daughters or granddaughters. **The Flower of truth.**

If they dress their own wounds, they who have tended so many others, and march towards this freedom with a firm and decisive step, all of them united.

If they **realise** that without them, the women, these oppressors are nothing.

If they realise that the oppressors feed on women's submissiveness because they are afraid of hunger and cold.

If they realise that they keep the women in subservience because they are afraid of dying out, afraid that women will decide to end life by leaving them with their doomed sperm.

If they realise that women have their own language, one which has the **power** to love, soothe, console and relieve...

The power to save the life of all those young girls with black scarves tied around their heads...

COMMENTARY

In her most powerful plea yet to Moroccan women, Saqi compares herself to a tiny grain of sand, which, combined with all the other grains of sand, (women en masse) could change women's destiny.

She imagines a huge circle of women, hands interlinked, delighting in their newly discovered self-reliance. A circle symbolises continuity and harmony, where all are equal. Saqi describes the bitterness with which women have been affected as "venin de souffrances, de sacrifices, d'humiliation, de mépris et de soumissions".

Saqi lists the various “rights” denied to women, above all the right to lead their own lives. In the sentence “*qu’elles sont réglées*”... she employs alliteration of the ‘r’ to convey the sense of harsh restrictions in the form of brief, staccato utterances. Again, in the phrase “*qu’elles ne sont pas indisposées mais au contraire prédisposées*”she plays on words to awaken interest in her readers and thus make them sympathetic to her cause. Women are not indisposed, or “under the weather”, but naturally inclined towards reconciliation, love and endurance.

She states openly that women have the right to experience sexual pleasure at all stages of their lives. Challenging the customary belief that menstruation is unclean, Saqi believes that it is a natural, hygienic phenomenon. Traditionally, Muslim women who menstruate during Ramadam cannot fast on those days but must “pay them back”, at a later stage.

She sees women as far more accepting and less critical than men - one example being that women accept men’s beards, even when the beards are in a filthy condition. Saqi is drawing attention to natural differences between the sexes.

Women, in her opinion yearn to see men as their “*complices*”, complementing them in their differences, without the constant struggle between dominance and oppression.

She postulates that women should no longer hate themselves or meekly offer themselves to those who dominate them.

Saqi sees the oppressors as being “*fragiles*” because women have cared for and nurtured them; ie., men are reliant on women and not self-sufficient. She describes, in a sensitive manner, the outpouring of love and care that mothers lavish on their sons.

It is the fear of women’s power, of the ability to give life, which results in men’s fears. This is a fear exaggerated by their vulnerable masculinity, a fear of women’s “*protubérances permanentes*”, protuberances which are always there whereas men’s erections are temporary. Here she is counteracting Freud’s penis envy. Saqi compares women who give life and men

who take life in war, or in sewing the seeds of chaos. She goes to the extreme of saying that men have buried their women alive, in other words they have stifled women's independence and quest for knowledge, their joy of life. Burying women alive could well refer to the traditional punishments of lapidation and bricking women up into walls.

In a striking series of "ifs", Saqi expresses her wishes on how to achieve female emancipation. Firstly, however, is the need to renounce the old traditions and to set in motion new thought processes, some of which are the following:

Women should not favour their sons over their daughters; daughters should no longer wait on brothers. Both these practices are inherent in Moroccan Society.

The blind acceptance of fatalism or "*In sa Allah*" (if Allah wills it) that one cannot change the course of destiny, must be challenged.

Girls should continue with their schooling and be better informed on sexual matters including birth control.

Tired mothers are no longer to be at the beck and call of selfish sons, returning at all hours of the night.

The mother-in-law should not interfere and should refrain from criticism when her adored son assists his fiancée in some household task.

Women are not to demean themselves by dabbling in black magic, in negative advertising, in haggling over dowries and in ostentatious weddings. Saqi frequently mentions the Moroccan woman's recourse to superstition, a sociological phenomenon inherent in Moroccan society. However, dabbling in such rituals implies negativity regarding one's own capabilities and a willingness to seek answers from charlatans.

The abused wife should stand up for her rights instead of belittling herself.

And finally Saqi recommends that the battered woman shatter the passive silence of shame.

Saqi continues with her metaphor of the flower. In this text, the flower no longer symbolises women but rather truth. She urges women to pluck the flowers of freedom and of truth. She emphasises these words in bold print together with the word, “realise” and “power”. Thus the words, “**freedom, truth, realise and power**” spell out tremendous potential strength, inherent in Moroccan women.

Saqi will go to any lengths to save the lives of “all those young girls with black scarves tied around their heads”. Indeed the veiling of Muslim women is frequently taken to be a symbol of their suppression, against which Saqi will fight to the end.

Saqi adopts a kind of “journalese” in this text. Her thoughts are delivered in telegraphic style, which omits main clauses and uses subordinate clauses, for example: “*Qu’ils se nourrissent de leur soumission, parce qu’ils ont peur d’avoir froid et faim*”. I have chosen to render this by a similar English journalistic style: “If they realise that the oppressors feed on women’s submissiveness because they are afraid of hunger and cold”.

In French it is acceptable to have long lists of verbs, for example: “*Décider, aimer, étudier, travailler, penser par elles-mêmes*”. In English an ‘and’ is necessary and the sentence reads: “To make decisions, to love, study, work and think for themselves”.

Saqi’s telegraphic style supplies a sense of urgency to her text, urgency because time is running out.

EPILOGUE

If all the grains of sand were to unite, oceans, seas and deserts would sing and thus, all together, would stifle the coughing voice of this dying machine.

COMMENTARY

Saqi's powerful metaphor of individual grains of sand, combining to choke the "coughing voice" of the antiquated phallocratic machine, illustrates that unity can prevail. If women were to unite against oppression, the age-old traditions imposed upon them by a patriarchal society could be annihilated, to the applause of the oceans, seas and deserts.

One grain of sand can accomplish nothing. Many grains can fill entire deserts.

Saqi's image of oceans, seas and deserts is very apt and one with which Moroccan people can identify, since the country of Morocco is bordered by the North Atlantic ocean to the north-west and the vast sands of the Sahara desert lie to the south-east.

GLOSSAIRE: GLOSSARY

Achkoun

Who is it? Who's there?

A ouldi

Oh, my son. Derives from the word *Oualada* = to give birth. There is no feminine version. The word, "*bent*" (girl) being the feminine of "*Ibn*" or "*ben*" (son of). Even though in French, one finds "*garçon*" and "*fiils*", ("*boy*" and "*son*") as opposed to the word "*fille*" ("*girl*" and/or "*daughter*"), the verb "*accoucher*" remains totally genderless. In English the words are completely distinctive: **son/daughter* versus *boy/girl* in respect of the verb *to deliver*.

*Saqi has misspelt the word "*sun*". It should, in fact, be spelt "*son*".

On reflection, it is as if in Arabic countries, only the boy is recognised as the issue of a delivery; the girl merely receives filial recognition. This is entrenched in Islamic Law as only males can inherit. Women must be "looked after" by male family members. Could this be the fundamental source of their unequal rights?

B'khour

Recipes made from plants, rags, or animals for the purpose of burning over a brazier, the smoke of which is believed to bring back a lost husband or to put a fickle man back on the right path.

B'natn'nas

Etymologically, "*daughters of the human species*" which relegates all the others to the animal species or to being diabolical monsters. Daughters of "good families".

<i>Choufa</i>	Illiterate woman claiming to have been born with the gift of clairvoyance.
<i>Développer des plumes</i>	To grow rich - then to disappear ¹
<i>F'kih</i>	Poorly educated man who claims he can cast bad spells or conjure them up.
<i>Kazem Saher</i>	A sentimental Arab crooner
<i>Koun Rajel</i>	Be a Man!
<i>L'mra</i>	Etymologically “the woman”. In this context, it concerns an impersonal name given by the man to his wife, the latter’s first name being deliberately concealed: “ <i>Woman without identity</i> ” .
<i>Mesmouma</i>	Viper, evil
<i>Mrat R'rajel</i>	Man’s wife or woman with a small w and a capital M.
<i>M'zlout</i>	Stripped, plucked
<i>Nâam Sidi</i>	“Understood your Grace”
<i>Neggafat</i>	Women who dress and adorn the bride
<i>N'siba</i>	Mother of the bride, mother-in-law of the groom

¹In the text, “*La maligne*”, Saqi writes “*développer les plumes*”: hence, inconsistency.

<i>Ouilada</i>	Etymologically: "she who has given birth". Mother
<i>Ouila</i>	Impoverished, destitute
<i>Rajel</i>	A "virile" man
<i>Souab</i>	Social pleasantries: social niceties.
<i>T'fousikha</i>	The same recipes as those of <i>b'khour</i> but these are directed against the effects of the evil <i>b'khour</i>
<i>Touila ârida</i>	Large and wide

CONCLUSION

Saqi does not claim to undertake “a rational and detailed analytical study” but searches for a realistic, overall picture describing the humdrum existence of ordinary women. She deals with issues vitally important for the liberation of Moroccan women from the patriarchal Islamic tradition, under which they are obliged to live.

Yet, Dr Raghib, writing to the Weekly Telegraph¹ says: “Islam has been one of the greatest liberators of women in our history.....The Koran taught that men and women are equal before God; it does not say that men are better than woman; it teaches that the best person in front of God is the one who is most pious. Islam gave women the right to be educated, to earn their own living, to own their own property, to inherit, to choose their own husbands and the right to divorce more than 1 000 years before women in the West were given any of these rights.

...In Islam, we are taught that women are the twin halves of men; that heaven lies at the feet of one’s mother, that the best man is the one who treats his wife the best; and that it is just as important for women to be educated as men.”

Mrs Shermeen Butt’s letter to the Weekly Telegraph contains the following comments: “The Muslim faith is an embodiment of peace and social justice. Its true adherents are commanded never to transgress. Islam recognises the diversity of the sexes. However, this does not mean that ‘men are better than women’.”

Why have Moroccan women been so suppressed, when the Koran states very clearly that men and women are equal before God and that women “are the twin halves of men”?

Serge Ménéger, for example, describes how Moroccan women writers are obliged to undertake and publish scientific research before being accepted by the editorial world. Only then are they able to embark on a novel².

¹ Issue No. 533: October 10 - October 16, 2001

²*La 1^{ère} personne plurielle des femmes écrivains marocaines des années 90*

Ménager cites Rachida Yakoubi, “Ma vie, mon cri”, who says that the Koran does not deprive women of freedom - on the contrary it very clearly states that women must seize this freedom and carry it through to a successful conclusion.

Lefèvre (1992:120) states that cultures that derive their ultimate authority from a text - be it the Bible, the Qur’an, or *The Communist Manifesto* - are likely to guard that text with special vigilance, since the power of those empowered can be said to rest on it.

Some sacred central texts like the Qur’an are not allowed to be translated at all. Or, rather, true believers are not allowed to translate it.....Non-translation of the Qur’an persists not because there are no Muslims capable of translating the work into other languages but simply because the authorities desire to protect their authority.

It can be concluded that it is man’s interpretation of the Koran which has led to inequalities between the sexes. It is this imbalance which Saqi hopes will be redressed once women have taken stock of their situation and reacted accordingly.

Although Saqi’s writings are flawed, her punctuation inaccurate, and her metaphors somewhat exaggerated, her text “*Marocaines en mâle-vie*” is of interest to those researching on feminist writings. Saqi’s sexual imagery is explicit and she could be considered outrageous for presuming to discuss these matters in her text. Usually such imagery is verbal rather than written³.

As someone who is interested in Feminist critique, I agree with Saqi that women must stretch out their hands to pick the Flowers of freedom and of Truth and hence “save the lives of all those young girls with black scarves tied around their heads”.

Morocco is a country said to be “like the desert palm; rooted in Africa, watered by Islam and rustled by the winds of Europe”⁴. Being subjected to such varying influences, could not the mind-set of Moroccans, themselves be “rustled” into change?

³Rachid O: *L'enfant ébloui*

⁴Sunday Times Lifestyle, October 28, 2001

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