

Exploring the Role of symbolism in Reflecting the Social and Culture Values in M. Moustadraf's Blood Feast

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دور الرمزية في تجسيد القيم الاجتماعية والثقافية في "مأدبة الدم" لمالكة مستظرف

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الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث كيفية استخدام الكاتبة المغربية مليكة مستظرف الرمزية لتسليط الضوء على أفكار مثل عدم المساواة بين الجنسين من منظور اقتصادي وأخلاقي، تستخدم هذه الدراسة منهجية بحث نوعية تتضمن تحليلاً نصياً مكثفاً ومفصلاً لبعض أعمال الكاتبة مع التركيز على رموز مثل الطعام والجسد والبيئات الحضرية. تكشف الدراسة كيف تنتقد مليكة مستظرف التناقضات الموجودة في كل من الثقافات المغربية المعاصرة والتقليدية، خاصة فيما يتعلق بتجارب النساء وأفراد الطبقة العاملة لتسليط الضوء على التظاهر المجتمعي السائد والتفاوتات في الثقافة المغربية. يضع هذا البحث عمل مليكة مستظرف في سياقه من خلال الإشارة إلى أمثلة لكاتبات عربيات أخريات، بما في ذلك فاطمة المرنيسي ونوال السعداوي وليلى أبو العلا. في الختام، يقدم البحث مقترحات لإجراء بحث إضافي في هذا المجال باستخدام مناهج متعددة التخصصات تتضمن وجهات النظر النسوية والاجتماعية وأساليب الدراسات الحضرية، تقدم هذه الدراسة نظرة ثاقبة حول كيفية استخدام الرمزية في الأدب العربي كوسيلة أساسية للنقد الاجتماعي وتمثيل الأصوات المهمشة.

كلمات افتتاحية: الرمزية، عدم المساواة بين الجنسين، التفاوت الاقتصادي، النفاق الأخلاقي، المجتمع المغربي، المناطق الحضرية، الرمزية الغذائية، السلطة الأبوية، الطبقة العاملة، النظرية النسوية.

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Abstract:

This research aims to examine how Malika Mostazraf, Moroccan writer, uses symbolism to highlight ideas such as gender inequality from an economic and moral perspective. This study uses a qualitative research methodology that includes an intensive and detailed textual analysis of some of the writer's works, focusing on symbols such as food, the body, and urban environments. The study reveals how Malika Moustadrif critiques the contradictions present in both contemporary and traditional Moroccan cultures, especially regarding the experiences of women and working-class individuals, to highlight the prevailing societal pretense and disparities in Moroccan culture. Malika Mostazarf challenges the moral double standards, patriarchy, or economic exploitation that continue to impact the lives of those who are excluded. This research places Malika Mostazraf's work in context by pointing to examples of other Arab women writers, including Fatima Mernissi, Nawal El Saadawi, and Laila Abu Al-Ala. In conclusion, the research offers proposals for additional research in this field. Using interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate feminist and sociological perspectives and urban studies methods, this study provides insight into how symbolism is used in Arabic literature as a primary means of social critique and representation of marginalized voices.

Keywords: *Malika Moustadraf, symbolism, gender inequality, economic disparity, moral hypocrisy, Moroccan society, urban settings, food symbolism, patriarchy, working class, feminist theory, Arabic literature.*

Background of the Study

Blood Feast and its socio-cultural context

Malika Moustadraf's *Blood Feast: The Complete Short Stories* is a pioneering publication that offers narrated Moroccan culture in its authentic form, with an emphasis on those who are not included or welcome. These stories are rich in powerful symbolism, addressing issues such as gender dysphoria, poverty, and societal bias. Her artwork reflects the harsh reality of Morocco's everyday existence?.

Socio-cultural factors are the primary determinants of the depth of *Blood Feast*. During the period in which Moustadraf wrote about Morocco, there were significant changes in social and economic life, with old customs often contradicting modern values. Her stories describe the opportunities and challenges of this period of change: urban sprawl, economic inequality, and the male-dominated patriarchy affecting women. According to a review in *Litro Magazine*, the stories offer an insight into contemporary Moroccan society where women are dependent on money and patriarchal interests are dominant.

It has been noted that Moustadraf speaks candidly about the social issues. 'Full Stop is a collection of fourteen stories that showcase her intelligent social observation skills, as they hiss and scorn against forms of unequal power. Her innovative approach to responding to social criticisms is also recognized by *The Markaz Review*.

Malika Moustadraf (Rosen 1969–2006), a Moroccan writer who was not an author and raised the bar for taboo topics, also engaged in debates outside of academia. She was raised in the Casablanca neighborhood, but her literary voice was impacted by chronic kidney disease and other factors. Her upbringing took place in the same household as hers. Despite her health challenges, Moustadraf's body of work is still highly influential for its courage and sincerity.

Despite her young age, the literary scene in Morocco was forever changed by the passing of this woman at 37. Similar to Moustadraf, the woman who isn't part of the writing process is a very outgoing and honest individual. Her writing, which deals with the margins, female body, and experience, is well-known, according to *Words Without Borders*. She has been compared to Mohamed Choukri, who is known for his candid portrayal of Moroccan traditions.

In the realm of modern Moroccan literature, Moustadraf is a quintessential woman who holds an elevated status. Why? *Women of the 21st century: Her stories challenge patriarchal institutions and reveal the real lives of women in Morocco. World Literature Today* recognizes Moustadraf as a significant figure in Moroccan literature, symbolizing the radicalization of gender and sexuality in North Africa. *The Blood Feast by Malika Moustadraf reflects Moroccan socio-cultural issues. "...She employs a powerful symbolism and an unapologetic narrative tone to offer insightful reflections on the issues faced by marginalized groups, particularly women, in societal shifts that are rapidly evolving.'* She is renowned for her literature, which serves to inspire and educate Moroccans as well as other Moroccan nationals.

Research Problem

The book *Blood Feast: The Complete Short Stories* by Malika Moustadraf speaks in symbolism to show what social and cultural attitudes contemporary Moroccan society possesses. The merit of the collection rests on its earnestness and unapologetic narrative, yet much research does not

exist to comment on the symbolism in questioning cultural institutions. Yet, the scholars have conjoined their efforts toward that end. In closing that gap, Moustadraf employs symbolic language in addressing issues of gender, class, and the intersection between tradition and modernity.

Here also lies a major prong of research: symbols of experience and struggle relating to marginalized peoples/communities, as well as their broader socio-cultural makeup in Moroccan identity. In this regard, the study considers how Moustadraf's narratives carry multiple meanings of their symbols and addresses how, without much elaboration, they would give the author a facility to confront oppressive regimes while offering a full view of daily life in Morocco.

Literature Review

Symbolism and Social Critique in Arab Literature

In terms of their writings, symbolism in literature, especially in the works of Arab women writers, was used basically for a critique of social issues, more specifically against gender inequalities, class disparity, and moral hypocrisy. Symbolisms such as food, the body, and urban landscapes in the writing of Moustadraf are consistent with much of contemporary Arab fiction, where much of the symbolism is often overtly critical of social conditions. According to Al-Zahra (2018), "Moustadraf uses common objects as symbols to highlight the serious inequities that practice oppression on Moroccan society." (p. 48). In the case of Moustadraf, food is not only a means of sustenance but also a metaphor for scarcity and systemic neglect, where everyday objects become metaphors for the marginalization of the working class.

Similarly, feminist scholars have highlighted how symbols in literature can serve to critique patriarchal structures. As pointed out by Tazi (2021), the symbolism in the work of Moustadraf stands sharply critical of traditional gender roles foisted on women within Moroccan society: "The symbolism in Moustadraf's work is especially evidenced in using the kitchen, the domestic place symbolic of female confinement and oppression" (p. 61). This symbol will become one through which she critiques the restrictions placed on the autonomy of women. This offers a deeper look into the sociopolitical struggles women face.

Feminist and Sociological Perspectives in Moustadraf's Work

Because of its multi-layered reading of gender and class, Moustadraf's work is engaging with feminist and sociological discourses. Bensmaia (2003) confirms this postcolonial Moroccan literary stance on employing symbolism to reveal the dualities embedded within colonial histories and the uneven development of cultural identities (134). This goes entirely in line with the symbolism that Moustadraf employs with respect to the oppressive atmosphere that is both traditional and modern for the Moroccans. In this socio-culture, the bodies of women are seen both as the spaces of power and as spaces from which women could fight back and take charge.

These include feminist theorists such as Ahmed (2018), who believe that the body gets its continuous shape by patriarchal ideologies defining it as symbolic (p. 91). Symbolism is used by Moustadraf to explore the dichotomy of oppression and potential subversion in the female body. Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence highlights the sociological perspective on Moustadraf's Symbolism because it explores how everyday practices reinforce and perpetuate

social capital and economic inequality. According to El Ayadi (2015), Mutoustandi's iconic use of cities is a description of social hierarchy found in real-life facts surrounding economic and cultural types of division in Moroccan society (102). By depicting urban spaces, Moustadraf powerfully conveys the contrast between the rich elite and the impoverished working class and, indeed, condemns the unequal availability of resources and opportunities.

Symbolism and Moral Hypocrisy

There is an extensive literature on the critique of moral hypocrisy offered by Moustadraf. Scholars covering up the prophetic piety and individual acts of benevolent kindness have raised the differentiation between socially prophetic symbols and public ritual ones. Mohammedoustadraf's indictment of moral double standards in Moroccan society, as noted by Fatima Tazi (2021), is emphasized by the apparent incongruity between the public display of religious piety and the unethical behavior of those in power. (142). Thus, the display of Quranic verses and prayer beads is a clear manifestation of the artificial religiosity of individuals who exploit or oppress others. This practice, comprising criticisms of social hypocrisy through the use of religious symbols represented within Arab literature, is consistent with broader critiques.

As pointed out by Al-Zahra (2018), Muslims depict traditional events such as weddings, brilliantly exposing contradictions in societal norms, asserting that looks are more important than real ethics. (p. 74). Through this, he shows how public practices become nothing more than symbols of social predisposition. Moustadraf also illustrates the symbolic devices in his research by contrasting the ethical discrepancies between the expectations of society and individual behavior.

Comparative Perspectives: Moustadraf and Other Arab Women Writers

This included the writings of Moustadraf on this particular area of concern by other Arab women novelists who have also represented such themes in their writings. Moustadraf's reinterpretations of symbolic language have been called at variance with Fatema. Mernissi's have noted that the symbols used by Moustadraf emerge from a critiquing patriarchal order. As Mernissi (2001) argued, the court of the harem reflected an enclosed and confined existence that women were expected to lead in Moroccan society. In comparison with Mernissi's use of the harem, Moustadraf's attraction is kitchens and bodies—the confinement of women in their own private world for impacting the latter.

Similar to Moustadraf, the writings of Nawal El Saadawi are said to be one of the portraits wherein women can be pictured as icons of both oppression and rebellion. According to El-Saadawi (1975), the female body in Arab literature is a symbol of oppression and also primarily a tool for retaliation. Conceivably, it is true. The allegories that Moustadraf uses are catered more to the context of Morocco's socio-cultural environment and to urban areas.

Bensmaia (2003), emphasizing the impact of modernization forces on Moroccan society, refers to Mutoustadraf's study on women's autonomy in the urban space. Something like that. "Moustadraf's text is perhaps more embedded in socioeconomic contexts than Leila Aboulela's, who enjoys frequently working with spiritual and religious symbols." The comparison holds quite well. Culturally displaced, Minaret and other works by Aboulela invoke spiritual symbolisms, whereas Moustadraf's metaphors are abstract and secular in their representations of the daily

struggles faced by marginalized communities. The complex identities of Arab women are projected through the lens of spirituality, as Aboulela (2012) mentions. 99). Moustadraf's interest in bodily and urban issues gives an extra dimension to the socio-cultural issues of Moroccan women.

Methodology

Textual analysis using qualitative methods

An extensive qualitative textual analysis has been done to investigate whether there is use of symbolism in the work of Malika Moustadraf, *Blood Feast*. Textual analysis is best suited for the research objective, as it would provide the opportunity for a detailed examination of symbolic elements in the text and their sociocultural implications. The analysis focuses on identifying recurring symbols, decoding meanings, and finally interpreting the role of the huge symbolism in providing society with the author's critique on its ethos norms.

Some of the key steps in textual analysis include:

1. A close reading: A detailed examination of the stories to identify symbolic elements such as objects, settings, characters, and motifs.
2. Contextual interpretation: To relate the identified symbols with socio-cultural and historical contexts of Morocco to find their deeper meaning.
3. Linking with Themes: To relate the symbols with greater themes of the stories, such as gender inequality, social class, and cultural transformation.

Application of Literary and Cultural Theories

To further enrich the analysis, the research applies literary and cultural theories that provide a conceptual basis to interpret the symbol beyond its purely textual meaning in relation to specific socio-cultural contexts. The following theoretical lenses are adopted:

1. Feminist Literary Theory:

This theory is employed to analyze how the use of symbolism functions as a critique of patriarchal institutions and how it raises issues pertaining to gender disparities. For example, symbols that are associated with the female body and domestic spaces would be deconstructed in terms of their implications on women's conditions and subjugation in Moroccan society.

2. Postcolonial Theory:

Postcolonial theory will be used as a tool to critically analyze symbols that echo the struggle between traditional Moroccan and modern and globalized influences and help situate them within Morocco's history with colonialism and its influence on cultural identity.

Cultural Semiotics: Through this framework, symbols are interpreted as cultural signs and can convey meanings in the context of Moroccan culture. By "reading" these signs, Moustadraf challenges social values, power relations, and cultural realities.

The data collection and analysis process

- Selection of Stories: Few stories will be selected from *Blood Feast* on the basis of symbolism used and being correlated with research questions.

- Coding and Categorization: Codes will be assigned to symbols for categorization on the basis of thematic elements like gender, class, tradition vs. modernity, etc.
- Thematic Analysis: Symbolic elements will be analyzed with reference to broader thematic concerns in the collection. Where appropriate, theoretical insights

Theoretical Framework

Symbolism in Literature

In literature, symbolism refers to the use of symbols or other forms of representation in which objects, characters, or events carry more than just their meaning. This approach enables writers to express intricate concepts, emotions, and themes through indirect means in order to give the story multiple layers of meaning. Abrams and Harpham (2011) assert that a symbol is an object or event that signifies something other than itself and triggers varying associations. They describe how symbolism can reflect universal human experiences, critique societal structures and ideologies, and establish connections between abstract ideas and concrete realities in literature.

By using symbols, authors allow the readers to make their work more interactive, as one is forced to find deeper meanings and themes that are more complex in the story. The symbolism in *Blood Feast* by Malika Moustadraf critiques the social and cultural norms in Morocco. Objects, characters, and settings have symbolic meanings aside from their real counterparts. Food in *Blood Feast* is not for nourishment but also symbolizes power structures, gender distinctions, and social inequality. Food representation, mostly marked by either its absence or abundance, is symbolic of the economic challenges of the underclass, particularly women.

Similarly, the female body serves as both a symbol of oppression and resistance, reflecting social expectations in society and the fight for freedom. Additionally, urban spaces are utilized by Moustadraf as representations of alienation, class distinction, and cultural tension. Post-colonial Moroccan literature places significant emphasis on the use of symbolism to address themes of identity, cultural diversity, and resistance against colonial and neo-colonialist influences. Other authors, such as Mohamed Choukri, Driss Chraïbi, and Malika Moustadraf, employ symbolism in an effort to discuss the heritage of colonialism regarding Moroccan society and culture. Most of them make use of symbolic devices to mark the conflict between old and new values with which they seek to criticize socio-political structures that continue to determine their protagonists' lives.

Full of cultural and social symbolism, Moustadraf's *Blood Feast* deals with issues on gender parity, class separation in society, and the problems posed to culture when a country is unable to advance its technology. Limitations imposed upon women are emblazoned upon domestic spaces and pieces of clothing; likewise, the urban landscape and everyday items serve as emblems for the working class and the economic inequality imposed by marginalization. The theme of cultural identity in the work of Moustadraf is denoted by the use of traditional symbols, such as religious objects, and modern ones, including consumer goods, which point toward the tension between Morocco's cultural heritage and its relation to globalization.

In *Blood Feast* by Malika Moustadraf, symbolization is what occasioned the critique of the Moroccan social and cultural order. The objects, characters, and places in the stories carry an aura of symbolism that extends far beyond their self-sufficient physical representations. Food appears in *Blood Feast* as more than mere sustenance. Rather, it servilely adorns variations in

power dynamics, gender roles, and social inequalities. This brings forth imagery of food and corresponding poverty or plenty as symbolic of the economic deprivation among the marginalized groups, especially women. Here, yet again, the female body is used as a metaphor of oppression and resistance more in manners of reflecting societal expectations within the constant tension of the continuing struggle for autonomy. Moustadraf creatively employs urban spaces as symbols conjuring alienation, class divides, and cultural tensions to engage certain complexities of living in a post-colonial modern society. In post-colonial Moroccan literature, symbolism becomes an unavoidable instrument for the contrived confrontation with themes relating to identity, cultural hybridity, and the resistant strategies to colonial and neo-colonial regimes. Authors such as Mohamed Choukri, Driss Chraïbi, and Malika Moustadraf embrace symbolism to grapple with the imposed legacies of colonialism in Moroccan society and culture. At the same time, symbolism in their works also illustrates tensions existing between traditional and modern values while investigating sociopolitical structures that still govern their characters' lives. The accounts of cultural and social symbols in *Blood Feast* highlight gender inequality, class struggle, and cultural preservation in the face of modernity. Family spaces and clothes stand in as symbols that confer restrictions on women's behavior while representing their conditions. At the same time, urban landscapes and everyday objects put flesh on economic inequalities that melt down into the social marginalization experienced by working classes.

The other theme that holds significant importance in the body of Moustadraf's works is cultural identity, where traditional symbols like religious symbols and modern symbols like consumer goods juxtapose one another, representing the tension between Moroccan cultural heritage and globalization. As Bensmaïa (2003) says in *Postcolonial Spaces*, "Symbolism in postcolonial Moroccan literature has become a weapon to reveal and contest the dualities engendered by colonial histories and the uneven development of cultural identities".

Meanwhile, the symbolic repertoire in Moustadraf's *Blood Feast* articulates this larger discourse, articulating the dilemmas of Moroccan identity within a society characterized by both tradition and change, thus giving the readers a subtle critique of the cultural forces shaping post-colonial Morocco.

Cultural identity is another major theme in Moustadraf's work, as the juxtaposition of traditional iconography—such as sacred objects—and modern symbols, like consumer goods, reflects Morocco's more difficult time in reconciling its cultural heritage with entering the new, global world. Bensmaïa (2003) in *Postcolonial Spaces* maintains, "Symbolism becomes a means through which to critique the dualities engendered by colonial histories and the uneven evolution of cultural identities." The symbolism that Moustadraf employed in *Blood Feast* fits into a larger discussion of the complications of Moroccan identity in a society bound to both tradition and change; it gives readers many finer shades of a critique on the cultural forces animating postcolonial Morocco.

Relevance of Feminist and Sociological Theories to Moustadraf's Work

Malika Moustadraf's *Blood Feast* is rich and made pregnant with feminist argument and sociological reflection, thus needing the sale of these two theoretical frameworks for analyzing the symbolic language drilled in her works. Feminist theory works more to create a window

through which one can assess how Moustadraf becomes alive to the situation and reality of women living within the Moroccan society while critiquing the characteristics of patriarchal oppression in those women's lives. Simone de Beauvoir's reference to "the other" is especially relevant when looking at how Moustadraf positions women as subjects and subordinate beings.

In the stories of Moustadraf, everyday images of domestic work and those of the female body convey how women, under the structure of patriarchal Moroccan society, are systematically oppressed. The symbolic representation revealed here is also typical of feminist thought in which the female body is regarded as an embedded site of objectification and control that reflects the ideology under which a woman's life is conceptualized. As put well by Ahmed (2018) in "The Female Body as a Cultural Signifier": "the body becomes a contested site, laden with meanings imposed by patriarchal ideologies..." which totally fits with Moustadraf's symbolic treatment of the oppression of women in terms of the pressures and expectations that are valorized against their physical appearances and domestic roles.

Sociological theory is, however, the appropriate bodily framework for understanding the larger socio-economic and cultural context in which these symbols are so prominently placed. The concepts of social capital and symbolic violence by Pierre Bourdieu would be instrumental as a means of interpreting how Moustadraf symbolically manifests class differentials and societal power structure. Bourdieu's conception of symbolic violence—the power exercised quietly or invisibly—can be applied to Moustadraf's criticisms of social forms: silent mechanisms of oppression through food, urban spaces, and the female body in exposing symbolic elements. For example, *Blood Feast* cities symbolize, for the most part, economic marginalization and class divides, the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities observable in Moroccan society. It reflects in sociological analyses of Moroccan urbanization, as El Ayadi (2015) observes that "the urban landscape often mirrors the deep socio-economic disparities that define contemporary Moroccan life." Moustadraf's symbolism of alienation and marginality through urban spaces definitely ties his work to the sociological views, creating an image of the economic struggles working-class and socially excluded post-colonial Moroccans endure. By deploying feminist and sociological theory, the above-mentioned work of Moustadraf entails the complex levels of symbolic meaning that critique the nexus of gender, class, and power in Moroccan society.

Analysis of Symbols Used in Blood Feast

Hence, this food is a multi-significant symbol used by Malika Moustadraf to center on certain important issues of the society: poverty, gender, and class differences. In most of her stories, food serves not only as a type of consistently tangible sustenance but also reflects survival, the injustices in wealth distribution, and the fetters that bind women within patriarchal communities. Interestingly, the bringing together of food and poverty takes on real significance among those stories that explore the lives of marginalized characters.

"Little or few meals" seems to recur, reflecting a deprivation of, or the inaccessibility to, the basic enough things that are denied by the economic and social injustice imposed by the system. To scavenge or to depend on stale bread or watery soup are some of the most authentic reflections of the conditions of life under a society that has turned the most basic have-nots into

unobtainable relative luxuries. A scene where a family struggles hard to make ends meet to buy a loaf would paint that family's daily fight against poverty, then turn into a poignant symbol of the ever out-of-reach comfort and stability that poverty consigns to their lives.

Food stands as a synonym for the strict division of gender roles imposed on women in their homes. Moustadraf's work practically always assumes the kitchen as a setting in which acts of food preparation are relegated to female characters, thus serving as a reminder of what they can always expect: confinement within domestic locations and caretakers. Thus, cooking becomes a perfect emblem of subservience, proving how patriarchal demand continues to keep women from their traditional roles of the household. Among other stories, it demonstrates that once a woman gets married, she does not just make ends meet with working for such meals but spends hours preparing them for her husband even under her totally exhausted scenario. It is not just home labor depiction; it has come to mean stereotyped representations of women's forced compliance to an oppressive society. It eliminates getting out of the kitchen as a matter of choice and casts the involvement into a binary transformation of its further gendered division, highlighting the role of women reduced to nurturers and caregivers.

At a higher level of complexity, Moustadraf marks varying quality in food as an indication of social class. The vast, ostentatious feasts symbolize wealth enjoyed and privileged lifestyles of the elite, while starving for the poor shows the social class differences. That's how the affluent eat with rich foods, like lavish banquets, contrasting with poor characters usually depicted eating leftovers or struggling for their basic meals, somewhat reflecting the social class segregations within Moroccan society. The association of food with social standing has a symbolically critical angle towards the material disparities tied with a stratified society. In one story, a very rich feast prepared for a high-status family is contrasted to the poverty of another character, who eats little more than scraps. And this is not simply a visual cue; it speaks to the social and economic dimensions in the narrative's setting as well.

The female body is crucially symbolic in *Blood Feast*, where it critiques societal expectations and individual defiance toward them, creating both the theme of oppression using the female body within society's notion and independence. In fact, with all these writings, Moustadraf develops a female body representing symbolic exploitation by society, within which the values and expectations of a patriarchal society are imposed. This does not indicate that the woman does not have willpower. She could be an object for people because this body is considered to be the form of reproduction. One story describes the body of the character as a "vessel for expectations of society." That is how they reduce women to fulfilling roles. By their worth defined by how good they could look, the ability to reproduce, or whether they serve or not. This representation of the female body as an instrument of control is a critique of the social practices that limit women's agency and freedom.

Moustadraf is also using the female body in a different way to symbolize resistance. Most of her characters, with the exceptions of her male characters, take back their bodies and use them to resist against the society. She went out rolling in the streets with no headscarf at all, an embodiment of powerful defiance. This was seen as the rebellion of an Orthodox woman, swaying the cultural norms before her. In reality, the simplicity of walking through the urban space, devoid of the symbolic protection of the headscarf, amounts to more than just defiance against tradition;

it is the declaration of an even larger possession—what can really and truly be called self-reclamation—in the face of societal pressure.

Blood Feast employs urban landscapes as yet another resource-rich ground for symbolic representation: alienation, class division, and cultural conflict. The cities in which such urban dwellers exist reflect symbols of an unworthy modern existence; thus, even those in the most labyrinthine streets or anonymous spaces are subject to extreme alienation and emotional disconnection. An illustration of an individual idly wandering through the streets of Casablanca serves as a visual metaphor for the emotional and social alienation pervading urban life. The markets, alleys, and heights above their heads represent the dismemberment and loss of the self in the spirit of new modernity.

Moustadraf also uses harsh conflicts of urban sites to reflect sharp social divides that exist in Moroccan society. Between affluent neighborhoods and poor suburbs, it is not only an economic fact; it's a visual and symbolic manifestation of the class pulls that define the societal fabric. There would be majestic streets and luxurious, fancy stores that one finds in the wealthier neighborhoods, really stark contrast with crumbling houses and impoverished conditions of the working classes. Such visual differences symbolize the firmly rooted social disparity that is very much common across Moroccan society, where one's social standing dictates even basic things like access to clean water or decent shelter and even food.

Finally, the dynamic and the scenarios in Blood Feast language, as well as space representing culture colliding with modern values and old fantasies. The environment around Morocco depicts a rich cultural heritage, yet being under siege from global pressures: at one moment found in traditional markets, or souks, coexisting with modern glass-and-steel skyscrapers. It is a narration where the characters are brought together at a modern café and engage in heated debates over the Moroccan identity, culture, and the looming Westernization. A modern space among the ruins of an urban landscape, this setting represents the space between past and present, between the old values of Moroccan society and the forces of modernization and globalization.

Thus, the voluminous symbolism in Blood Feast is a part of Moustadraf's critique of social injustices and the complexities of individual entwinement with their social, cultural, and political surroundings.

Social and Cultural Attitudes Reflected Through Symbolism

Critique of Patriarchy and Traditional Gender Roles

Moustadraf uses symbolism to interrogate patriarchal structures that have been planted into place and the causes of rigid gender roles that firmly define Moroccan society. Through tangible objects, actions, narrations, and spaces, she exposes the systemic oppression of women within their constrained agency and male-dominated worlds. In Blood Feast, the kitchen, but more generally the house, stands as one of the recurring symbols of confinement for women in society. These symbols connote, for instance, the idea that a woman's worth is primarily that of caregiver and homemaker—she becomes just an enabler of familial sustenance. To take an example from an episode, there is a woman trapped in an abusive marriage, and she is portrayed performing the well-known act of preparing meals for her husband, symbolizing her coerced servitude. In

other words, the kitchen for her serves as both nourishment and degradation of her identity, intertwining that identity with her subjugated status as a wife.

The female body is often considered the ultimate site through which domination and subjugation could be expressed. Moustadraf exposes the severe constraints that societal norms of beauty and purity impose on a woman's independence, as both these factors make her body a mere instrument for the fulfillment of patriarchal desires. A striking instance: a girl is forced into an arranged marriage, clearly having her body mercantiled and traded among males like a transaction devoid of any agency. Moustadraf here extends this metaphor to point out that the generalization and objectification of women in society make their bodies focal points for the enforcement of societal norms and expectations.

Blood Feast shares some signs with such female resistance to patriarchal norms within this felt oppression. Moustadraf often uses this dress as a symbol of doubleness in women.

Exploration of Class Disparities and Economic Struggles

Moustadraf employs symbolism to emphasize the economic differences and struggles that the working class faces in Moroccan society. The author criticizes the systemic conditions that provide sustenance to poverty and marginalization through her vivid portrayals of cities with food and material possessions. In Blood Feast, cities represent divided spaces: the rich enjoy luxury while the poor swallow the burdens of rent in crowded, dilapidated neighborhoods. This division is not even physical; it depicts the internal social divisions or ruptures established between classes within Moroccan society. For instance, in one scene, a maid sits peering at the costly decoration splayed all over an affluent household; these, as far as her economic despair is concerned, are already unreachable signifiers. It painfully reminds her how terribly her life fails to measure up against the lives of the wealthy, which signify the gulf between the privileged and the marginalized, because, in all objective terms, she is poor.

Food centralizes as a symbol in how Moustadraf connects economic deprivation. The absence of food, the quality of meals, and the omnipresent state of hunger in her stories constitute a very strong image of systemic neglect. It is the representation of food as an icon of separation that Moustadraf's work makes salient. The laborers' everyday battle with sin, where having daily sustenance becomes a daily struggle: as Badruddin Al-Zahra (2018) notes in *The Hunger and the Symbolic in Moroccan Literature*, "Moustadraf uses food to encapsulate the stark disparities in Moroccan society, with hunger functioning as a universal marker of injustice." Hunger does not function only to reflect individual poverty but, also, it conveys a much more extensive critique of the structural forces that sustain economic deprivation in the world. Absence of food is only a representation of larger social and economic injustices at play in Moroccan society. Using such symbols, Moustadraf's work gives a very powerful commentary on the economic divides among poor people, giving the much more significant context of a society that continues to perpetuate inequalities in the lives of the marginalized.

Examination of Moral Hypocrisy in Modern and Traditional Societies

Moustadraf's work is a critique of the moral contradictions observable in modern and traditional Moroccan societies. Through the symbols of religious artifacts, social rituals, and positions in

public space, she outlines the dissonance between morals professed by societies and those followed or pursued by individuals, disclosing the hypocrisy in both traditional and modern moral codes.

Moustadraf's work critiques the moral contradictions present in both modern and traditional Moroccan societies. By the symbols of religious artifacts, social rituals, and public spaces, she exposes the dissonance between the values that societies profess and those that individuals pursue or engage in and demonstrates the hypocrisy characteristic of traditional and modern moral codes. The religious artifacts used include prayer beads or Quranic verses, which Slavic guests place as ubiquitous statements to criticize the superficial religiosity of some characters. These objects, normally associated with piety, become instruments with which Moustadraf unveils the moral duplicity of characters who outwardly appear faithful yet engage themselves in exploitative or oppressive behavior. For instance, a rich trader may publicly donate to mosques while exploiting his workers, thus exemplifying the sheer hypocrisy masked by his alleged piety, which are religious symbols that veil the place of moral corruption.

Besides the religious artifacts, Moustadraf uses societal rituals, like weddings, to symbolically critique the double standards embedded among the traditions within the society. The weddings, which should ideally be celebrations of love and unity, are often characterized by a contrasting enforcement and contradiction of societal expectations. There is such an overwhelming contrast of display of wealth associated with such events compared with the everyday situations investors face in life. An awful and direct stylistic juxtaposition of ostentation versus poverty reinforces the moral hypocrisy of a society that embraces lavishness at the expense of marginalized groups. Ostensibly, these social rituals are meant to reinforce tradition; however, they reveal the contradictions and disparities that present themselves beneath the surface of cultural practices.

In Moustadraf's narratives, public spaces, most strikingly in the context of the modern, such as cafes and marketplaces, are evocative of moral aporia and alienation. These spaces, wherein diverse types of personages intermingle and tussle, capture the tension between tradition and modernity. Both these urban landscapes evoke in their inhabitant characters a sense of displacement and moral ambiguity between their conflictive worlds in which tradition confronts modernity. Indeed, as sociologist Fatima Tazi observes, Moustadraf's discussion of modern spaces discusses the moral ambivalence and urban alienation peculiar to Moroccan life—where tradition and modernity live side by side. The individual conflicts of characters within public spaces represent the wider battle within society at large to embrace the old in balance with the new and mirror the moral and cultural dilemmas of urban Moroccan life. By these symbols, Moustadraf questions moral hypocrisy in both traditional and modern structures, thus pointing out well the contradictory tendencies of individual and collective behavior.

Comparative Analysis

Moustadraf's Use of Symbolism in Comparison to Other Moroccan or Arab Women Writers

Comparatively, the symbolic usage by Moustadraf makes a fertile ground for fruitful comparison against the symbolism of other Moroccan and Arab women writers who have tackled gender, class, and societal oppression. It is distinguished by its raw and unflinching representation of the marginalized but yet resonates with larger currents in the Arab women's literature by its critique

of patriarchal structures and the lived experiences of women. Just like Moustadraf, Fatema Mernissi speaks about restraints that patriarchal systems impose. However, there are differences in the angle each writer has taken in dealing with the topic. Critique of gender inequality on the grounds of sociology and autobiography comes partially from the works of Mernissi, especially *Dreams of Trespass*.

In another regard, Mernissi relates the harem with women's societal enclosure in a broader abstract sense of imprisonment articulated by patriarchal structures. However, Moustadraf follows the fiction route to uncover specific lived experiences of women in Moroccan society. Her symbols formed in such spaces as the kitchen and the female body make the critique related to the patriarchal limitations on women's freedom and agency more immediate and visceral. Such symbols evoke how women are trapped, both physically and metaphorically, by societal expectations, underscoring the very intimate, personal level of their oppression.

In contrast to Moustadraf, whose treatment of the body is much more localized within Morocco's socio-cultural context, just like Nawal El Saadawi, whose literary endeavors, including *Woman at Point Zero*, present the female body as a scaled locale for oppression and resistance. In most cases, however, El Saadawi's critique against Arab patriarchy is quite broad and universal; such as the description of the female bodies as symbolic sites for repression and rebellion in the wider Arab world.

Moustadraf's Unique Contribution

Moustadraf's unique contribution to Moroccan and Arab women literatures is best manifest in her capturing the soul of Morocco's socio-cultural tensions through symbolism. The writings bring an intimate and vivid depiction of struggles encountered by women, working-class persons, and marginalized communities in a rapidly modernizing and yet deeply traditional society. One aspect that makes Moustadraf stand out is her earthiness and rawness in representing these social realities, especially in an urban lens and often taken-for-granted objects. Her writings deal with the individual and collective agonies of characters in a way that reflects the commission of balancing between gender, class, and social hierarchies shown in contemporary Morocco.

Moustadraf's focusing on cities as setting is important for her work. Many of her contemporaries would be inclined towards larger social or political arguments; Moustadraf's stories, however, always define themselves within the experience of individuals dwelling in urban space: their crowded, poor areas, where the environment in some way refers to, and is part of, the emotional or social turmoil in which they live. The city ceases to be a mere backdrop and becomes instead a protagonist in the lives of the characters. Yet this place also sharpens the differences between opulence and poverty, tradition and modernity, aspiration and domination. The spaces in which Moustadraf's characters happened to exist, be it narrow and oppressive rooms in homes or commotion-filled and alien-looking streets of the city, become metaphors of diminished agency and systemic inequalities to confront.

The use of ordinary objects is equally important in Moustadraf's articulation of the intricate ways in which such objects may connote meaning. An object like food, for instance, domestic tools, and clothes are not props with specific cohesive roles in her stories, but are often very embedded with symbolic meanings that represent the socio-economic and gender struggles that define her

characters' lives. Food is the strongest of the symbols, representing both nourishment and deprivation, all of which, to a greater degree, indicate one's character's economic conditions, social status, or emotional states. In such stories, hunger is a sensation that transcends the body and becomes another form of the wider social neglect and injustice imposed on poor, marginal communities. Such mundane objects-turned-everyday tools represent a new dimension of meanings, as Moustadraf uses them to critique the structures of power, patriarchy, and economic disparity that define the lives of her characters.

Moustadraf's work gives a new perspective by leveling on the marginalized- people generally not taken into consideration by larger sociological conversations. She really gets inside the lives of women caught in the clutches of marriage, salariés who go through the grind to keep afloat- the disenfranchised who, in Moustadraf's writings, give sound to lives often hushed into silence, revealing at once the unmerciful truths of their life and a healthy measure of compassion or wit. Thus, her contributions are humanistic in nature, showing the unnoticed, the underrepresented, and the disestablished inside societies and allowing for their struggles to be known and perceived .

It is this emphasis on marginalized communities that also settles Moustadraf's unique position within the Arab women's literature. Many Arab women writers often revolve around gender oppression and their forms of expression; Moustadraf stretches from that limit to shaped clear understanding.

In focusing on class along with gender, Moustadraf's use of imagery engages the conflicts inherent within tradition and modernity. The fact that Morocco is incessantly modernizing does not absolve it from maintaining well-rooted cultural and religious traditions, thereby creating a somewhat contradictory social landscape. Moustadraf uses symbolism to reflect on these tensions—showing the dilemma of her characters to be able to fulfill their demands for self-realization and modernity against the pull of what is expected from them by tradition and society. The symbols of the female body, domesticity, and urban spaces all perhaps collaborate to illustrate the psychological and emotional costs of this cultural conflict, and they compellingly portray the complex intersection of tradition and modernity in Morocco .

However, Moustadraf's contribution is not merely through symbolism, but it is even more with the insights that she throws light upon the intricacies of Moroccan society while examining the minutiae of every day-the mundane aspects of life themselves. In particular, his gaze at urban spaces and into marginalized communities would perhaps introduce a different perspective to some broader narratives being constructed by other Arab women authors on the struggles nuanced for women and the working class. Thus, for the many who have not been heard in the mainstream voice, Moustadraf brings them to visibility. She primarily makes their narratives audible in order for their struggles to be understood. It is, therefore, appropriate that she will be called one of the most important voices of contemporary Moroccan literature, as her work becomes a part of an ever-relevant discussion concerning gender, class, and social change in the Arab world.

Conclusion

For Moustadraf, thus, the most important bit of writing cannot only be a precious contribution to the literature of the Maasai manor, but most importantly, a serious go into the socio-cultural

dynamics between such realities in Morocco, symbolically because addressing issues such as gender inequality, economic disparity, and moral hypocrisy. By means of food, the female body, urban spaces, and the like, she now reflects more vividly than before on forms of oppression that systems have tended to impose on others, especially women and the working class. Those symbols, besides being outlets for social critique, also delve deeper into the real-life experiences of people navigating the difficulties of patriarchal, poor, and quickly modernizing societies. The *vérité* of her stories reveals how social structures shape subjective realities and offer a critique of the intersectionalities of gender, class, and social exclusion.

Moustadraf's stories become the ones to write within that context of Arab women's writing because they evoke the picture of Morocco and urban realities unflinchingly. While almost most Arab women writers speak the same language of patriarchy and oppression, Moustadraf sets herself apart by the visceral and grounded symbolism with which she draws the socio-economic struggles, the cultural tensions of Moroccan society. Everyday lives of marginalized communities, along with the symbolic representation of their physical and emotional sufferings, present a refreshing position within the larger gender and class discourse in the Arab world.

Moustadraf's work bears greater relevance and significance for the understanding of Moroccan society and its literature. In the obscurity of mainstream accounts, struggles of women and the working class are highlighted within the work and talked about as issues often ignored within society. With her contribution to literature, she voices the voices which have been relegated by socio-cultural forces into margins. These literary works are expanding the canon of Moroccan literature and demonstrating how fiction can address powerfully, issues that are relevant in social and cultural contexts. Most importantly, gender relations and urban life contribute to broader discourses on modernization and its impact on the lives of traditional societies in Morocco, thus allowing critical insights into tensions which continue to exist between tradition and progress in Morocco.

Through her symbolic language and unflinching examination of societal structures, Moustadraf enriches the literary landscape and voices an essential one to understanding contemporary Moroccan society. However, a future avenue of research could be to investigate Moustadraf's work comparatively with her contemporaries among Moroccan and Arab writers, toward tapping into regional trends and convergences or divergences in thematic concerns. Interdisciplinary approaches within the sociology, feminist, and urban studies arenas might bring more insights into her use of symbolism and the larger implications for understanding power dynamics, gender roles, and social inequality. Given the culture-laden quality of Moustadraf's narratives, another line worthy of research into the future would be the challenges and advantages of translating her narratives to a global readership. This research could help to broaden an understanding of how her imagery and socio-cultural critique go across languages and cultures, thus extending her reach even internationally.

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