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Resistance in the New Harem Era: Gendered Violence and the Power of Media in the Time of Covid-19 in Morocco



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Abstract

In a time of great uncertainties, the world witnesses, for the very first instance in its modern history a global lockdown spanning over all the vital spheres of economic and social life. At this point, when neither leaving home nor staying is an option, the surge to exponentially study the manner in which human life has evolved and been shaped under such circumstances gained valuable interest, especially within the circles of feminist and human rights-based academia. Respectively, researchers argue that the weight of the lockdown and movement restriction policies fall discriminately on men and women as they are interestingly leading such novel experiences in different ways. Men, by having no concern mounting to the priority of protecting themselves from being inflicted by this global pandemic and maintaining their economic roles as the traditional family providers, and women on the margin side of the picture, having to deal with the burden of surviving the dangers that the outside and the inside worlds akin dispose. Henceforth, this article is an attempt to probe the dynamics of the private sphere considering the intersections between oppression, seclusion and violence and the development of new dynamics of resistance by transposing from the early 20th century's feminine experience of confinement and the 21st century's global lockdown in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. This research considers the stories presented by the renowned Moroccan sociologist and author "Fatima Mernissi", who herself lived a different kind of seclusion behind the colossal and skillfully ostentatious walls of the harem of the city of Fez in the forties of the previous century and this shall be done mainly by reviewing the stories of resistance presented in her memoir *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*; and by considering the stories of five respondents who have shared with us their accounts through various social media outlets upon the surge of the pandemic in Morocco. The purpose here is to unravel the convergences between women's experiences of gender-based violence (GBV) in both confinements and to foreground the value, significance and challenges these feminine insights being in them simple acts of everyday life constitute in establishing a discourse of resistance and feminine empowerment vis-à-vis patriarchy, seclusion and gender-based violence¹.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the course of many years, the international feminist movement has been engaged in an arduous and long struggle with the objective of fostering the rights of women to have equal chances, to enjoy their rights and be assigned equal opportunities and ends and to fight all sorts of discrimination in their regard, gender-based violence included. Feminists managed, starting from the

seventies and in an enduring philosophical and political query, to question what had yet been seen as profoundly natural and normal sets of behavior and social demography characterizing the everyday life practices. These activists equally managed to draw more attention to the abuse women were subject to in the confines of their homes under the banner that 'the private is political', indicating that the inequality that

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profoundly underscores the essence of the private sphere's politics is a reflection of the wider power relations and dynamisms of patriarchy in the wider society that function with the objective of subjugating and subordinating women. Feminist theorists of the time also continued to draw attention to the fact that major state institutions (the police, health care system and the legal sector) also contribute in the enforcement and perpetuation of gender based-violence.

In 1993, The United Nations' Declaration on the elimination of Violence Against Women recognized that the unequal power relations between men and women stand as major factor behind the prevention of women's empowerment and their social, economic and political advancement, dooming them to eternal inferiority with regard to men. This very same document urged all member states to condemn and combat in all force all types of gender-based violence targeting women, girls and children and constructed that all states should by no means allow contextual customs and norms; traditions or religious considerations stand in the way of arriving at such end. The declaration equally lists in clear terms the rights that women are entitled by virtue of their being, these rights include, *inter alia* as indicated in article 3:

Women are entitled to the equal enjoyment and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. These rights include, *inter alia*:

- (a) The right to life; (b) The right to equality;
- (c) The right to liberty and security of person;
- (d) The right to equal protection under the law;
- (e) The right to be free from all forms of discrimination;
- (f) The right to the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health;
- (g) The right to just and favorable conditions of work;
- (h) The right not to be subjected to torture, or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Assembly, 1993).

Despite the efforts that feminists, social activists and human rights agents have deployed over the years to promote better conditions for women and to fight against all forms of discrimination with their regard; with violence being a top priority, several women's rights agencies still record significant increase in the toll of women who have fallen victims to gender-based violence in all its different sorts worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO), Department of Reproductive Health and Research estimates in a research conducted in 2013 that 35 percent of women globally have been victims of sexual or physical violence predisposed by an intimate partner or a non-partner. The study underscores equally that some national inquiries draw attention to the fact that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced, at least once in their lives, violence either in its physical or sexual

terms. These women as the studies tend to foreground, are more prone to demonstrate higher rates of psychopathologies and of incurring sexual-transmitted disease (WHO, 2013).

Equally important, it is also estimated that of the 87000 women who were intentionally killed in 2017 globally, more than half (50000; 58 percent) were killed by their intimate partners or family members, meaning that 137 women across the world are killed by a member of their own family every day. More than a third of the women intentionally killed in 2017 (30000 women) was killed by their current or former intimate partner. On a similar scale, a study conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime indicates that half of the intentional murders and whose victims were women in 2017 were committed by intimate partners or by family members. The numbers estimated by 137 women across the world and per day reflect the toll of mortality of women due to gender-based violence conducted by current or former intimate partner and / or by family members (UNODC, 2019).

In one last example, approximately 15 million adolescent girls (aged 15 to 19) worldwide, a UNICEF 2017 research asserts, have forcibly experienced sex at some point of their lives. Forced sex includes forced sexual intercourses or other sexual acts imposed on girls or women by their boyfriends, partners or husbands. The research also points that only one in 100 victims seeks professional assistance (UNICER, 2017).

The rates of gender-based violence intensified significantly during the new global lockdown that the Covid-19 pandemic instituted, ringing intensely international alarms that the world is not only facing one deadly virus but in effect two. The only difference is that while governments swiftly mobilized to counter this new pandemic exploiting all possible means, one of which was to mandate social distancing and lockdowns as a means of curbing the spread of the virus and mitigating its inevitable impact of public health. Violence continued to grow and ravage silently in the fertile ground conferred by the privacy and the secretive aura characteristic of homes and the private sphere. Today, we stand, as never, before the challenge of managing this crisis that targets women and girls all around the world as they find themselves at the mercy of their abusers, having to spend every hour of the day in their homes under intensive movement control and restrictions policies that put them in front of a double edged-sword decision to be made: leave or be expelled from the home in jeopardy of infection and homelessness or stay in confinement with the possibility of being endlessly subjected to violence, and without any chance to recourse to or seek help. Lockdowns have also widened the gap for women to find support as it became harder to contact NGO's or feminist associations due to the continuous presence of the abuser/s in the same space with the victims². Shelters, hotlines, judicial and medical services, police departments have also become beyond reach for the

majority of women due to the conditions governing the status quo³. Moreover, as women constituted the major work force behind small and informal businesses, agriculture and industries, the lockdown and quarantines measurements left this broad segment with no or limited access to work and by consequence a solid income. Women also found themselves overburdened with the task of looking after children – who have started a new system of homeschooling in which the majority of Moroccan women who are illiterate cannot help or take part in- and the elderly.

In reference to this, UN chief Antonio Guterres in a public statement put out a call for the end of what he termed a “horrifying global surge in domestic violence”. He lengthily expresses that violence is not solely related to wars and battle fields, it exists everywhere, and it exists where women are to be the safest.

Over the past weeks as economic and social pressures and fear have grown, we have seen a horrifying global surge in domestic violence. In some countries, the number of women calling support services has doubled. Meanwhile, healthcare providers and police are overwhelmed and understaffed. Local support groups are paralyzed or short of funds. Some domestic violence shelters are closed; others are full (UNGS, 2020).

Defining violence, what counts as a violent act and what is not, how intersectional the scope of the concept ‘violence’ is and how relative, short or sophisticated it might be in capturing and encapsulating different women’s experiences in varied and dissimilar contexts, and the forms of violence that they may have endured is beyond the scope of this paper. For this, we intend to use the term gender-based violence as the major term to describe what we deem the type and violence experience relative to most of the Moroccan feminine experience with violence. This means that, with the aim of restricting the scope of the current research (and by no means the scope of the concept violence or women’s experiences in general within this regard), violence designates all forms of discrimination, ill-treatment -be it physical, sexual, economic, psychological- that the woman/girl may endure as a result to her being a female. We recognize also that violence might be undertaken by the intimate/previous/current partner of the woman with whom she might be in confinement. Perpetrators comprise also male family members: brothers, fathers, uncles, grandparents or other distant or close relatives. Same sex violence is also included in this regard as we acknowledge that some female members of the family (or by that matter otherwise) might also be the generators of violence against women/girls. We restrict our definition of violence due the following considerations:

- Due to various restrictions related to the span of conducting the research and movement impossibility, this research focuses mainly on

women who have been capable of responding to our calls via social media outlets.

- Various experiences relative to women who face violence at work, in the streets, women who live with intimate partners -including women in same sex relationships-, immigrants and refugees and women who live in rural areas are not covered in this research as a result to the restrictions aforementioned.

Resistance is another central concept used in this research. In linking two confinement situations across one century period, we deem that the development of new means of resistance and the negotiation of the dynamics of confinement and seclusion through various covert means of resistance is what constitutes the link between the Harem experience of the early 20th century represented by the work of professor Fatima Mernissi, ‘Dreams of Trespass’ and the quarantine experience of women in Fes in 2020. To construe more in developing this, we adopt the definition Allan Wade provides in his article “Small acts of living: Everyday Resistance to Violence and other Forms of Oppression” where he states that resistance is:

any mental or behavioral act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression (including any type of disrespect), or the conditions that make such acts possible (Wade, 1997).

By this, we confirm that resistance, that is characteristic of feminine thriving in oppressive contexts, does not always have to be manifested through equally violent, abusive or physical actions, but it can manifest itself through developing various behaviors that covertly negotiate ruling elements of power and create means of survival and fighting back that are minimal in form and practice. To this, the idea of “where there is violence there is resistance” becomes central to our research in which we emphasize that the power relations governing gender relations across spatiotemporal patriarchal communities are always characterized by negotiations of imposed conditions and regulations in which the seemingly constrained models of social configurations are in constant state of defiance, fluctuation and covert/overt alternation.

Critical to our analysis are also the ideas James Scott develops in his seminal analysis of the dialectic links between power politics, resistance and social orders “Domination and the Arts of Resistance”. Succinctly, Scott argues that all power relations are met with varying forms of resistance, of which, and probably most proliferate of, are reified through small acts that take on the semblance of everyday activities. Here, what Scott accentuates is that laying behind our strictly assigned public roles, enacting a public performance either by pursuing a well-targeted routine of smiles and

estimate pleasantries, or counter wise, voicing a suffocated thought or expression erstwhile prudently silenced, there is always a strategic dimension of power negotiation, that is to say that either a “public or hidden transcript” is constantly being woven with consideration to the moment-present dialectics of surveillance and disguise. By the private and public transcript, Scott generally refers to covert and overt ways of interaction and resistance advanced by the two parties in the power relationship. In more details, he describes these transcripts as follows:

Public here refers to action that is openly avowed to the other party in the power relationship, and transcript is used almost in its juridical sense (process verbal) of a complete record of what was said. This complete record, however, would also include non-speech acts such as gestures and expressions (Scott, 1990).

One major characteristic of the public transcript is according to Scott its withstanding ‘disguise’:

The greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast. In other words, the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask ... (Scott, 1990)

The hidden transcript on the other hand designates the:

Discourse that takes place “offstage”, beyond direct observation by power holders. The hidden transcript is thus derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript (Scott, 1990).

One last consideration that we deem important to put forward in this research is that to clarify that by no means do we propagate the narratives of dissent presented and analyzed in this paper as epitomes of consciously heroic feminist battlers. We recognize that the persona models found in Mernissi’s memoir and in the testimonies, we received are models of “anti-authority struggles”. That is to say, the resistance of these women represents immediate struggles which objective is to “attack not so much such and such an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class, but rather a technique, a form of power” (Foucault, 2003). This resistance while it counters the dynamics of violence and confinement, and represents a vivid consciousness of women’s subjugation under patriarchy, it does not however essentially avow a conscious resistance to the institution of patriarchy as such.

To all this, we have developed two research hypotheses that are as follows:

- Unlike orientalist depiction and portrayal of the Harem and its inhabitants, we argue here that women in the Harem developed a conscious awareness of their state of disempowerment and seclusion, leading them to negotiate the dynamic of the private sphere through various covert acts of resistance
- Similarly, we assume that through covert actions of resistance women victims of gender-based violence can counter the oppression and discrimination they are subject through channeling their stories via social media platforms during the Covid-19 global quarantine.

This study, therefore, aims at profoundly surveying the communalities characterizing women’s confinement experiences through over a century distant accounts, first through the memoir of Fatima Mernissi’s ‘Dreams of Trespass’ and through five contemporary dissent narratives/testimonies of women victims of gender-based violence. Methodologically speaking, our analysis will adopt a feminist approach based on a comparative method informed by gynocriticism applied to Mernissi’s text, and a response-based approach to therapeutic interviewing applied to the five women’s narratives presented in the second part of the article.

2 WRITING AND RESISTANCE IN THE CASE OF WOMEN’S CONFINEMENT EXPERIENCE IN EARLY 20TH CENTURY HAREM

I was born in a harem in 1940 in Fez; Morocco... (Mernissi, 1995)

With this very first sentence, *Dreams of Trespass*, one of Fatima Mernissi’s most circulated, accredited and deliberated books begins. Translated into more than 22 languages upon its publication in 1994, *Dreams of Trespass* is yet another book in a lasting legacy of a rich literary and academic productions arsenal that broadly, but not exclusively, revolved around a deep analysis of the historical development and advancement of the Islamic thought and heritage from a psycho-sociological perspective; and in which, through a thorough scrutiny she examined women in the Islamic history. Most of Mernissi’s contributions focused on approaching religious framing of the positions and functions of women, either through direct reading of Islamic texts, or through criticism of jurisprudential literature that is crucial to producing statutory laws and devoting social frameworks specific to the situation of Arab Muslim women. Mernissi’s productions include: *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society*, which was her Ph.D. dissertation at Brandies University, later published as a book in 1987. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam*, through this book published in 1992 Mernissi presents a profound re-evaluation of various gender-related the matiques widely acknowledged as divine-anchored in Islamic thought by

developing a historical, political and ideological contestation to these idealizations based on a feminist reinterpretation and revisit to Islamic sources of Sharia (Quran and Hadith). And last but not least, Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern world published in 1992.

Similar to the frontiers, God has ordained to separate the worlds of men and women, Fatima's father meticulously instructs in the first pages of her memoir, so did God created vicious oceans to separate Dar Al Islam and Christendom. Problems would befall Muslims, the father continues, only and only when both frontiers/*hudud* are not strictly respected and when either parties try to contest or defy their holiness. This is the first picture Mernissi paints to the readers of her memoir *Dreams of Trespass*, the story of a confined, suffocated and secluded childhood behind the sacred walls and metal gates of a great Fassi Ryad, a harem, that in its likeness to the lands of Islam, preserves the honor, culture and core of Islamic values incarnated through women and the family institution, a space that preserves and hence is to be preserved. Harem as many writers aver, is a dangerous space, a space of holy law, a feminine confine par excellence. For Mernissi, the harem originates from the word "haram" that means sin and stands counterpoint to what is permissible and "halal", and denotes the danger that surrounds the frontiers of the harem and that are customized with the aim of protecting all that is sacred.

At the heart of Mernissi's experience, and hence description of the harem in *Dreams of Trespass* is the idea of spatial segregation and physical territorial organization. Mernissi depicts the harem as a space of certitude, patterns and norms where neither humans nor objects are to behave according to their own wills. Everything is meticulously ordered and everything follows the rules of the divine and patriarchs. What seems interesting in this description is that the space of the harem, though hosts women and occasionally men, its rules do not much apply but to its female dwellers as it acts as an all watching and controlling eye over their physical and intellectual movements. Mernissi in this respect recounts that:

I would sit out in our house as if I had never seen it before. First, there was the square and rigid courtyard, where symmetry ruled everything. Even the white marble fountain, forever bubbling in the courtyard center, seemed controlled and tamed (Mernissi, 1975).

In this space of strict orders, respecting the *hudud* attentively accounts for the thriving of a Muslim identity and tradition that respects on full stands the dimensional regulations of what is 'halal' and 'haram'. Nonetheless, one might wonder here, why are the notions of the harem, sin, seclusion and Islam always related to women? The early feminist scholar Qassim Amine explains this in his seminal work 'The liberation of

Women' (Mernissi, 1975) on the premise of women's sexual activeness. In his attempt to process the logic behind veiling and spatial segregation and seclusion of women, Amine comes to the conclusion that women are oft-times associated with the private sphere in an attempt to tame and control their impulsive sexuality and to protect by consequence men from them. The woman becomes in this stream of reasoning a 'Femme Fatale' (Mernissi, 1975), a dangerous creature, a Fitna and a source of Kaid that must be locked behind doors and kept away from the sight of men in a nobler attempt to prevent them from diverging astray from their social, moral and religious duties. In a fuller account, Mernissi tends to describe this in terms of an 'explicit theory', a one that is commonly denotative of men's authority over women and that goes in parallel with orientalist descriptions of the harem; that draw it as a space of endless luring passion, and where a man reigns over hundreds if not thousands of virgins of unparalleled beauty driven by their lust and thirst for their 'master'. On the other end of the spectrum, Mernissi also speaks of an "implicit theory" where men are depicted as the weaker party, the weaker sex at the stake of women's mercy. In her own words, this is how she describes this:

Muslim society is characterized by a contradiction between what can be called 'an explicit theory' and 'an implicit theory' of female sexuality, and therefore a double theory of sexual dynamics. The explicit theory is the prevailing contemporary belief that men are aggressive in their interaction with women, and women are -passive. The implicit theory, driven far further into the Muslim unconscious, is epitomized in Imam Ghazali's classical work.¹³ He sees civilization as struggling to contain women's destructive, all-absorbing power. Women must be controlled to prevent men from being distracted from their social and religious duties. Society can survive only by creating institutions that foster male dominance through sexual segregation and polygamy for believers (Mernissi, 1975).

The sacredness of such seals, as Mernissi continues to recount in her memoir are by no means meekly accepted by the female dwellers of the space, rather these women continue day and night to challenge, negotiate and contest the dynamics and implications such *hudud* impose in chaining their wings from freely soaring the sky. These women create new imaginary worlds within the reality of their confinement by "fantasizing" and dreaming about roaming imaginary streets and trespassing limits and frontiers. By balancing the two ends of their extreme confinement: freedom and seclusion and by creating a special tradition based on feminine bonding, these women manage to transform their very mundane existence through obsolete actions and behaviors into instances of conscious feminine, matriarchal ritualistic resistance to confinement.

The notion of resistance here requires more problematization as has been briefly presented in the introductory session. For the objective of this article, we understand that resistance requires a deep analysis of this concept at different levels and in different contexts. Resistance is attributed to a deviation and opposition from the mainstreams. It is indeed a convoluted concept to define, since it involves a whole range of social and political phenomenon covering different acts and manners. The notion of “resistance” is both a recurring clamor of the mobilized groups and a notion sufficiently spongy that any practice of opposition or refusal can be diluted in the grammar of resistance. If the existence of a tipping point or a break point between resistance and the reproduction of domination seems implicitly postulated, this point remains largely undetermined. Resistance may happen, while one is fully conscious about their opposition and refusal to the dominant ideology, or via unconscious action of displaying disapproval. This brings to conversation different types of resistance to be cited, on one side the overt resistance which consists of the micro resistance that starts from within. A person herein deliberately or unintentionally can resist and oppose throughout various tools asserting their own condemnation of anything they disapprove. In this regard, our inspiration behind this chapter is to describe the resistance adopted by the heroines of Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass*, by studying their own way of trespassing the *Hudud* of religion and patriarchy.

In this following part our aim will be to analyze how women's performances of dissent in the confines of the 20th century's harem manifest via what we deem a double-patterned approach: that of the writer herself with regard to the act of writing and performing gynocriticism and that of the narratives of the female characters in *Dreams of Trespass*.

3 TRACES OF GYNOCRITICISM AND FEMININE RESISTANCE IN MERNISSI'S WRITINGS

Resorting to the past, resurrecting hidden and forgotten figures from the canons of literature and religious scholarship was the major endeavor put forward within the circles of feminist schools of literary criticism during the seventies. By establishing a past tradition, these feminists argued that they were reconstructing a feminine herstory, identity and collective memoir for themselves. Hence, as in the case of *Dreams of Trespass* (and other works by Mernissi), such objective can well enough be traced through the autobiographical nature of this account that tries at essence to bridge spatiotemporally divergent elements of resistances framed in the past, the present and the future. This approach followed by Mernissi can further be more expounded and subdivided into two chief stands that start with conceiving the feminist scholar as a “Reader”. In her article “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness” (Showalter, 1981), Elaine Showalter clarifies that this mode of writing essentially enables the feminist critic from enacting the role of a reader that offers critical

readings of canonical texts from a feminist perspective all the while focusing on reconsidering the representations, stereotypes and omissions of women in these texts. Showalter continues that the role feminist criticism extends to becoming a tool of intellectual emancipation such as K. K. Ruthven asserts in his seminal work *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction*. In this book, Ruthven argues that feminist writing can play the role of a resistance mechanism and change outlet, reading in his own words can be a political activity’ (Ruthven, 1984) whereby power relations and gender roles can alter and be subverted. Adrienne Rich also reiterates the liberating outcomes that the act of critical reading confers by stating that:

A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue of how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been time now a male prerogative and how we can begin to see and name –and therefore live-afresh” (Rich, 1981)

The second approach of feminist writing consists of the creation of a new tradition of gynocriticism that enables the scholar from being the agent/writer, the creator and the generator of meaning. Performing the action of writing respectively becomes synonymous with the establishment of alternative modes of representation, definition and meaning construction by which feminist scholars gain the capacity of reflecting and criticizing previous modes of (mis)representation that plundered women for centuries of their voice and secluded them behind walls of shame, of cloaks and of speech. By reclaiming the authority to revisit, deconstruct and reconstruct new methodologies the female writer incorporates into the canon of literary production the feminine experience, needs and demands and tames the common discourse to account for her equality with men.

Mernissi's special focus on the power of writing reflects her pertinence to a wider international theoretical wave of engaging the feminine experience as an agent and motif in feminist writings under the banner of Gynocriticism. In the very first chapter of her book *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory*, Mernissi emphasizes on the role writing can play in shifting power relations and in disturbing the peaceful and silent march of the world's dynamics. To her, to write is to exist, to grow younger and younger against the tides of time and to reclaim a voice that in no other place would it be allowed to shout. Mernissi encourages women to write, for in writing their resistance resides⁵.

In *Dreams of Trespass* traces of both modes of writing easily manifest themselves as we go throughout the narrative, making the writing of Mernissi a voice and apparatus of resistance par excellence. Mernissi in her memoir engages with the tasks of reading and

feminine writing by focusing on a double criticism of the long-anchored representations of women in Islamic traditional *turath* and in western orientalist manuscripts on the one hand, and on creating a special worldview that takes of women's language, stories and performances it's shaping core on the other hand. As for the former stance, Mernissi counters both attempts of Islamic and orientalist scholarship to encapsulate women's herstories in divine-inspired texts and in western narratives and paintings arguing that both perspectives view women as mere subjects of study, recipients and dependent beings governed by lust, morals, politics and religion. Equally important and no less significant is Mernissi's imperative to write against western feminist scholarship that claims that Arab and Muslim women's lack agency, consciousness and change impulse. By depicting the lives of her female characters and by using feminist and artistic voices in her text and by resorting to reviving the stories of fictional figures such as Shahrazad and the Lady with the Feather Dress, Mernissi opines that resistance can take many and divergent forms across times, cultures and spaces. Hence, counter to the western conceptualization of activism as essentially incorporating explicate mode of resistance such as lobbying; making petitions and organizing demonstrations Mernissi contends that for in contexts such as Morocco, women's regular, basic and oft-times disregarded practices can constitute in themselves sites where power and resistance reside.

The gyno-based writing of Mernissi also manifests itself clearly in *Dreams of Trespass* in which she creates a world of feminine agency, eloquence and dreams. Women inhabitants of the harem are with no exception a new type of characters that the reader freshly discovers and comes to put into comparison with how women are depicted in Islamic and orientalist sources alike. These women are all endowed with a deep consciousness of their oppression and their resistance that they covertly express through their folklore-embedded language and performance as well as the transmission to other generations through orality and feminine solidarity. All these elements enabled Mernissi of creating an alternative narrative –if not the most adequate– of what the real lives of women and resistance are, and endowed the female characters of the memoir with the voice to reflect their daily battles, realities and dissent against censorship. Gynocriticism becomes in this regard a critical tool that not only the writer herself disposes of and freely deploys but rather transpositions to the harem dwellers in their self-reflection as the continuation of the analysis will show.

4 NARRATING AND PERFORMING DISSENT: REAL YET FICTIONAL MEMOIRS

Face to seclusion, violence and confinement, women in “*Dreams of Trespass*” have developed a unique link with words and with oral eloquence and theatrical performances creating an elaborate ritual of feminine

resistance. One of the early studies that focused on the tradition of orality as an integral part of the feminine Moroccan tradition was that conducted by the American researcher Alison Baker in her book *Voices of Resistance* where she contends that storytelling is an apprenticeship that women and girls get involved in at a very young age as it establishes a fundamental element of the Moroccan popular culture. What stands as a striking characteristic of this tradition is its focus on retelling stories about heroine personas that contrast in their archetype western tales about candelillas and sleeping beauties as women in Moroccan folktales always outsmart in wit and strength men to obtain their personal objectives (Baker, 1988). Orality in this context plays a substantial role as a means of socialization, education, trans-generational learning and a means of creation and assertion of an identity oft-times absent from official accounts of history. By introducing on many occasions, the figure of Shahrazad and the female heroines of the ‘One Thousand and One Nights Stories’, Mernissi's mother and grandmother Yassmina play the roles of teachers and transmitters to the young Fatima. Mernissi tells the reader that:

One late afternoon, Mother took the time to explain to me why the tales were called A Thousand and One Nights. It was no accident because, for each one of those many, many nights, Scheherazade, the young bride, had to spin an entrancing, captivating tale to make her husband, the King, forget his angry plan to execute her at dawn (Mernissi, 1995)

Using Shahrazad as the rebellious, strong-witted and audacious queen who only through her perfect mastery of the art of storytelling and the use of words managed to save not only her life from the merciless grasp of king Shahryar, but also that of many other women as a feminine icon in these stories and a focal character in storytelling is by no means a trivial detail. However, it represents that the female dwellers of the harem possess a profound understanding of their entrapment and their seclusion within the confines of the harem and that's where their choice of Shahrazad as a strong figure that could disturb the dynamics of patriarchal –monarchical rule comes to be significant. For the women of the harem the story of Shahrazad becomes the creed of hope and solace to their loneliness in the harem and a beacon of light to plant in the hearts of the emerging generation of women. Knowing the moral behind the story surpasses that of survival to that of developing critical perspectives of one's position in the social realm and how that latter can be altered when needed.

Another reason for why orality in the most part relates to women in precise can be inferred from the fact that it is generally told and transmitted through “linguistically oral/inferior/ native languages; Darija and Tamazight” often mastered by women who have never had any form of schooling. For Fatima Sadiqi, Moroccan women are profoundly conscious of the role

that their use of orality plays in maintaining their household, relationships with children and tradition transmission that they attentively tend to use it to both “carry out their social duties and express their inner selves” (Sadiqi, 2012). Orality for these women is also a means of linguistically disturbing the mainstream dimensions of gender roles and canonical discourses by ‘speaking against’ or by ‘telling’ new stories and creating new meanings. In Mernissi’s childhood harem, women are all aware of the power of words in socializing a new generation of resilient and strong women, in adding colors of hope and joy to their mundane reality and in giving life, depth and soul to their dreams. In describing how words can alter realities, Mernissi’s aunt Habiba states:

When you happen to be trapped powerless behind walls, stuck in a dead-end harem, you dream of escape. And magic flourishes when you spell out that dream and make the frontiers vanish. Dreams can change your life, and eventually the world. Liberation starts with images dancing in your little head, and you can translate those images. And words cost nothing! (Mernissi, 1995).

In all her stories, aunt Habiba gave great focus to speak about women’s capacity to travel the world. Her stories took the listeners across seven seas and seven skies to worlds of marvels and fairies, where women not only could speak but had agency over themselves. Developing wings to fly then became aunt Habiba’s most recurrent advice to Mernissi, for she knew that to leave the gigantic walls women had to become birds and to grow invisible wings to fly and escape: “The wings need not be visible like the birds’; invisible ones were just as good, and the earlier you started focusing on the flight, the better! (Mernissi, 1995). Aunt Habiba had wings, and hers were of words, imagination, stories and art. The bird figure is always associated with her in the story as she is depicted embroidering, against the norm, gigantic birds with enormously marvelous wings

Another important detail to be mentioned with regard to women’s use of storytelling is their tendency to feminize the stories they recount. One prominent example is that of the story of “The Lady with the Feather Dress, originally known as the story of Hassan Al Basri. In this tale that Yassmina *re-tells* from her own feminine perspective, Hassan falls in love with a woman who outdid in beauty all human beings and who was a bird coming from the mysterious land of Wak Wak. In his attempt to keep his lover, Hassan stole her wings and buried them thinking that time after his wife would relent her quest to look for them. After years of search, the lady with the feather dress finally finds her wings and leaves Hassan Al Basri to her home, daring him that the only way they can be reunited is by his travel to her land that no one knows where to locate. Not only does Yassmine, the wise grandmother, change the title and the protagonist of the tale from Hassan Al Basri to The Lady with the Feather Dress; she also changes

the ending from an original one that entraps Hassan Al Basri’s unnamed wife forever in his castle to a one where the Lady manages to become the bird she was again and fly with her children away from the confines of her husband’s harem to the land of marvels and freedom.

The female characters in the memoir of Mernissi used also theater as a means of locating themselves with the outer world and of enacting roles that they were denied in reality. The shows meticulously prepared by Chama included intricate plots about female artists, feminists and nationalists all over the world:

The heroines most often portrayed in Chama’s theater were, in order of frequency: Asmahan, the actress and singer; the Egyptian and Lebanese feminists; Scheherazade and the princesses of A Thousand and One Nights; and finally, important religious figures. Among the feminists, or *ra-idates* -pioneers of women’s rights- three were special favorites of Chama: Aisha Taymour, Zaynab Fawaz, and Huda Sha’raoui. Among the religious figures, the most popular were Khadija and Aisha, the wives of the Prophet Mohammed and Rabea al-Adaouiya, a mystic (Mernissi, 1995).

This theatre located on the terrace of the harem offered women a specific section of the house where they could practice their talents and discover their inner gifts in dancing, singing, performing and acting. The world of the theatre opened the door for women to enact roles that in their real lives were denied such as having a formal education, taking to the streets with men to fight against colonialism, become artists and scholars. In the theater, Helen Cixous opines “one can only work with a self that has almost evaporated, that has transformed itself into space” (Cixous and Kerslake, 1984)

The means of resistance in Mernissi’s ‘Dreams of Trespass’, have surpassed the regular thoughts and the traditional Moroccan society’s standards. In an era when women’s rights and position were infringed and encroached upon, we see and live with women who expressed their defiance against male’s hegemony throughout different methods and various steps all the while keeping their secrecy and confidently planting their believes, consciousness for change and performance of resistance to the following generations.

5 WOMEN IN THE NEW HAREM ERA: COVID 19 AND NEW MEANS OF RESISTANCE TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

While the previous section of this article was dedicated to analyze some glimpses of resistance and dissent performances in the experience of confinement characteristic of women’s lives in the early 20th century Moroccan harems, our study moves now to analyze, what we deem to a large extent, a similar experience,

viz., women's experience of confinement and violence during the global lockdown that has started in many countries since December 2019 and continues till the present moment as a result to the outrageous spread of the global pandemic Covid 19. In this regard we will be using five selected stories from respondents who contacted us via social media outlets upon a call that we previously published. The stories are marked by differing social contexts, violence experiences and most importantly variant and vibrant resistance instances. Furthermore, the stories, to be noted, were received in Moroccan Darija and were rendered in English by us.

Before embarking on our analysis of the respondents' accounts we deem it necessary to paint a better picture for the reader that better contextualizes the new confinement experienced by women in 2020 compared to that presented in Mernissi's analysis:

- While confinement in *Dreams of Trespass* was a norm for all women, this new sort of seclusion is an exceptional measurement that not only bounded women with confinement but also men.
- The dynamics of men's control in the private sphere have not changed, for as we have previously discussed with Mernissi's memoir, men's control over the private space (women included in this sense as objects of this multidimensional setting sphere) continues even in their absence, and this we clarified through the strict conduct by which women maintained their lives, except in their covert moments of dissent and also through the description of the physical space of the harem as a place that takes no novelties and where everything follows a pre-drawn pattern. The same patriarchal control continues during the confinement of 2020 as we shall see in the stories of our respondents that foreground the idea of men maintaining the final say over all walks of the private and public life.
- We must also note that as in the stories previously analyzed, resistance in this section takes various covert shapes and forms all of which emphasize the idea that women are by no means less conscious of their situation and further argue against many propagated statistics to which we shall refer in what comes and project for a decrease in GBV in Morocco during the period of confinement.
- Another theoretical consideration to be elaborated here concerns mainly the approach with which the stories to follow will be analyzed. Respectively, our analysis is to be based on a response-based approach to therapeutic interviewing. In the post we shared on various female groups on social media our questions were as followed:
 - Have you ever been victim or exposed to any sort of violence at a certain stage of your life?
 - How did you react?
 - What measurements did you undertake and how did you feel?
 - How do you feel about your experience and what advice would you give to other women in order to avoid going through the same situation?

In all of these questions we sought to intelligibly orient the respondents to interact and react to their stories through a response-based lens which centered their reactions, responses and performances of resistance to violence rather than an effect-based approach that frames women victims of gender-based violence, as recipients of the act of violence and as culpable of their own victimization and the reason standing behind it. In his article on women's resistance to violence, Allan Wade explains that this approach stands on four major principles: expose violence, clarify perpetrator's responsibility, elucidate and honor victims' resistance and contest the blaming and pathologizing of victims (Wade, 1997).

Story One

My mother has always preferred my male brothers over me especially after my father passed away thinking that she can depend on them financially to support her. She always put forward her belief that a woman's better place is within the house of her wed and for this she arranged a marriage for me soon after my father's death to one of her relatives.

Ever since confinement started in Morocco, I automatically lost my job in a textile factory and all the house expenses were thereon my older brother's responsibility since he earned a respectable wage by working in Canada.

This situation intensified her reliance and dependence on my male brothers, and our relationship took a new turn towards verbal, psychological and physical violence. Whenever, I had any kind of discussion or argument with any of my brothers, she took it upon herself to deadly defend them, blaming all our misfortunes on me and saying that I am too much of a burden to take. For her I lost the right to speak my mind or oppose anything in our house the day I lost my job and could no longer contribute in paying for the rent or cover the basic needs for our livelihood. I became a depend subject in a place that is rightfully my own, and neither my privacy and being nor needs are acknowledged.

The only resort I found during this situation was through social media and the internet. I started reading similar stories of violence in many groups and so I decided to post and share my story as well in many girls' groups. The responses that I received were enormous and the amount of advice encouragement and love I got was unparalleled to anything else in my entire life. This virtual world is my escape and outlet to voice out what I feel, to share with other girls like me who

would feel and relate to my stories the experiences I went through. It is only through these sorts of posts that I feel empowered, heard and loved by my virtual fellow sisters. And only through your education, work and independence that you are to feel complete and self-sufficient my sisters!

Story Two

At the age of 22, I was already married to my husband for 7 years in which I conceived two children. Ever since our wedding I was exposed to torture and violence until it has become the norm in my life. In seven years, I experienced all types of violence you could name: physical, verbal, psychological, economic and sexual. My children as well never escaped the tragedy and were all at the center of this miserable situation. Adding to all of this the fact that I had no privacy as we were living in the house of my husband's extended family where violence is condoned and seen as a natural right that men dispose of especially in the rural area where we live.

I could always benefit from few days of peace when I escaped to my family in the popular square of Belkheyat in Fes for whatever reason I would conjure up. But with two children, they themselves started to see in that a burden and a source of trouble especially that my husband followed me one day and violently took my children away from me. Because of living in the countryside, it was always very hard for me to move from one place to another, first, because my husband is well known in the village and roaming the place would be a public tarnishing of his family's and his own reputation and honor. Second, because the gendarmerie station is way far from where we lived, I had to accept my situation and avoid even the thought of reporting the violence I constantly was subject to the authorities, instead, I taught myself to be grateful each time that he did not murder me yet. I still remember the day he pulled my hair and beat me so hard. I kept running until the gendarmerie station to complain. I shared my story with the responsible there and he instantly asked: how can I trust you? He showed me his hair and said "look at the vixen in my hair. It's a malady and nobody pulled my hair and it could be the case for you." I got back home defeated losing my faith in any alternative or solution to get rid of my abuser.

I knocked the doors of many associations, many of which provided me with the help they could summon. I tried twice to divorce him but we kept coming back together as both our families interfered to reconcile between us.

Upon my third pregnancy which unfortunately ended by a miscarriage, I noticed that my husband became more absent in our house, physically and mentally. I found out later that he was in another relationship with a woman that lived next to us. When I confronted him, he violently attacked me and he broke my arm. In the hospitable, he obliged me to say that I fell off the stairs. My family again convinced me to go

back to him for the sake of protecting my children. As I recount this, I regret that I didn't have a proper education and that I have never tried to learn a craft or look for a job. I know this because I am unable to read and or write, and because I can't secure a job that would enable me to live away from this man and secure a dignifying and respectable future for my children.

Since the confinement started, work in the fields ended for the most part, and he no longer had access to the same amount of drugs he usually consumes and the pressure of this situation found way to his behavior with everyone around us as he became more than ever physically and psychologically violent. After one week of the lockdown I found myself on the street expelled from my house without my children or any of my belongings. I could not resort to the police or to the court to proceed with any legal undertakings. I called with the help of my neighbors the local authorities to report my case but I was always face to face with a dead end.

I live ever since in my neighbors' house. Their daughter helped me contact you through this group, and here I want to advice you if you are studying get your degree, work and be independent because no man would grant you your rights unless you claim them to yourself. This story is written by my 14 years neighbor because I am not able to write and read.

Story Three

I was in a relationship for 12 years, I had in it 4 daughters. To get a marriage certificate I had to take my partner to court to legally prove his paternity to my daughters and legalize our marriage.

Our relationship after marriage was never the same because he kept me away from every aspect of his life. I knew nothing about his family, his work or his friends. In the house he never played the role of a father for my daughters and when drunk or under drugs he would beat me and say that he has all the right to doubt his paternity to our daughters since I conceived them while we were unmarried, and that for his was enough reason to doubt my infidelity.

I had to work as a cleaning lady to earn some money with which to cover some of the necessities of my daughters. This job I immediately lost under lockdown and was face to face again with the obligation to depend entirely on my husband's support.

Now that we found ourselves head to head in the house, our arguments intensified and he became more violent than ever not only towards me but also towards our daughters. I started to avoid him all the time and mostly in bed for I am disgusted of him and of myself complying his needs without ever considering my own. I always pretend that either of my daughters is afraid at night and I need to sleep in their room or that I have a headache or simply an early period. My eldest daughter started to develop panic attacks whenever her father would approach her in anyway. The other day, I found

out that she would fane that deliberately so that he would leave the house and stop being violent to us. This struck me with grief because I came to realize and see that while I could not protect my daughters, they were the ones weaving plans to protect me and resist that ill treatment inflicted upon us. I want to start a new and make a better life for myself and my children. I want no man to treat them the way he does to me. I want a better future, because my daughters taught me that resistance is innate in us, and that I should fight for them the way they do for me.

Story four

We got married in 2014, we were classmates, friends and then lovers. I started working as a nurse in Cheikh Zayed hospital in Casablanca while he was an agency director of a company. We have never had any financial deficits; in the contrary I bought a car while he bought his and we tended to help each other buy our house before having our first child. Everything was okay, we didn't have many problems because we used to understand each other and find ways to help each other grow. Until the damned locked down, when he lost his job, he started making an issue out of everything I do or say. In 13th April 2020 at 5am he woke me up screaming his lugs out to kick me out from our house. I still don't know the reason now after almost 4 months, I'm still wondering why would he treat me this way, though we were best friends before husband and wife. I opposed him and decided to remain home, my child was afraid and started to cry, I begged him to stop breaking the housewares and cutting my clothes but in vain... all he was saying "Leave me alone, I don't want to see you again". I endured all types of violence to protect my child and tried to convince myself that his rage was a temporary phase that shall wear away, but nothing changed till the day he threw my clothes off the window and expelled my child and myself from our house. I went to the police, but none of them helped, I thought about killing him, yet I knew it is no solution. I contacted my lawyer to divorce but she says that everything is delayed until the end of the locked down.

Story Five

I've never imagined myself sharing this with anyone, but I'm sharing it anonymously because I don't want anybody else to recognize me. Yes, I have always helped women survivors of violence to make their voices heard and report the abuser, yet I've never thought I would one day be a victim of physical violence. Everything started during the confinement me and my husband were much stressed working from home and delaying all of our programmed plans until the end of the confinement. His behavior started to change since the very first month of the global lockdown, I tried to contact a psychologist friend of mine to help him, but once I told him about the idea he started yelling "I'm not crazy I'm stressed". It was strange because we both knew that a psychologist isn't for crazy people but a person who's willing to help

anyone going through severe stress, especially that this period is unusual for not only both of us but for the world as whole. He didn't talk to me for more than a week, I tried many times to talk to him and listen to his problems... until the day he violently took my hair and beat me until I fainted. I can't find any pretext to violence, I don't care if he's stressed, we're both experiencing the same circumstances, he didn't even apologize, all I was thinking of was leaving the house and getting my divorce as soon as possible. I couldn't go out during the confinement period, so I was obliged to remain home with him. The next morning, he came to me (thinking he would apologize) then he told me "that's what happens when you don't mind your business. It's not going be the last time though". I rethought all of the memories and sacrifices I made for him, he was a monster since day one, I was maybe blind not to realize I was living with an abuser for 8 years. I thank God for being financially independent and not a depending human being on a monster like him, we are now divorced and I'm just thankful for that not taking too long to finish the procedures.

6 ANALYSIS

Writing has been proved to be one of the means through which women voice out their hidden and oft-times side-pushed stories, experiences and needs. Extensively drawing on this idea, we tried in the previous part to problematize this aspect deeper with Mernissi's writings and locate it within a wider feminist tradition of literary criticism. This very same approach applies to the stories our respondents and testifiers shared and stand as the first common element in their experiences of violence and its exacerbation during the lockdown.

Writing in this regard takes different forms and is controlled by many considerations that we feel the necessity to clarify briefly as being first of all: a) brief and audience targeting, b) does not mandate a prior feminist engagement or agenda and finally, c) does not locate itself within a wider wave of resistance against patriarchy as we explained in the introduction. While our respondents showed a considerable consciousness of their subjugation and situation, they are not however to be forced into an illusionary trend of emerging virtual feminist militants. By going back to the stories, we find that the testifiers recognize the importance of writing in channeling their experiences and in giving them an opportunity to freely reach out to others who might be going through the same situation, to ask for help and find a supportive community. Respondent one for example, explains in this respect that in no prior situation has she received the same amount of reactions, interest and love toward her being and toward her story. The same idea is expressed by the second respondent who further advised the female members of these groups to pursue an education, be independent financially and spiritually, and build for themselves a secured future before engaging in a conjugal relationship. Economic dependence comes here as striking motif that stands behind women's subjugation. The three first respondents

explain excessively that their subjugation and the hardships they went through were in a large part due to their financial independence and reliance on their male relatives. Respondent-one advises women in this regard to stick to their jobs expressing that empowerment, dignity and freedom will only be attained when that is achieved. Respondent-three also reflects this in her account as she states that she takes upon herself the responsibility of financially maintaining the family by seeking a job as a cleaning lady, acknowledging in this the importance of being financially independent when it comes to alleviating some of the violence she and her daughters faced. She did this in a manner that was consciously opposing the deprivation, fear and economic violations of her partner. Respondents four and five have also testified that being financially independent women helped them move away from the situation of violence and uplifted them to pursue divorce and start their lives anew.

By resorting to posting their stories in these groups, our respondents admit to feeling empowered, part of a wider community and more determined to change and make improvements to their life. For us, this can be the direct impact of the “feminine” nature of this virtual space and the sense of solidarity that it creates. The feminine solidarity that these virtual social media groups and the privacy that they bestow are also points of eminent pertinence in this regard. The importance of these elements resides in them providing a protected area for confession where personal information is concealed and where no judgment is allowed. Through a close observation and interaction with many members in these groups we could feel the ease with which girls and women exposed their ideas, desires and fantasies knowing that in this ‘sisterly world’ their solidarity are a common vow that they see enough to protect their confidentiality.

Resistance in the second story in particular comes from a woman whose inability to read and write never prevented her from expressing herself and sharing her story. Neither her age, nor her conditions made her forget that violence, abuse and assault are not normal situations to be accepted, even in the rural area where she is living. At an early age, she was married and became a mother of two children who were all living in the husband’s extended family house, where every corner of it testifies to the violence she and her children experienced. The respondent asserts here that “Living in the countryside was very hard for me to move from one place to others, first, because he is known in the tribe, second because the gendarmerie station is way far from where we lived, so I consequently had to accept my situation and thank god every day for not being killed.”

The cultural aspect has always ratified the gender roles that are directly or/and indirectly imposed on both men and women. These social roles have historically created a preference and disharmonized relations and positions between brothers and sisters, husband, wife, etc. When amongst one’s family the feeling of

inferiority and dishonor is strongly present based on the gender, this it immediately leads us to rethink about the parental investment approach, which stands for the parents’ strategy in order to evaluate the economic gains of sons against those of daughters. The first respondent’s story is based on gender preference amongst her and her brothers who are in fact preferred on the basis of their economic contribution. In this regard, she states: “Ever since confinement started, I automatically lost my job in a textile factory and all the houses expenses were on my older brother who lived and worked in Canada. This situation intensified her reliance and dependence on my male brothers, and our relationship took a new turn towards verbal, psychological and physical violence”.

From psychological violence to physical violence, women within patriarchal societies have been institutionally discriminated and perceived as the harbinger of sin. This example provided by the participant can only prove that this ideology has not directly changed, yet it has been differently expressed, throughout the way the family systems in which men hold the primary power conceive women’s position. This example demonstrates that even in the absence of the father, the mother can replace the patriarchal thought and ideology as in this respect the priority goes to the male brothers based on their gender and minimalizes the female.

Violence is also blamed on women whenever they try to act out. The guilt and shame are always linked to the way women react in societies. Accepting violence is permissible as long as she is able to protect her family, and protection in this respect refers to the fact that a woman decides not to report or legally prosecute the abuser. Furthermore, the second participant in the aspect expresses: “I knocked the doors of many associations, many of which provided me with the help they could summon, I tried twice to divorce him but we kept coming back together as both families interfered to reconcile between us”. When different parties try to influence a woman’s attitude towards her own situation and experience, the self-blaming and disgrace augment and impact the way they visualize themselves. Immediately, accepting violence becomes a “norm” and women turn out to be susceptible towards their place in the society as a whole.

Another way of reflecting resistance is the respondents’ resort to legal justice to find solutions and inculcate their violators. The third respondent’s story exemplifies this approach to performing resistance and dissent in the private sphere. Her action of taking her partner to the court for a paternity and marriage legalization reflects her profound understanding that in her situation she is not protected against her partner’s violence and that even by resorting to the law, she can’t claim her rights for protection care and justice. By taking the matter to the legal authorities, not only does the respondent assign a legal frame to her partnership, she most importantly shows that she is aware that her

rights -at least theoretically- are to be protected only when her relationship is legally recognized. In this respect it is important to note that relationships outside of wedlock in Morocco are criminalized and without a legal documentation of the marriage, the couple would not be able to extract birth certificates to their children and most prominently, the woman partner would not be able to legally demand for alimony or custody in the case of separation.

Respondents four and five have also resorted to justice in their own turns, yet what is striking is the fact that they had to endure months of subjugation in their houses as courts have suspended their work during the lockdown period. Resorting to justice has become multiple times distant from women's reach during the global lockdown restrictions of movement. According to many Moroccan feminist associations and service centers that work with women victims of gender-based violence, the number of the services beneficiaries dropped down multiple times as a result to women's inability to leave the house all for help with the presence of the perpetrator at home or simply because they are unaware that associations provide telephone services and that in itself they associate with the lack of sensitization through media campaigns. In a report issued by the Ministry of Public Affairs on April 30, as part of its follow-up to cases of violence against women, prosecutors in the Kingdom's courts recorded between March 20 and April 20 a total of 892 complaints related to various of violence against women (physical, sexual, economic, psychological, etc.) which corresponds to a level of ten times recession of the cases of violence during the period of confinement compared to monthly rates across the year⁵. What these statistics deliberately ignore and conceal is the fact that women's access to all essential services (medical, social and legal) were to a large extent limited if not entirely stopped after the covid-19 pandemic surge. Such statistics while distorting data paint a false image of women's conditions and propagate for inadequate information with regard to women's right to access medical, social and legal help when being exposed to any form of violence.

These testimonies demonstrate that either an educated, independent woman or uneducated, dependent woman were not immune from having to experience different types of violence during the confinement period. However, the common point amongst all the interviewees of this survey is their consciousness that violence should neither be accepted nor unmentioned. While interviewing these powerful women, who opened up to share their stories without restrictions, we asked ourselves multiple questions while comparing every story to the other. To what extent one's financial independency and educational consciousness can uplift a woman's social status and orient her overcome violence? Yet, the answer to this question doesn't require an absolute reply, since every interviewee went through the same experience, but within different

circumstances. Even though, these women are coming from different backgrounds and social status, their need for making their voices heard in order to inspire other women talk about their rights to report the abuser and break the typical image given by society to "divorced and/or abused" women.

A third way of resisting violence that came through the respondents' accounts was through the creation of conscious performative traditions of dissent: boycott and panic. An example that can be given within this reference is the third respondent's connotative 'boycott' to sexually engage with her husband. Here what this action mirrors is that while the respondent might not be plainly voicing out her refusal to sexually engage with her husband, she is yet covertly going on strike that represents that she is "fed up" with the repetitiveness and dullness of what she terms a "disgusting experience". The respondent's daughter also cultivates a tradition of fainting panic attacks whenever signs of violence might be displayed by her father. A pathological act at the surface is in effect a conscious and performative mechanism of resistance that the daughter employs with the aim of protecting herself and her mother.

7 CONCLUSIONS

A key element that connected violence against women and resistance by women throughout history is their perpetuity. Whenever there was or is violence against women, they always found ways to combat it and to express themselves in fashions totally liberated from its confines. While violence took many forms, feminine resistance also showed itself in many colors, trends and ways. We have demonstrated through this article that took as its aim the analysis of two instances of feminine resistance with almost a century's long distance. Fatima Mernissi's memoir on her childhood and women's life in the harem on the one hand and the online narratives that we have collected through online groups. The analyzed accounts all showed that women always managed to contest marginalization, silencing and most importantly seclusion and come up with wittily crafted means of resistance through which, even if at the scope of imagination, they could say "NO" to violence and regain agency over themselves.

8 NOTES

1. The experience of seclusion that is to be presented through the memoir of Fatima Mernissi and the experience of the global lockdown are symbolic to us for a multidimensional translation of gender-based violence where the aspects of physicality, psyche and economy interwove.
2. For women in precarious situations in the city of Fes, the situation is highly intensified when taking into consideration that the rates of violence augment and peak in neighborhoods that lack the most basic facilities for a dignified life. These neighborhoods are characterized by the difficulty to access schools, medical services, police stations and justice institutions.

Constituted as well from newly migrant families that come from rural areas seeking work, most families (of over five members) find themselves living in a single chamber house with a shared kitchen and bathroom with other numerous dwellers of the same house. Women's access to help becomes impossible and unimaginable taking into consideration such conditions.

3. UN reports that in some countries like Lebanon, France and Malaysia, the percentage of calls reporting violence have doubled in comparison to the same period last year, these numbers tripled in China and Australia. This surge also counts search engines that include researches done on domestic help measurements.
4. Mernissi states respectively: "Authority is the key word where writing is concerned. Writing is one of the means human beings discovered thousands of years ago for challenging. You can shut yourself away quietly for an hour and write a long page to the director of the postal services [...] In this sense, it is an extraordinary opportunity for someone isolated, looked down on and excluded from decision-making to hold a dialogue with herself, first of all, then with her environment and possibly with the authorities (Mernissi, 1996).
5. As a result to such allegations, many feminist associations issued public announces defying the statistics that the report provided and petitioned in favor of mandating more clarity when dealing with the issue of GBV by national authorities.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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