

REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMALE EROTICISM IN  
ZAKARIYYĀ TĀMIR:  
THE WOMEN'S REVOLUTION FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT

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*This paper analyses the representations of the female body and of female sexuality in the works of Zakariyyā Tāmīr (b. 1931). Motivating this focus on female eroticism is the desire to scrutinise its socio-political value contextualising it in the historical events of Syria, in the context of the collapse of the totalising nationalist ideologies world as analysed by Abu Deeb as well as its impact in a neopatriarchal milieu as described by Sharabi. In particular, this development is punctuated in the early period of Tāmīr's career by the emergence of the female's perspective in contrast with patriarchy, exemplified in stories like al-'Urs al-šarqī (The Oriental Wedding) and Waḡh al-qamar (The Moon's Face). Epitomised in particular by Taksīr rukab (Breaking Knees) his latest works operate a definitive break with social realism, and the divorce from ideology, bestowing a greater degree of subjectivity on female characters that conquer the scene once and for all through a confident and overwhelmingly bold assertion of their sexuality.*

In the pages that follow, I examine the representations of the female body and female sexuality in Zakariyyā Tāmīr's stories, and their development from his early to his latest works. Motivating this focus on female eroticism is the desire to scrutinise its socio-political value contextualising it in the historical events of Syria, in the context of the collapse of the totalising nationalist ideologies as analysed by Kamal Abu Deeb<sup>1</sup> and its impact in a neopatriarchal context as described by Hisham Sharabi<sup>2</sup>. This development will be analysed chronologically, starting from the early episodes concerning female libido from Tāmīr's first collection *Šahīl*

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<sup>1</sup> Kamal Abu Deeb, *The Collapse of Totalizing Discourse and the Rise of Marginalized/Minority Discourses*, in Kamal Abdel-Malak, Wael B. Hallaq (eds.), *Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature. Essays in Honor of Professor Issa J. Boullata*, Brill, Leiden-Boston-Köln 2000, pp. 335-366.

<sup>2</sup> Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York 1988.

*al-ḡawād al-abyaḍ* (The Neighing of the White Steed)<sup>3</sup>, exploring the changes in style and language and relating them to the broader contexts, in particular the crisis of modernist, nationalist, and unifying ideologies in the Arab world. This development is punctuated by the emergence of the female's perspective, usually in contrast with or as the victim of patriarchy in the 1960s and 1970s, and by the definitive break represented by *Taksīr rukab* (Breaking Knees) in the 2000s<sup>4</sup> in which female characters gain a greater degree of subjectivity, conquering the scene once and for all through sex, often to the detriment of their male counterparts.

Lama was accustomed to dozing off and putting in her mouth whatever happened to be in her hand. Her mother advised her in an angry and reproachful voice to get rid of her nasty habit, especially now that she was engaged and about to get married. But after marriage Lama discovered that her mother was naïve and that her advice was wrong, for what she had grown used to doing while dozing was widespread, prized, and desirable<sup>5</sup>.

Published in the early 2000s, this story epitomises in a few lines the transgressive, condensed and minimalist representations of female libido that represent the culmination of the development of female sexuality and eroticism as represented in this writer's oeuvre. This aspect has typified the works of Zakariyyā Tāmir<sup>6</sup> since the outset, finding its most eccentric representations in *Taksīr rukab*. What can come across as a rather explicit episode concerning oral sex and its urgency forms a crucial part in the development of the representations of female sexuality which I analyse in this article. Situating *Taksīr rukab* within Tāmir's entire production makes it stand out as the one book in which female characters conquer the scene once and for all, to the detriment of their male counterparts. Women proclaiming their sexual drives, and looking to satisfy their libido, monopolise the stories of this collection, breaking taboos but more significantly upgrading their stance on their sexuality from claims,

<sup>3</sup> Zakariyyā Tāmir, *Ṣahīl al-ḡawād al-abyaḍ*, Maktabat al-Nūrī, Dimašq 1960.

<sup>4</sup> Zakariyyā Tāmir, *Taksīr rukab*, Dār Riyāḍ al-Rayyis li 'l-Kutub wa 'l-Našr, London 2002. This work was edited in English: Zakaria Tamer, *Breaking Knees. Modern Arabic Short Stories from Syria*, translated by Ibrahim Muhawi, Garnet, Reading 2008. See also the translation from Arabic to Sardinian by A. Columbu: Zakaria Tamer, *Segmentu de ancas*, Condaghes, Cagliari 2015. This is the first book to have ever been translated from Arabic into Sardinian.

<sup>5</sup> Zakaria Tamer, *Breaking Knees. Modern Arabic Short Stories from Syria*, cit., p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Born in Damascus in 1931, Tāmir has lived in England since 1981. He has published ten collections of short stories, three collections of satirical articles and numerous short stories for children. His latest book is *Arḍ al-wayl* (The Land of Grief, 2015), published by Jadawel.

complaints and demands of their recognition as possessors of sexual desires, to assertion, reaffirmation and crystallisation of female sexual identities that liberate their instincts.

In the pages that follow I will analyse how Tāmir's representations of the female have developed from stories where a markedly male-centred structure usually assigned a secondary role to the female, through the stories of the early 1970s which show the first signs of a shift towards a more female-centred narrative. This development finds its ultimate stage of maturation in the latest period of his career typified by the more overt and less symbolic language of episodes dominated by women affirming their sexual identity.

In his essay *The Collapse of Totalizing Discourse and the Rise of Marginalized/Minority Discourses*, Kamal Abu Deeb brings together the socio-political transformations that have taken place in the Arab world since the 1970s, and the manifestation of new literary modes of expression that have blossomed across the region in the following two decades<sup>7</sup>. Abu Deeb's analysis focuses in particular on the gradual disintegration of the modernising, unifying and totalising ideologies of Pan-Arabism and socialism that the countries of the Arab Middle East have witnessed since the 1960s, as the most significant transformation in the realm of political thought and practice, a phenomenon this critic has analysed extensively in his career<sup>8</sup>.

In the more specific Syrian context after independence, which is our focus here, the country witnessed the modernising and usually authoritarian efforts of the *Ba 't* party that aimed, amongst other things, to incentivise the participation of women in the public sphere, a political enterprise that emphasised the centrality of women's emancipation for the country's modernisation<sup>9</sup>. These efforts aimed to operate a decisive break with the traditional patriarchal society and were essential to the empowerment of women and to their access to education and public life. However, the modernising and emancipatory nationalist enterprise was not devoid of contradictions and shortcomings. The process of the modernisation of society that a number of Arab countries in the Middle East underwent contained inner contradictions – Abu Deeb argues at length<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Kamal Abu Deeb, *The Collapse of Totalizing Discourse and the Rise of Marginalized/Minority Discourses*, cit., pp. 335-366.

<sup>8</sup> Kamal Abu Deeb, *Cultural Creation in a Fragmented Society*, in Hisham Sharabi (ed.), *The Next Arab Decade: Alternative Futures*, Westview/Mansell, London/Boulder 1988, p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> S.L. Sparre, *Educated Women in Syria: Servants of the State, or Nurturers of the Family*, in "Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies", Volume 17, issue 1, 2008, pp. 3-20.

<sup>10</sup> Kamal Abu Deeb, *The Collapse of Totalizing Discourse and the Rise of Marginalized/Minority Discourses*, cit., pp. 345-348.

– that have emerged prominently with the ideological disintegration and fragmentation that the region has witnessed since the 1970s. In particular, the unifying ideologies of the post-war period put forward a totalising, uniform vision of society and largely neo-patriarchal language that assigned to women the role of mothers and bearers of the nation typifies the Syrian Arab nationalistic discourse since the early days of the *Ba'ṭ*, for example in the writing of ideologues such as Zakī al-Arsūzī<sup>11</sup>.

With the rise to power of President Hafez al-Assad (Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad) in the 1970s the emancipatory language of the *Ba'ṭ* witnessed a regression, and after the October 1973 war the Syrian political vocabulary was enriched with familial metaphors that in turn derived their coherence and intelligibility from the actual lived understandings of gender and power in Syrian families as patriarchal and male centred<sup>12</sup>. Representations of the nation as a woman, common across a variety of cultures, began to be employed in Syria too, describing the Arab nation as a victimised woman to be protected. In particular, the association between Palestine and the female body usually allegorised the former as the occupied Arab land through images of the latter as the victim of rape and violation. An ideology that had presented itself with a progressive and emancipatory language, witnessed a regression that was paralleled by the gradual retreatment of the nationalist and socialist ideologies, brought about by a series of traumatic events that left indelible scars in the Syrian collective memory, making European-style modernisation and secularisation lose appeal, favouring the rise of political Islam and a broader process of fragmentation<sup>13</sup>.

This process of gradual disintegration of what Abu Deeb calls «the totalizing discourse» has affected cultural production in the Arab world dramatically, and has led to the emergence of minoritarian, individualistic, non-nationalist and non-ideological forms of writing. These new forms in turn have exposed the contradictions that were inherent to the modernising

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<sup>11</sup> L. Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: politics, rhetoric and symbols in contemporary Syria*, Chicago University Press, Chicago 1999, p. 55.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>13</sup> Kamal Abu Deeb, *The Collapse of Totalizing Discourse and the Rise of Marginalized/Minority Discourses*, cit., p. 338. In particular Abu Deeb makes reference to a number of important aspects of reality that have significantly been connected with the process of fragmentation: the attitude to Israel, the conflict within the Palestinian resistance movement and between the Palestinian resistance movement and Arab regimes, the rising inequality and class conflict, the rivalry between the cities and countries historically considered “central” (Egypt and the Ottoman *Bilād al-Šām*) and the peripheries (the Gulf and North Africa), the civil war in Lebanon, the rise of Gulf monarchies and of political Islam, etc.

enterprise, and have contributed to the erosion of the unifying assumptions of ideology with regards to national identities and gender roles. Amongst the most relevant literary phenomena that have germinated in this context of ideological fragmentation, the rise of gender-motivated fiction has been in an interweaving relationship with the collapse of the totalising ideologies. Both male and female writers have produced works that reject the notions of «unifying, comprehensive, totalizing projects of modernization, modernity and emancipation on the higher level of society as a whole»<sup>14</sup> contributing to the erosion of the oneness and singularity of neopatriarchal authoritarianism and of the “totalising discourse” by dismantling the roles assigned to masculinity and femininity by the nationalist and progressive ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They contribute, for example, to the deconstruction of the official discourse on the emancipation of women which failed, even at the level of language, to raise women from a subordinate position<sup>15</sup>.

In the case of Zakariyyā Tāmir, the development of his representations of female characters follows a trend in many ways similar to the analysis Abu Deeb proposes, but finds in the taboo-breaking force of eroticism as interpreted by female characters its key fragmenting connotation. Motivating this article then is also the desire to situate this analysis of female sexuality in Tāmir’s stories in the context of the collapse of the “grand narratives”, of the totalising and unifying ideologies, which began in the 1970s and coincided with the germination of marginal narratives. In Tāmir’s oeuvre this call into question is expressed through transgressive representations of female libido that expose a widespread taboo, and challenge a conceptualisation of female sexuality as reprehensible. The maturation of the female throughout Tāmir’s stories confronts a patriarchal idea of female sexual prowess as a possible source of *fitnah* and social disorder as illustrated by Fatima Mernissi in *Beyond the veil*<sup>16</sup>, a work whose political implications in authoritarian contexts like Syria have been analysed more in depth in Hisham Sharabi’s *Neopatriarchy*<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 340-341.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>16</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Societies*, revised Edition, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1987.

<sup>17</sup> Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, cit. , p. 32 (in particular the beginning of the chapter «Women and Neopatriarchy»).

*The Early Period of Social Realism*

Some of the subtexts that had typified the Arabic modernist cultural production, considered by Abu Deeb as organic to the above mentioned emancipatory ideologies, included a rupture with the past and with tradition, identified usually, but not exclusively, by patriarchy. Episodes typified by love, violence, blood and death as the elements necessary to achieve the breakthrough to modernity and to reach a freer future<sup>18</sup>. Many of these characteristics were central in Tāmir's early works, in particular in *Ṣahīl al-ġawād al-abyaḍ* and *Rabī' fī 'l-ramād* (Spring in the Ashes)<sup>19</sup>, whose stories express a more manifest political commitment with the struggles of the working class and of the marginalised sectors of urban society. The tropes that will become prominent in the latest collections materialise only marginally in this period, signalling however the author's concern with the liberation of sexual mores at a very early stage in his career.

The fashion in which female sexuality has developed in Tāmir's stories exemplifies the transformations that have taken place in Arabic creative activity since the 1960s, in particular in relation to ideology. Whereas the early episodes that expressed a more manifest rejection of past traditions of a bygone past coincided with the modernising and revolutionary tone of the post-war period, soon in the early 1970s and in parallel with the above mentioned process of fragmentation of the text, a polyphonic and more fragmented vision, other subjects such as patriarchal authority in the family, began to emerge. As Abu Deeb has shown, this development and the ways in which it relates to ideology has affected other Arab writers, such as for example the Syrian playwright Sa'd Allāh Wannūs, a towering literary figure of the calibre of Tāmir in Syria, whose early plays usually voiced a strong commitment with the Arab nationalist cause<sup>20</sup>. With the gradual retreat of Arab nationalism and of the modernising project, together with a number of historical events which contributed to that retreat, Wannūs' 1990s plays, in particular *Ṭuqūs al-iṣārāt wa 'l-taḥawwulāt* (Rituals of Signs and Transformations, 1994)<sup>21</sup> exemplify the degree of fragmentation Arabic fiction and theatre reached in the last decade of the past century<sup>22</sup>. This transformation has

<sup>18</sup> Kamal Abu Deeb, *The Collapse of Totalizing Discourse and the Rise of Marginalized/Minority Discourses*, cit., pp. 344-345.

<sup>19</sup> Zakariyyā Tāmir, *Rabī' fī 'l-ramād*, Maktabat al-Nūrī, Dimašq 1963.

<sup>20</sup> Kamal Abu Deeb, *The Collapse of Totalizing Discourse and the Rise of Marginalized/Minority Discourses*, cit., p. 352.

<sup>21</sup> Sa'd Allāh Wannūs, *Ṭuqūs al-iṣārāt wa 'l-taḥawwulāt*, Dār al-Ādāb, Bayrūt 1994.

<sup>22</sup> Kamal Abu Deeb, *The Collapse of Totalizing Discourse and the Rise of Marginalized/Minority Discourses*, cit., p. 352.

also heavily affected Tāmīr's oeuvre, although in a considerably different fashion. Wannūs' female hero asserts her autonomous identity and existence through violence, penetrating decisively into the narration and depriving the male of his centrality. In Tāmīr's stories the female protagonist's sexual drives become the "weapon" that allows her to symbolically defeat patriarchy and express her agency.

*Women and their Body as the Object of Men's Fulfilment*

In the recurrent description of alienated individuals who cannot attain their basic necessities that characterises Tāmīr's early stories, women come across as passively subjected to the needs of men. Their role in the stories of the 1960s and 1970s is usually secondary and accessory to that of men, whose tyranny and narrow-mindedness they are helplessly subjected to as a tool made to provide sexual enjoyment to the man and to procreate. Men by and large dominate this landscape, with women usually relegated to playing the role of accessories to the male protagonists' aspirations of bread, love and freedom. Men who suffer from material and intellectual deprivation recur considerably more frequently as the central motif of Tāmīr's earliest collections, which appeared in the context of modernism and social realism and were strongly influenced by the emancipatory ideologies of nationalism and socialism. Hunger, unemployment, hostility, violence, backwardness and ignorance lay as the plagues upon his main characters, a picture that leaves women aside, confining them to the part of the victims of the victims<sup>23</sup>.

An overwhelming presence of male protagonists distinguishes Tāmīr's very first collection, *Ṣahīl al-ḡawād al-abyaḍ*. The narrator tells all the stories in the first person, usually putting great emphasis on the protagonists' suffering and discomfort at material and spiritual deprivation, at the lack of freedom in the patriarchal household, at their material poverty, and at their sexual frustration. The author's desire to denounce a reality of social inequality as well as to express strictly individual concerns come together in numerous stories, set mostly in the Syrian capital Damascus, recognisable in places like Baghdad Street, or al-Hijaz Station mentioned for example in *Raḡul min Dimašq* (A Man from Damascus)<sup>24</sup>, the city where the author was born and bred. The concern with social issues and major political subjects such as industrialisation, rapid urbanisation, unemployment and inequality that are prominent in a story like *al-Uḡniyyah al-zarqā' al-ḥašīnah* (The Blue

<sup>23</sup> Mahmoud Kayyal, *Damascene Shahrazād: The Images of Women in Zakariyyā Tāmīr's Stories*, in "Hawwa", Volume 4, Issue 1, 2006, pp. 93-113.

<sup>24</sup> Zakariyyā Tāmīr, *Raḡul min Dimašq*, in Id., *Ṣahīl al-ḡawād al-abyaḍ*, cit., pp. 51-76.

Harsh Song)<sup>25</sup> in which female characters do appear and have a voice, leaves them as the accessory in a broader picture dominated by male protagonists. The only female character appears in the male protagonist's fantasy, who dreams of the day when he will become a king. In the following conversation the nameless protagonist illustrates to Abū Aḥmad, the owner of the local coffee shop, the ideal woman that he would like to marry.

I will marry a woman that I saw some time ago on the street. A true woman. Her face was like the moon, framed by her black hair hanging loosely. Green eyes. Firm breasts that shuddered at every slightest movement of her body.

I walked behind her for a while, and I enjoyed observing her behind quaking. Oh, what a woman! She was a big happy world! I will command to search for her and I will marry her<sup>26</sup>.

The evident objectification of the woman in this episode remains an exception in his oeuvre, which nonetheless especially in this early collection contains several images of idealised women as the object of frustrated male desire. The focus on the individual's contemplations, photographed sometimes through the stream of consciousness, repeatedly stresses the lack of love amongst the protagonist's biggest concerns. This protagonist in the vast majority of stories comes from a working class, poorly educated background, struggles to make ends meet and is unable to find a woman with whom he can settle down. He usually idealises the woman he is looking for, a woman whose features match the popular (*ša' bī*) standards of beauty: long black hair, green eyes, fair skin tone.

The denial of female sexual desire and the reprehensive attitudes towards their daughters' expression of their sexual identity, of fathers and mothers equally, are met with little resistance in the very early period. The notion of unity still enjoys a major presence in the language, and although significant in the prominence they bestow on the protagonists' inner needs and longing for sexual intercourse, do not articulate the woman's experience as the norm but seem to merely strive for the destruction of the traditional patriarchal order. The noteworthy presence of suggestive sexual images however, portrayed through powerful metaphors of nature and the world of animals, indicates the author's preoccupation with the subject since his outset, and an openness to address sexuality and libido as a fundamental need for the individual in his or her quest for freedom and emancipation. At this stage Tāmir's stories remain under the influence of the realist trend that was

<sup>25</sup> Zakariyyā Tāmir, *al-Uḡniyyah al-zarqā' al-ḥašinah*, in Id., *Šahīl al-ḡawād al-abyaḍ*, cit., pp. 7-14.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. My translation.



predominant in that period, although in decline, showing nonetheless a tendency for the surreal, the suggestive and the imaginary that would become his trademark. The role women play in his early stories evolved relatively slowly, and still in the 1970s the preoccupation with women's sexuality emerges clearly, but is usually articulated in response to the man's demands, or in reaction to his incentive.

However, a richer and more suggestive language typifies other stories in which the above mentioned process of fragmentation begins to emerge gradually, although the main themes remain inequality, poverty and deprivation as seen from the point of view of the male protagonists. *Qaranfulah li-asfalt mut'ab* (A Carnation for the Tired Asphalt)<sup>27</sup> is a brief sketch with four episodes occurring apparently in the same city, following one another seamlessly like a series of photographs shot randomly with no apparent connection to each other. The first episode is particularly significant as it frames an adolescent girl laying on her bed, her eyes closed, listening to music «that sent a dazzling and strange joy to her [...]. Her body laying on the bed cover was as mature as aged wine. [...] Without a man her body was like a sea, whose brown waves were sleeping»<sup>28</sup>. The protagonist finds herself alone dreaming, but suddenly the ever-present mother appears, to remind her of the deceitful nature of men who «worship women as long as they smell their odour, but they desert them when their lust is quenched». Suddenly she remembers the story their old neighbour told her once of a woman who was kidnapped by seven men, and only escaped their hold after several nights.

The girl repeated silently: seven men and only one woman... seven men. The girl felt as if the seven men suddenly broke into her room. As if they were standing before her, their hands feeling her flesh with hunger. She can hear them panting. From her body stemmed the smell of animals whose sweat blended with early spring rain.

“She will look nicer without clothes”, said one of the men. They extended their fingers in her clothes and began tearing them. The girl did not feel ashamed, and drowned in a flood of pleasantness, mixed with a longing for passionate cruelty<sup>29</sup>.

In a poetic crescendo of the girl's imaginary depiction of the men around her and of their comments, her own imagination arouses her, and she begins trembling and moaning with pleasure. At the climax of her self-elicited enjoyment however, she hears her mother's voice calling her insistently: «The seven men disappeared. She opened her eyes and said to

<sup>27</sup> Zakariyyā Tāmir, *Qaranfulah li-asfalt mut'ab*, in Id., *Ṣahīl al-ḡawād al-abyad*, cit., pp. 104-111.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104-105.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106. My translation.

herself: “I’ll be happy when my mother dies”»<sup>30</sup>. This story appeared as early as 1960, articulating the conflict between the traditional authorities of family and patriarchy on one side, and the natural sexual drives pulsating inside men and women on the other, embodied by the girl protagonist who wishes her own mother would die in order to attain sexual fulfilment. Similarly to the early episodes depicting patriarchal sternness, in these episodes too an intolerant environment corners and represses the young protagonist’s desires. And although the latter’s response to this asphyxiating situation remains at the level of words with no action, the relationship between the daughter and her mother begins to address female identity deconstructing patriarchy as a male institution that oppresses the female. Devoid of the tyranny usually embodied by fathers in most episodes but almost equally detrimental, the relationship between mothers and daughters/sons that recurs very frequently in his collections too, is cast in a bad light. Tāmīr’s female characters also come under the attack of his irony as complicit in an environment typified by fear and terror that their misogyny and conformism contribute to perpetuate.

*al-Ra’d* (The Thunder) published in 1970, contains episodes that bring this preoccupation forward, towards a more female-centred narration, but still exposing the severity of patriarchy and its male-supremacist, belittling attitude towards women as somehow overwhelming. The episodes quoted below bring forward the concern with female sexual identity by showing the contradictions of such supremacist assumptions and of traditional institutions such as arranged marriages, operating for the first time a break with the previous representations of women as the accessory of the man’s necessity. Ṣalāḥ and Hayfā’, the protagonists of *al-‘Urs al-šarqī* (The Oriental Wedding)<sup>31</sup>, incarnate the two extremes of patriarchy: the former, a young school boy who wants to get married, willing to accept whatever his parents decide for him just in order to find a woman who can help him solve a mathematical problem and leave school; the latter, the proverbial *bint al-ḡīrān*, the neighbours’ daughter, the girl next door, an expression used in the Syrian vernacular to indicate an ordinary well-mannered girl perceived as familiar and dependant, whom Ṣalāḥ’s parents choose for him as his future wife. Ṣalāḥ’s and Hayfā’’s parents eventually meet, to discuss the details of the engagement, and agree on the price the former’s father has to pay to obtain the latter’s hand in marriage to his son. A great deal of irony and realism characterises the episode of the two parents discussing Hayfā’’s price per kilo, denouncing the persistence of a tradition that excludes the

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106. My translation.

<sup>31</sup> Zakariyyā Tāmīr, *al-‘Urs al-šarqī*, in Id., *al-Ra’d*, Maktabat al-Nūrī, Dimašq 1970, pp. 71-79.

girl from the decision-making process. Also, the conversation occurring between Ṣalāḥ and Hayfā' when left alone together in the living room, would seem to suggest an accusatory tone, depicting the girl as helpless and accommodating:

“I want to marry you. Do you have any objection?”

Hayfā' feigned shyness and said in a soft and shivering voice:

“I don't have an opinion. It's up to my family.”<sup>32</sup>

At first glance this dialogue too would seem a realistic depiction of a stereotypical submissive young girl, which in Syrian popular slang would be described usually as one «whose lips no one but her mother has kissed»<sup>33</sup>, and who holds no agency with regards to her sexuality and her future life. The fact that she is feigning her insecurity though, suggests that she is more aware than what she might appear, and it is only in the closure that she shows all her maturity and sexual awareness in comparison with the boy's childish and insecure nature.

Ṣalāḥ laughed gaily, whilst Hayfā' headed over to the door and stuck a cotton ball in the lock. She then started taking off her clothes like a mature, self-confident woman and laid on the bed saying to Ṣalāḥ in a strange, commanding tone:

“Come, come closer. I want to tell you a secret.”

“What is it? Tell me...”

“Come closer; don't be afraid, I don't want to raise my voice too much so that no one can hear us.”

Ṣalāḥ found himself compelled to approach her, and stick his face to her naked breast. Then his mouth seized her nipple and a savage desire to swallow it hit him. He did not eat Hayfā''s breast, instead he broke into tears after a little bit, when her bosom would not grant him warm milk<sup>34</sup>.

The whole story is structured in such a manner as to build up the narrative tension employing characters from a traditional setting that the readers are familiar with (like the well-mannered girl), using the element of surprise and Hayfā''s astute nature to undermine the patriarchal-perpetuator vs young-victim pattern. What seems to his parents an aware and mature man, who kisses his father's hand in reverence, ready to officially enter manhood through marriage, is in reality a little boy whose infantilism is unmasked by the same character, Hayfā', presumably a naïve and essentially simpleminded character. Although the story is constructed around Ṣalāḥ and his ineptitude in order to ridicule the

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75. My translation.

<sup>33</sup> واحدة ما باس تمها غير أمها «Wāḥdeh mā bās timm-ha ġayr əmm-ha» («Wāḥidah mā bāsa timmahā ġayru ummi-hā»).

<sup>34</sup> Zakariyyā Tāmir, *al-'Urs al-šarqī*, cit., p. 79. My translation.

institution of arranged marriage, it presents the first signs of a development in style that gives prominence to women and their awareness of their sexual drives. The centrality that the female gains comes at the detriment and ridicule of patriarchy and its customs, which the more assertive and self-confident attitude of characters like Hayfā' helps to voice. The disregard for patriarchal institutions comes about through their ridicule in a build-up that expresses no judgments, but leaves it to the female protagonist to unmask the conventions through the assertion of her mature sexual desire.

In the evolution of the representation of the female inner libido, and the relationship between her eroticism and the environment around her, the stories of the 1970s possess the verbal dynamism of an original and explosive mix between prose and poetry. The suggestiveness of the above mentioned episode of the seven men is absent in Ṣalāḥ's and Hayfā''s story, but returns powerfully in a story that stands out as the turning point in the early representations of female sexuality in the stories of Zakariyyā Tāmīr. In particular, the way *Wağh al-qamar* (The Moon's Face)<sup>35</sup> articulates the oppressive but not invincible nature of patriarchy as a major obstacle to the free expression of the female's sexuality breaks definitely with the man-centred trend of the first collections. This story revolves around a female protagonist, Samīḥah, and her recollection of a series of sexist abuses: her abusive father who violently slapped her as a little girl for exposing her thighs, her marriage to a man that failed due to her incapacity to satisfy him, a mysterious encounter with a middle aged rapist. These recollections are recounted in parallel with Samīḥah's first moment of genuine awareness of the nature of her heterosexual desire, operating a subject/object reversal, but that contrary to a trend typified by parricide in other stories<sup>36</sup>, is careful not to alienate the man/father as the oppressor. The narrator portrays sexuality and the protagonist's awareness of her sexual drives as blurred and uncertain, inarticulate and vague, but at the same time as an unstoppable and relentless process of inner discovery and emancipation, which culminates with the collapse of the symbols of her upbringing.

As Husam al-Khateeb recounts in what remains the only deep analysis of this story in English, the individual experience of the protagonist Samīḥah draws the reader into the exploration of the broader subject of sexuality in society<sup>37</sup>. Samīḥah's persona and her record of encounters

<sup>35</sup> Zakariyyā Tāmīr, *Wağh al-qamar*, in Id., *Dimašq al-ḥarā'iq*, Maktabat al-Nūrī, Dimašq 1973, pp. 96-102.

<sup>36</sup> See for example *Lā... (No...)*, in Zakariyyā Tāmīr, *al-Numūr fi 'l-yawm al-'āšir*, Dār al-Ādāb, Bayrūt 1978, p. 88.

<sup>37</sup> Husam al-Khateeb, *A Modern Syrian Short Story: Wajh al-qamar*, in "The Journal of Arabic Literature", Volume 3, 1972, pp. 96-105.

with men from inside and outside her family, although apparently an inexorable series of inevitable abuses, possesses the potentiality of a style that bestows centrality to the sexual experiences of the female character to exemplify the asphyxiating nature of the patriarchal family. The glance into Samīḥa's confused and inarticulate desire that the narrator throws, includes a middle aged rapist into the sequence of men that Samīḥah has, in a way, loved and that have shaped her experience until this moment. The protagonist's longing for a renewed encounter with the same man that raped her as a little girl (but still the only one able to satisfy her desire) provides an unidealistic view of female sexuality that steers away definitely from the patronising and objectifying tone of the very early episodes.

For the first time this author passionately proposes a narration structured around sexuality as a fundamental need for women against the hindrances put forward by men and misogynist patriarchy. Through Samīḥah's own imagination, illusions and fantasies the episode suggests the inevitability of defeat for patriarchy and sexism, represented by Samīḥah's father, and by the middle-aged man. And although somehow gruesome and disturbing, the protagonist's attraction to the same man who abused her as a twelve-year-old reinforces the completely autonomous and unmanipulated nature of her sexual desire. Similarly, her desire to attract a screaming madman inside her room and engage in sexual intercourse with him signals the protagonist's autonomous quest for sexual fulfilment. Following a trend similar to that of the previous episode (Ṣalāḥ's and Hayfā's) in the deconstruction of the binary logic of feminism vis-à-vis patriarchy, the process through which Samīḥah comes to realise, accept and assert her sexual desire is beset by men and women equally as exemplified by the pre-marital and misogynist briefing she receives from experienced women in her family before her failed marriage to a man she did not love.

The exploration of Samīḥah's inner distress takes the reader on a journey into the psychological consequences of this worldview and of patriarchal impositions and prejudice, but anticipates in many ways the process of postmodern fragmentation elucidated by Abu Deeb. What is only apparently a close-up of the protagonist in fact possesses great social implications, embodied by the characters populating Samīḥah's environment, particularly the family as the embodiment of patriarchy and the madman as the rebellion against it. The female protagonist becomes aware of her sexual drives, of her desire to have sexual intercourse by deconstructing the male's presence as besetting, finding comfort in her own sexuality through a journey of self-discovery that remains largely autonomous and confined to the limited space of her room. The disparity between the closure, with Samīḥah ultimately finding gratification and

her previous, unsuccessful sexual encounter with the divorced husband highlights the defectiveness of a misogynist idea of sexual intercourse as a necessity of the male exclusively. This value system implicitly views the physical act of love as an obligation the female must perform to fulfil the male's bodily urgency, but it is perpetuated in this episode by misogynist women, and not exclusively by men.

This contradicts many of the conclusions al-Khateeb comes to in his analysis of the social and political implications of this story. The structure of the story in fact contains the first element of what has been described as a postmodern style in this author<sup>38</sup>, particularly in the way it deconstructs a binary male patriarchy vs female sexuality logic, which al-Khateeb's analysis, characterised also by a vaguely Orientalist language, seems to rest on. The process of deconstruction is evident not only in Samīḥah's journey of self-discovery, but also in a number of apparently contradicting elements: the definitive cut with the lemon tree as the symbol of the protagonist's childhood happens at the hands of the father, not necessarily «a typical oriental despotic father»<sup>39</sup>, the fundamental role women in the protagonist's family play in trying to shape a self-erasing view of sexuality and the considerable degree of attraction that Samīḥah feels for the middle-aged man at whom she «looked with anxious longing [...] after she had waited long for him»<sup>40</sup>. The middle-aged smelly man remains the object of her distorted desire until the definitive break with the past (the collapse of the lemon tree), and she can finally articulate her desire for the crying madman, the other outsider figure in the story who is simultaneously the object of the protagonist's desire and the embodiment of her unconventional personality.

#### *From Desirable Object to Desiring Subject*

In contrast with the marginal role female characters played in the stories of the early period, frequently that of the protagonist's partner playing the role of the object of male desire, an accessory individual that quenches the male hero's thirst, in the latest works published by Zakariyyā Tāmir the female protagonist upgrades to a character that confidently articulates her subjectivity, and that gains centrality and agency, and even supremacy in her relationship with the male. The two stories quoted below illustrate the disparity between the two stages of Tāmir's career in the representations of the female body, particularly in

<sup>38</sup> U. Stehli-Werbeck, *The Poet of the Arabic Short Story: Zakariyya Tamir*, in A. Nuewirth, A. Pflitsch, B. Winckler (eds.), *Arabic Literature. Postmodern Perspectives*, Saqi, London 2010, p. 228.

<sup>39</sup> Husam al-Khateeb, *A Modern Syrian Short Story: Wajh al-qamar*, cit., p. 102.

<sup>40</sup> Zakariyyā Tāmir, *Waḡh al-qamar*, cit., p. 101. My translation.

the contradictions that emerge from the social realism typical of the first period and characterised by a more evident denouncement of authoritarian practices of oppression. Taken from collections that appeared in very different historical contexts, they represent the parallel between two versions of one single episode as seen from two different angles, if not exactly the same episode retold only with a different approach to the sexes. In the first episode of *al-Iḡtiyāl* (The Assassination) from *al-Numūr fī 'l-yawm al-‘āšir*<sup>41</sup>, a couple's intimacy is suddenly disrupted by the ever present security forces or *muḥābarāt* (intelligence and secret services) described by the protagonist as «men that I don't know».

Men I don't know chase me. I hide inside my beloved's body, but the men come nonetheless fast, angry and harsh. They descend upon my beloved's room, they're looking for me, but they cannot find me. Their expressions frown and they're about to leave when one of them suddenly says to my beloved:

“Take off your clothes.”

“You should be ashamed,” said my beloved in shock and contempt.

“We want to conduct a thorough search,” said the man to her calmly and inflexibly.

Thus my beloved hastily takes off her clothes. There she stands, naked in defiance. The man feels her flesh, then he flings her to the ground with a fierce and sudden strike. I can hear her gasping, trembling. “You're hurting me,” she whispers.

The man continues penetrating her body, until he bumps into me. He's not surprised, and in a harsh and shaking voice says to me: “Get out, if you don't want us to shoot you.”

I do as he says, yet he keeps looking for me followed by the other men. I yell in disapproval, and they ask me to be silent. I obey, and stand by watching with dead eyes<sup>42</sup>.

Comparing this episode to that of *Samīḥah*, which appeared as early as 1962, demonstrates that the development of the trope of female sexuality does not follow a coherent line of elaboration. Still in this story, published in 1978, the female body remains entangled into representations that assign a secondary role to it, in this case for the purpose of symbolising the male's success or demise, or to denounce social injustice upon the male protagonist. By deconstructing its more manifest political significance, in fact the narrative device employed to voice the angst at authoritarian arbitrary violence reveals an objectification of the woman, and her accessory nature in a male-dominated environment. What has been praised as a courageous interpretation of the current state of

<sup>41</sup> Zakariyyā Tāmir, *al-Iḡtiyāl*, in Id., *al-Numūr fī 'l-yawm al-‘āšir*, cit., pp. 159-164.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159. My translation.

«domesticated societies»<sup>43</sup> certainly exposes the overwhelming and unchallenged forces of authoritarianism on the individual's dignity. However, it employs images that ideally take us back to the early days of the realist representations of male protagonists, with their frustration and deprivation voiced through the marginalisation of the female. The female body ideally plays the role of the carrier, the accessory through which the authoritarian state performs its humiliating practices.

The “beloved” embodies the humiliation and emasculation of the protagonist, sacrificing her body to protect him from the beating and the arrest which in turn become only pretexts for the thugs to abuse her body. This objectification of the female body as the site of the male's honour and humiliation is mitigated by the greater endurance displayed by the beloved in the face of the antagonists. The male's emasculation materialises not only in the brutality visited upon his partner, but in particular in his inaction and his passive following of the events as they unfold before him, as well as in the cowardice displayed by hiding inside his partner's body. The story captures the contradictions of the literary social realism that was organic to the nationalistic and modernising project, expressing the desire for individual liberation whilst at the same time perpetuating the patriarchal worldview through the representation of the female body as an accessory. Deconstructing this attempt to denounce and undermine patriarchal authoritarianism eventually reveals the language of this attack as entangled in the same male-dominated worldview it seeks to undo.

Twenty-one years later the same episode returns in the title story of *Sa-nadḥak* (We Shall Laugh)<sup>44</sup>, published in 1998. In this story too the narrator and his beloved remain nameless, enjoying each other freely and blending with the surrounding nature, or living ordinary everyday moments, only to be disrupted again by unspecified “men”, which however can again safely be interpreted as an evident reference to thugs and security services. This time the story is told in the first person plural voice, eliminating the boundaries between the two elements of the couple and observing yet another episode of invasion of the private sphere with a four-eyed look. The attack happens not on the man, on his masculinity and his honour, but on the couple as a dyad, establishing equality between the two sexes and no longer objectifying the female body as the repository of honour: «One day the police descended upon our house, looking for me and my wife but they did not manage to find us because I

<sup>43</sup> Hišām al-Bustānī, *Ruġm al-išārāt la taḥsul al-taḥawwulāt*, in “al-Ra’y”, al-Mulḥaq al-Ṭaqāfī, 13-11-2015, <http://www.alrai.com/article/749023.html>, retrieved on 13-11-2015.

<sup>44</sup> Zakariyyā Tāmīr, *Sa-nadḥak*, in Id., *Sa-nadḥak*, Dār Riyāḍ al-Rayyis li ’l-Kutub wa ’l-Našr, London 1998, pp. 120-121.



transformed into a coat rack and my wife transformed into a sofa, and we laughed when they left the house in disappointment»<sup>45</sup>.

The title of the story itself expresses greater optimism and a defiant demeanour in the face of the asphyxiating presence of authoritarianism embodied by the thugs, and however grim the feelings that their ubiquitous presence might initially elicit as they descend on their house, wit, magic and imagination come to the couple's aid, disentangling the apparently irresistible forces of the State.

Its significance in the context of this analysis though lies in the different approach to the sexes that the text puts forward, going beyond the previous separation between men and women that bestowed prominence and centrality on the former through the latter's body. It also significantly expands the width of space allocated to the protagonists, emerging from the claustrophobic room where the thugs humiliated the male in the first story; to occupy a variety of spaces and situations all meant to deride the harasser. This expansion becomes regular in the latest period, with female characters playing a new assertive role in a variety of places and situations, seldom relegated inside the house or as inactive housewives.

However, as anticipated, the pivotal transformation of the female's role happens more frequently and considerably more significantly in the realm of sexual desire, that explodes in *Taksīr rukab*, from which the following episodes are excerpted. Published in 2002, the vast majority of episodes in this collection deal with female sexuality, putting vehement emphasis on desire as an empowering tool to unmask the invisible link between patriarchy, authoritarianism and religious bigotry. The victim of the female's confident attitude however is not always represented by villainous figures like the patronising policemen as seen in the previous episodes, but also through the deconstruction of the relationship between husband and wife, and even of casual sexual encounters stressing the female's need to satisfy her sexual appetite. This process of deconstruction and unpacking always happens at the hands of women, who manipulate male as well as female misogynist characters and strip them of their centrality, although apparently leaving them the decision-making authority. Men, however, appear helpless and incapable of performing decisions, control and intercourse, overwhelmed by the confident and canny defiance women display.

The woman was strolling in an orchard thick with trees when suddenly, out of she knew not where, a tall man appeared in front of her. He brandished a long knife and said in a coarse, threatening voice: "Careful! If you scream, I'll kill you."

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120. My translation.

The woman was filled with terror, and her face turned pale. The man was pleased to see her fear, and wanted to enjoy more of it. “Do you know what I’m going to do to you now?” he asked.

She assured him she didn’t know, and had no way of knowing. He told her he was going to rape her in a way she wouldn’t forget for the rest of her life. The woman sighed with relief, ignoring the knife close to her. “Are you going to rape me here, in this orchard?” she asked without fear. “Or will you take me to your house with a bed? Are you going to rape me standing up, leaning against a tree, or lying on the grass? Do you want me to take off all my clothes, or some of them, or are you going to rip them with your hands and teeth? And when you rape me, do you want me to keep quiet or moan with pain? Do you want me to cry and beg, or laugh and get excited? Are you going to rape me once, or a number of times? Will you alone rape me, or are you going to share me with your friends?” The man found his hand stashing the knife back in his pocket, and his feet carrying him away<sup>46</sup>.

The knife serves clearly as the metaphor for the phallus that the antagonist employs to threaten the victim and that contributes to building up the narrative tension that leads to the reaction from the protagonist who proves unexpectedly confident and eager to engage in casual sex. The story unmasks the supposed sexual prowess of the male and his assumption about the female’s submissiveness and physical inferiority, as well as her lack of sexual desire. It also demystifies the denouncement of rape and forced sexual intercourse by men on women, representing casual sex as desirable, and as an activity in which the female protagonist appears more versed than the rapist.

In what remains one of the very few attempts at analysing the significant development in Tāmir’s representations of the female in the stories published since the 2000s, Mahmoud Kayyal concludes that the object-to-subject path of emancipation that women have walked in this writer’s oeuvre can be interpreted as a consequence of his geographical estrangement from his home country, but also as a result of the rise of postmodernist writing<sup>47</sup>. The greater centrality that women gain in his latest works, however, can also be ascribed to the rise of Islamism and of a more conservative view of the role of women, paralleled by the regression of the progressive ideologies<sup>48</sup>, as well as the divorce between Tāmir’s generation and social realism and ideology. Behind what amounts almost to an obsession with sexuality in this collection there

<sup>46</sup> Zakariyyā Tāmir, 9, in Id., *Taksīr rukab*, cit., p. 18.

<sup>47</sup> Mahmoud Kayyal, *Damascene Shahrzād: The Images of Women in Zakariyyā Tāmir’s Stories*, cit., p. 108.

<sup>48</sup> J.L. Esposito, *Women in Islam and Muslim Societies*, in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, J.L. Esposito (eds.), *Islam, Gender, and Social Change*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998.

appears to be an intolerance for religious hypocrisy towards sex. In one of the interviews I conducted with the author, he expressed the ubiquitousness of the erotic trope in this collection with the belief in the physical act of love as a means to explore the complexity of human nature, as well as to unmask a predominant religious hypocrisy about sex<sup>49</sup>. The unfavourable opinion this writer maintains of the religious establishment often emerges in this collection, usually with an ironic stance that ridicules their connivance with power. Female sexuality becomes the tool to expose religious hypocrisy, but its presence and the assertive attitude of the female protagonists antagonise male supremacist and patriarchal figures more frequently and in fact religious figures only appear in a handful of stories. *Taksīr rukab*'s female protagonists, playing a variety of roles throughout the collection, dominate marital as well as casual relations, putting forward a confident and self-aware image of their own sexuality, overshadowing men and often unmasking their supremacist claims with a positive attitude. The stories of *Taksīr rukab* in particular represent the definitive break in the role the female characters play, a leading role that charges the representations of the relationship between the sexes with strong sexual and political connotations. Sex becomes the weapon that women symbolically hold against men, converting it into their most powerful deterrent to male domination, as well as the pretext that serves to ridicule the male's supposed physical superiority.

The relevance of the taboo-breaking representations of sexuality that emerge so prominently in Tāmīr's latest works resides in the subversive potential that sexual images possess in a patriarchal context where female sexuality and subjectivity contain considerable political implications. As Rita Stephan argues in her analysis of al-Sa'dāwī and al-Sammān's work, these two authors' representations of female sexuality challenge a normative and hegemonic discourse on sexuality, put forward by nationalist, religious and traditionalist actors that emerged in the Middle East in the postcolonial period. «While the bourgeois have historically been the agents of social control, in the Middle East they have collaborated with other social agents to operationalize an entire mechanism of social control. Middle Eastern and Islamic societies remain fairly preoccupied with women's sexuality»<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> A. Columbu, *Zakariyya Tamir: storie siriane o storie umane? – Un esperimento di traduzione dall'arabo*, Postgraduate dissertation, University of Bologna, July 2012, p. 103.

<sup>50</sup> R. Stephan, *Arab Women Writing Their Sexuality*, in "Hawwa", Volume 4, Issue 2, 2006, p. 161.

Like Tāmīr, but in a considerably different stylistic fashion, both al-Sa‘dāwī and al-Sammān in fact, as well as many others, notably in the Syrian-Lebanese context in the cases of Kūlīt (Colette) Ḥūrī and Laylā Ba‘albakī, have introduced the unmentionable taboo of sexuality heavily in their writings<sup>51</sup>. This style contests a hegemonic discourse on sexuality that is tightly intertwined with a patriarchal worldview<sup>52</sup>, and its significance is better understood in the context of the forbidden trinity of sex, religion and class conflict, the three unmentionable taboos of literature according to Bū ‘Alī Yāsīn’s conceptualisation of authoritarian obscurantism in Syria<sup>53</sup>. In addition, Tierney-Tello’s analysis of experimental fiction by South American female writers publishing under a dictatorship offers numerous insights into the implications and the potential of deconstructing a unifying and naturalising vision of gender and desire<sup>54</sup>. This work’s relevance resides in its focus on a separate, distant context (South America) which nonetheless is characterised by similar socio-political dynamics and seeks to clarify the potential of literary works that address authoritarianism as an intensification of patriarchy. In particular, the parallels between Syria and countries of the Southern Cone become useful to deconstruct a normative approach that relates patriarchy, authoritarianism and sexual bigotry to Arabic and Islamic cultural elements and they add a further element of nuance also connecting patriarchy to authoritarianism as political theory and practice regardless of its geographical setting.

The representations of women and female sexuality in Zakariyyā Tāmīr in the latest period of his career signify the maturation of the female characters through a daring declaration of their sexual desire as a stringent necessity, which seems to have surpassed the stage of fragmentation and the collapse of the totalising ideologies and the rise of Islamism, representing the accomplishment of a process of self-realisation of the female protagonist that is commonly ascribed solely to female writers<sup>55</sup>. This process overturns *fitnah* from «a potential source of

<sup>51</sup> R. Allen, *The Arabic Short Story and the Status of Women*, in R. Allen, H. Kilpatrick, E. de Moor (eds.), *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, Saqi Books, London 1995, p. 77.

<sup>52</sup> R. Stephan, *Arab Women Writing Their Sexuality*, cit., pp. 159.

<sup>53</sup> Bū ‘Alī Yāsīn, *al-Ṭālūt al-muḥarram – dirāsāt fī ‘l-dīn wa ‘l-ğins wa ‘l-şirā‘ al-ṭabaqī*, Dār al-Ṭalī‘ah, Bayrūt 1973.

<sup>54</sup> M.B. Tierney-Tello, *Allegories of Transgression and Transformation: Experimental Fiction by Women Writing Under Dictatorship*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1996, pp. 2-16.

<sup>55</sup> Sabry Hafez, *Women’s Narrative in Modern Arabic Literature: A Typology*, in R. Allen, H. Kilpatrick, E. de Moor (eds.), *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, cit., p.157.

division among the men [...] overpowering, destructive, and divisive»<sup>56</sup> and ironically reinvents it instead as a potential solution for petty conflict and a source of peace<sup>57</sup>. The divorce from ideology that this fragmentation brings about in fact does not deprive the text of its political significance, and clarifies the potential of the aesthetic strategies through which representations of female sexuality have developed, evolved and matured significantly throughout this author's career, as well as the ways in which it relates to the persistence of authoritarianism on the one hand, and to the emergence of political Islam on the other.

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<sup>56</sup> Mounira Charrad, *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco*, UC Press, Berkeley 2001, p. 57.

<sup>57</sup> This aspect in particular is epitomised impeccably in story 49 from *Taksīr rukab*. See Zakariyyā Tāmir, 49, in Id., *Taksīr rukab*, cit., p. 126.