

Body, Gender and Pain in Moroccan Prison Memoir *Ḥadīth al-‘Atama*.

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The article explores the themes of body, physical pain, and corporeal memory as framed by Fatna El Bouih's and Latifa Jbabdi's prison narratives contained in *Ḥadīth al-‘Atama (Tale from the Dark)*. Members of the Marxist-Leninist movement, El Bouih and Jbabdi were subjected to sensory annihilation, brutal tortures, practices of gender erosion, and sexual abuses during the Moroccan *Years of Lead* (1965 - 1999). The article provides a critical reading of the memoirs by identifying a trajectory from a gendered inflicted suffering (abuses and tortures) to an agentive self-inflicted pain (hunger strike). Drawing on Banu Bargu's perspec-

tive on the manipulative use of corporeality in the carceral framework, the article emphasizes the weaponization of women's bodies in undertaking a hunger strike which ultimately improves the inmates' conditions of detention. Furthermore, the body is defined as a crucial *medium* of memory as the two women approach the recollection of violent past experiences to restore historical truth about Moroccan state violence of the *Years of Lead*.

Keywords: Prison Memoirs, Morocco, Years of Lead, Hunger Strike, Corporeal Memory

"Il y a un lien intime entre le corps écrivain et l'objet de l'écriture"
(Zekri, "Le sujet et son corps" 46).

Introduction

Few years after Moroccan independence from the French protectorate, occurred in 1956, king Hassan II imposed a long-term period of massive repression against the parliamentary opposition, students' unions and revolutionary leftist groups, as well as against military coup leaders and soldiers, Islamists, Berber and Sahrawi protesters (Abitbol 669-680; Daoud 9-340; Miller 162-220; Perrault 59-367; Saoudi "Il Marocco degli Anni di piombo" 263-287, *Voyage au-delà des nuits de plomb* 13-219; Vermeren, *Histoire du Maroc* 20-98). They were the so-called Moroccan *Years of Lead*, *Sanawāt al-Raṣāṣ* in Arabic, *années de plomb* in French, whose beginning is marked by the state of emergency following Casablanca's riots and massacre (1965) and their conclusion corresponds with Hassan II's death (1999). Criticizing a weak reformism, foot-dragging and the *wait-and-see* approach of the left-wing political parties *Union National des Forces Populaire* (UNFP) and *Parti de la Libération et du Socialisme* (PLS), the Marxist-Leninist Movement (MMLM) arose with three clandestine organizations. *23 Mars* (named after the

Casablanca riots), *Ilā al-Amām (Forward)*, and, later, *Li-nakhduma al-sh'b (To Serve People)* sought to overthrow the monarchical regime and support a national democratic revolution. Their members were soon placed under arrest and subjected to arbitrary detentions and torture. As the *Group of 139*, a large part of them received a mock mass trial in Casablanca in January 1977, which accused the militants of “plotting against the State”, imposing them long-term judgments (Saoudi, *Voyage* 14).

During the *Years of Lead*, numerous were also the female militants who underwent forcible disappearances, arbitrary detentions, mock trials, tortures, and death (Saoudi, *Femmes-prison* 31-80; Slyomovics, “The Argument from the Silence” 73-95). As Nadia Guessous illustrates, commenting on the work of IER (*Instance Équité et Réconciliation*), a reparative commission established in 2004 to restore the truth on the numerous human rights violations during the *Years of Lead*: “While we may never know the exact number of women who were affected by political violence in Morocco between 1965 and 1999, it is nevertheless noteworthy that women constitute 15% of the dossiers received by the IER from ‘direct victims’ and 46% of those filed by ‘indirect victims’” (15).

The so-called “Meknès group” (Slyomovics, *The Performance of Human Rights* 137) included six women who did not know each other before. Khadija Boukhari, Boudda Nguia, Maria Ezzaouini, Widad Bouab, Latifa Jbabdi, Fatna El Bouih found themselves sharing the same destiny of carceral coercion for their political beliefs, being incarcerated from 1977 to 1982.

Born in 1956, Fatna El Bouih has been affiliated to the clandestine Marxist group *23 Mars* based in Casablanca, where she had moved to attend the Lycée Chawqi thanks to a scholarship (Slyomovics “Fatna El Bouih and the Work of Memory” 41-44). Due to her initial involvement in the *Syndicat National des lycéens* and the coordination of a students’ strike to protest against the closure of *Union Nationale des Étudiants Marocains* (ANEM), she was briefly arrested for the first time in 1974. In Maarif police station, she was raped by a guard (Slyomovics, “Reparations in Morocco” 89-93). In 1977, as a university student and a Marxist-Leninist militant, she was abducted and has been arbitrarily imprisoned for three years, serving, after a sham trial, other two years of detention. Initially detained in the secret prison of Derb Moulay Chérif (Casablanca), she has been blindfolded for six months, undergoing brutal tortures for the entire period.

Then El Bouih was transferred in the civil prisons of Casablanca (Ghbiyla) and Meknès, where she and her comrades decided to undertake a hunger strike in order to improve their conditions and be recognized as political prisoners. Sharing the same prison cell with Fatna, Latifa Jbabdi was another female member of the *23 Mars* movement. After her release, she founded and has been directing from 1983 to 1994 the newspaper *Thamaniyyah Mars (8th March)*. Named after International Women’s Day, it spread Moroccan and transnational feminist ideals. Jbabdi was one of the founders, in 1987, of the feminist organization UAF, *Union de l’Action Féminine*. Fatna El Bouih adhered to UAF as well, engaging in the feminist mobilization for the revision of the *Mudawwana (Personal and Family Code)* with the aim of improving women’s civil rights. The two women were among the founding members, in 1999, of the *Observatoire Marocain des Prisons*. Moreover, Latifa Jbabdi was the only female member in the *Équité et réconciliation commission* (IER), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in 2004 to shed light on the atrocities of the regime during the *Years of Lead* (Benadada and El Bouhsini 62-86).

Moroccan authorities have a long story of denied human rights violations in the prison environment. However, in the last decade of Hassan II's long reign (1961-1999) and especially with his son Muhammad VI's ascent to the throne (1999), Morocco has attenuated the most restrictive censorship on the state violence.¹

Following the release of prisoners in the nineties, a proliferation of historical and memorial writings shedding light on the inhumane conditions of detention have been recorded (El Guabli "The 'Hidden Transcript' of Resistance" 170-207, El Yasami and Zekri 25-34; Elinson 289-303; Fouet-Fauvernier 23-288; Moukhliis 347-376; Zekri "Écrire le carcéral au Maroc" 59-79). The *adab al-sujūn* (carceral literature) appears to be a remarkable literary trend and testimonial *medium* of the recent Moroccan history. It illustrates conditions of detention and countless violation of Moroccan political prisoners' human rights, also conveying anti-regime political instances both in Arabic and French.²

Narrative and autobiographical accounts ascribable to *adab al-sujūn* present a diffusion among women who suffered the repressive grip of the regime either against themselves or, as indirect victims, on their relatives.³

With her prison memoir entitled *Ḥadīth al-'Atama* (*Tale from the Dark*)⁴ published in 2001, Fatna El Bouih gives a detailed account of her life in prison. Her voice speaks between tortures and material deprivations, but also testifies negotiations with the authorities, collective resilience, and active practices of resistance, in a pervasive sense of solidarity shared with her comrades. The text is a hymn of attachment to life that emerges among the wounds inflicted by physical and psychological tortures.

As one of the most compelling examples and well-received testimonies about the treatments of the Moroccan regime on female opponents, several scholars have scrutinized the text. *Ḥadīth al-'Atama* has been analysed as a gendered memory from a literary theory perspective (Diaconoff 105-149; Hachad, *Revisionary Narratives* 27-59; Orlando 273-288) and by utilising historical/anthropological approaches (Menin "Rewriting the World" 45-60; Slyomovics "The Moroccan Equity and Reconciliation Commission" 10-41). As it has been underlined, El Bouih's authorial voice expresses a female *collective self* (Orlando 283; Menin, "Rewriting the World" 54-6), namely a shared and gendered point of view on the brutalities imposed by the regime in the seventies and eighties on female dissidents.

Significantly, the same text composition contributes to convey a sense of multi-authorial inclusivity since *Ḥadīth al-'Atama* incorporates, in its final pages, shorter memorial accounts by comrades Latifa Jbabdi and Widad Bouab, who shared much of their ideological path and repressive experience with El Bouih.⁵

By reading *Ḥadīth al-'Atama* as a historical-literary source, this article aims to add further understanding of the text seeking to adopt a specific gaze on the physical aspects emerging from the narration. Tracing the articulation of the pain in the female bodies, both inflicted and self-inflicted, corporal and psychological, this article is going to show how suffering can strengthen political beliefs and become a source for female agency within the prison. In this perspective, the hunger strike finds a new, pivotal dimension that reconfigures the significance of the women's struggle in the carceral framework during the *Years of Lead*. Furthermore, the article examines how in *Ḥadīth al-'Atama* the suffering body shapes the prison experience's cognition, contributing to define Fatna El Bouih's and Latifa Jbabdi's memorialist voices. In that respect, it is interesting to investigate how body structures remembrances, arguing for a *corporeal memory* as a crucial aspect of the

gendered historization of Moroccan *Years of Lead*.

The article is composed of three paragraphs: “From Inflicted-Pain to Bodily Reactions”, “The Self-Inflicted Pain: Agency in Hunger Strike” and “Corporeal Memory”. It is a preliminary result of an ongoing Ph.D. research focusing on female political activism in Morocco during the *Years of Lead* and about Moroccan women’s collective memory and public history of the last two decades. This research will hopefully explore more in depth the chosen themes, also engaging in a wider reading of the Moroccan female memoirs related to the *Years of Lead*.

From Inflicted Pain to Bodily Reactions

The exercise of violence against women in the prison framework assumes various forms. As *Ḥadīth al-‘Atama* shows, a combined mix of physical deprivation and emotional displacement is added to specific psychological kinds of abuse damaging personal intimacy and gender identity of female prisoners.

The very first form of mental abuse perpetrated against female detainees in Derb Mulay Chérif appears to be the masculinization of their personalities.⁶ The jailers carry out a psychological erosion of gender identity which primarily derives from the imposition of male names on women.

As Fatna El Bouih recalls: “They give me a number and a name: ‘From now on, your name is Rachid. Don’t move and don’t talk unless you hear your name, that is Rachid!’” (15)⁷

The punishment for women who escape the confined space of domesticity and enter the male sphere of politics and militancy consists of being treated as men in detention. Consequently, female prisoners renamed with male names are subjected to standard treatments in the torture sessions aiming to extract information. For their sadistic pleasure, the torturers take on the name of *haji*, a term that in the Islamic tradition indicates a man of faith who has carried out the holy pilgrimage to Mecca, and, conversely, in the context of carceral violence, denotes the person who has the task of inflicting a *journey* into physical suffering.⁸ Torture practices include the *falaqa* method, that involves electroshocking in an airplane position, crucifixion *à la sauce marocaine*, beatings upside down, rapes, and threats of gang rapes.⁹

Latifa Jbabdi narrates how a specialized torturer nicknamed Camel used to ruthlessly inflict her the *falaqa*/air travel method. As a rite tested many times, a “cérémonie de la souffrance” in Foucauldian terms (Foucault 308), this tor-

ture is evoked by Jbabdi in the following graphic description:

There were different degrees of ‘air travel’ and they made me try them all, from first to last. The ‘Camel’ put the stick between my knees and arms grouping them together. It was just like putting a chicken on a spit. He pulled me downward with a system of knotted ropes, until my feet were upward and my head downward. I stayed in this position while the interrogation continued in the same way as the previous one, until I felt dizzy. I could stay in that position for hours, while they violently beat my feet with a thick lash made of wet ox nerves. At that point, they made me regain consciousness as the interrogation had to continue (El Bouih 127).

Physical violence includes massive and frequent doses of kicking, slapping, and punching, causing Jbabdi’s deafness (El Bouih 126) and facial disfigurement, that is part of the erosion of personal identity operated by carceral violence. The sense of discomfort deriving from the inability to recognize her own facial appearance is also evoked by Fatna El Bouih when she recalls the impossibility of seeing her face through a mirror for the entire period of imprisonment (42). Besides, as part of

gender removal's project and total negation of female needs, Marxist-Leninist prisoners in Derb Moulay Chérif are not given sanitary napkins during their menstrual cycles, being forced for days into bloody clothing (Slyomovics, *The Performance of Human Rights* 135).

Thereby, Fatna and her comrades undergo both, a gender erosion deriving from the abusive masculinization under which the jailers torture them, and a typically gender-based violence consisting of the rapes, threats of gang rape and dogs' rapes, and virginity testing.

In addition to these practices, female bodies are subjected to an annihilation of sensory perception. For the first months of their arbitrary detention, female political prisoners are not allowed to speak at all, lying on the ground in the narrow space without the possibility of getting up. El Bouih, Jbabdi and their companions are forced to live in a state of complete blindness with permanent eye bandages for six months in order to prevent the captors' recognition, especially during the torture sessions. The negation of sight provoked a global decompensation of their senses, worsened by the inability of moving and speaking. At this respect, Suellen Diaconoff notices that: "In prison, the physical senses, like the body, are alienated, distorted, deprived, and assaulted"

(123). Speaking about being assaulted, even the insects can attack female bodies running through them, as Latifa Jbabdi testifies (126). Indeed, forced immobility and bodily privations are aggravated by the imposition of not moving even to drive out fleas or cockroaches. This represents a transparent image of the authorities' desire to remove any residue of human dignity in the political detainees, in a never-ending time.

Nevertheless, the sensory disintegration imposed as part of neutralization and dehumanization of female prisoners soon becomes one of the women's political detainees' fields of manipulation and resistance. Strategies of adaptation, minimization, and acceptance of the privations of the senses are tools of resilience in the carceral framework. In this regard, Latifa Jbabdi affirms how she got accustomed to the bandage, to identify it as an extension of her body and occasionally forgetting of removing it in the unique possible moment, at the toilet (El Bouih 124). Moreover, the privation of sight strengthens prisoners' faculties of hearing and touch. This condition helps to identify each torturer beyond the generic name of *hadj*. The process worked via particular traits: the walk, the force of the blows, the tone of voice, the grip on their flesh.

Interestingly, if their voice is silenced and the sight nullified, female detainees refine some communication strategies to convey their feelings. They are able to communicate with each other by drawing out letter profiles on the inmates' skin to form words and sentences. This tactile Arabic in "corporeal transmission" (*The Performance of Human Rights* 138), as Susan Slyomovics defines it, is allowed by the inmates' physical proximity and has the result of creating a mute friendship particularly charged from an emotional point of view. With this human alphabet, women in prison realize an agentive exit strategy from solitude, individual suffering, and alienation of bodies, performing, at the same time, subversive gestures of communication in their physical closeness.

The Self-Inflicted Pain: Agency in Hunger Strike

Notwithstanding the end of strictest prison regime and the relocation at civil prison of Ghbiyla (Casablanca), Fatna's group is far from normalization in the carceral environment.

On the one hand, the inmates have removed the bandages and they can look at each other, experiencing a renewed sense of personal integrity and gender identity. On the other, the duration of their imprisonment is still indefinite, and their

rights of political prisoners are far from being recognized.

In Ghbiyla, El Bouih and Jbabdi occupy the cell which was of the Marxist-Leninist movement member Saida Menhebi. Former student union's fellow and active member of the clandestine group *Ilā al-Amām (Forward)*, Saida worked as an English teacher when she was arrested in 1977 and subjected to tortures. Following a hunger strike that lasted 34 days, undergone to protest against the conditions of political prisoners, she was hospitalized and died at twenty-five.¹⁰ The news of her death profoundly shocks the inmates, and El Bouih and Jbabdi's group is soon transferred to Meknès to avoid contamination from the so-called 45-day strike. Nevertheless, Fatna and her comrades decide to proclaim a hunger strike in order to have their rights as political prisoners fully recognized.

That would mean for them to be able to read and study in a cell, to continue university and give exams, to enjoy more hours of daylight in the courtyard and more visits by family members. Also, the chance to have the right of medical care and, most importantly, to obtain a trial after three years of arbitrary detention. For these reasons, they utilize the only effective weapon of protest at their disposal, the refusal of food, even at the cost of

endangering their own lives. As El Bouih affirms: "We had no choice but to practice violence against ourselves. We had no choice but to consider death easier than our current condition" (38).

Not being an inflicted form of pain but consisting of the self-infliction of suffering, hunger strike is an extreme choice by vulnerable subjects in detention. In undergoing a hunger strike, mental strength is closely related to physical endurance, and collective political convictions to physical resilience.

According to Machin, hunger strike entails three major aspects. It is a strategy of effectively communicating political intents, a tool to reproduce a collective identity, and a way to disrupt the structure of the carceral institution (160). The first aspect is related to the urgency of raising voice and being heard in prison. To the second point, hunger strike is intended as a shared dispositive that rehabilitates the sense of political belonging and restores a common identity. A vision that is in contrast with the Foucauldian assumption that in prison pain is not just individualized but also individualizing (Foucault 239). Finally, in collectively incorporating a typically male fighting tool such as hunger strike, women exercise a gender provocation. As Machin argues: "The protesting body - in particular, the female/feminine protesting

body - can disrupt the dominant order of the political sphere through the use of self-directed violence" (160).

Fatna's account of hunger strike reports that the hardest days are precisely the initial ones, which see a drastic change in the inmates' already poor food routine. The hunger strike brings about headache, blurred vision, stomach cramps, heaviness in the limbs. Soon, the women decide to drastically reduce to speak and move, staying for a long time in a state of semi-immobility. Still, the temporary privation of voice and mobility is instrumental in gaining a significant impact on the carceral system, spreading a message of protest to the entire *makhzen*, the Moroccan political apparatus itself.

As Banu Bargu highlights in her *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons* the weaponization of life is a "tactic of resorting to corporeal and existential practices of struggle, based on the technique of self-destruction, in order to make a political statement or advance political goals" (14). Forms of self-destruction, such as hunger strike and self-immolation in prison, relate to the nature of sovereign power and prison politics in the modern world themselves. According to Bargu, radical forms of struggle and militant martyrdom specifically arise from the asymmetric antagonism between the

modern state and its contestants (23). Showing a deep political awareness regarding the value of hunger strike in the abusive and coercive context of prison, Fatna El Bouih argues: "The hunger strike shakes the foundations of a State that claims to be grounded on the rule of law, a State that affirms to recognize human life as sacred" (38). This affirmation is also consistent with Padraic Kenney's point that the modern prisoner of conscience, with his or her reluctance to submit to the rules of the prison, is aimed at sparking off a crisis on the modern state and its coercive apparatus.

As the days of hunger strike go on, Fatna manages to maintain a strenuous strength of mind in the solid conviction to either overcome or to die. After twenty days of hunger strike, the carceral authorities break the silence. Representing all the other strikers, El Bouih is called to directly negotiate the terms of their final recognition as political prisoners. The negotiating table is a symbolic and factual place of reconfiguration of female subalternity towards male carceral authorities. Fatna, disfigured by the prolonged food deprivation and at the very limit of her physical strength, deftly confronts the prison director, demonstrating an extreme mental endurance and exemplary political conduct. The compromise obtained consists

of the effective recognition of the status of political detainees without a formal act. It will allow political prisoners to study and to enjoy more hours of light a day, and to receive a judgment in a courtroom. The hunger strike is over, and it has produced a significant impact in the carceral environment.

Corporeal Memory

In her study on the suffering body through history entitled *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry affirms the inexpressibility of physical pain, arguing that the inflicted pain deriving from torture experiences is for its very nature unspeakable. According to the American scholar, pain nullifies the personal subjectivity and annihilates the capacity of individual agency (161-180). To Scarry, pain is a "supreme extra-linguistic event" (Fifield 119) which also isolates the individual from the others, preventing people any valid form of communication. Distancing herself from this position, historian Lisa Silverman argues that the author does not consider the forms of self-inflicted pain, stating that: "For Scarry, the pain has a primary meaning, and that meaning is the negation of the essence of humanity in its suppression of imagination" (21). Drawing on Silverman's perspective, it is possible to comment on Fatna El Bouih's case of hunger strike, which entails

the development of a fervid imagination as a strategy to endure pain and physical privations. During the hunger strike, water, drunk and passed over wrists and face, is the only form of physical relief to her. In addition, her thoughts dive into watery scenarios as Fatna projects herself into the waves of the sea and her sight looking at a river (El Bouih 43). Indeed, imagination plays a significant role for Fatna since the aquatic imaginary contributes to keep alive also her mind.

Moving away from a certain monolithic vision of the suffering subject as mute and impotent, Stephen Milich and Lamia Moghnieh state that the concept of un-narratability of a traumatic experience has given way to a more complex and contextual apparatus of readings (9). Likewise, Lisa Silverman encourages a reconceptualization of the connection between pain and truth, body, and language (22).

In this perspective, it is possible to argue that *Ḥadīth al-'Atama* draws a trajectory from physical violence to an effective communication in and from the prison, describing a transformation of the suffering body into a voice, and of voice into memory source. Still, the process is not entirely linear and direct. Despite the high level of historical consciousness and political commitment, Fatna El Bouih's and Latifa Jbabdi's literary accounts are not

exempt from space-time leaps, selective memory and removal mechanisms typical of the traumatized recollection. For instance, as Fatna El Bouih omits to speak about information told under torture, Latifa Jbabdi underlines her strenuous resistance in not pronouncing anything under torture. Or, while Jbabdi overlooks the hunger strike event, El Bouih puts great emphasis on her account about that experience. Occasionally, in *Ḥadīth al-'Atama*, mostly narrated in the first person, there is a narrative shift towards the external focus of the third-person narrative, establishing a “floating pronoun perspective” to Suellen Diaconoff’s reading (118). This mode works as an expedient which allows El Bouih to distance herself as the protagonist of her memories. Realistically, to diminish the effect of past tribulations on her.

On the other hand, the passage to the civil prison, which means the possibility to study, meet relatives and have more hours in the daylight, marks Fatna’s decision to note down memories of her carceral experience during her imprisonment. Fatna El Bouih starts to produce her prison account as an inmate, to prevent the facts, also the cruellest ones endured in jail, to be obliterated by the passing of time and the psychological rejection of painful memories. In completing her memoirs once released

from prison, El Bouih likely had access to her recollections through a re-actualization of physical pain and sensory deprivation, as suggested by Diaconoff: “It is reasonable that when a writer endeavours to re-access the mental/emotional texture of her prison experience through memory, her attention will be strongly focused on her physical body and the senses, and how they were both assaulted and reshaped” (122). Still, the defence mechanisms of the wounded memory in remembering the past violence must be considered. The bodily consciousness which emerges from Latifa Jbabdi’s and Fatna El Bouih’s traumatic experiences marks a type of memory which challenges the natural rejection, refusal, and obliteration of physical pain. The memorial voice and the ensuing restoration of the truth about the brutalities experienced arise precisely from the effort to overcome psychological barriers and removal necessities. In that vein, the act of memorial activism, fully ascribable to El Bouih’s and Jbabdi’s memoirs, entails a personal struggle in the political conviction of the necessity to testify against oblivion and censorship. If, as Naima Hachad claims, “agony can be a revolt” (“Monstrous Offspring” 128) - and the Meknès group’s hunger strike would confirm it - spreading the suffering through memories represents a form of

profound transgression of the *status quo*. As long as the remembering process poses, in the first place, a personal, intimate challenge.

Conclusion

Drawing conclusions, this article has discussed the topics of body and physical reactions to carceral coercion as shaped by the collective memoir *Ḥadīth al-'Atama*, that sheds light on the Moroccan state violence against female members of the Marxist-Leninist Movement (MMLM) during the seventies and eighties. It has analysed the bodily transformation in prison, from gendered violence to a corporeal weaponization, also commenting on the memory implications of the process.

Fatna El Bouih’s and Latifa Jbabdi’s memory accounts illustrate the systematic practices of violence inflicted on female dissidents. The repressive paradigm implies a doubled kind of suffering inflicted on women, as they undergo strategies of gender erosion and conformity to the male sphere combined with the most typical forms of sexual violence.

Although being arbitrary deprived of freedom and forced in inhumane prison conditions in a state of complete blindness and immobility, the violated female bodies are field of passive resilience and active resistance against the carceral

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repression. Thereby, Fatna's group uses imagination and creativity, staging communication sessions. They utilise their *bodies as books*, tracing letters' outlines to form sentences in order to convey sense, contrast their alienation, and reinforcing their collective sisterhood.

Subsequently, to achieve the substantial status of political prisoners which would guarantee an improvement of their prison conditions, they decide to impress an utter wound on their already fragile bodies. In this sense, it has been observed and described an overarching trajectory proceeding from an inflicted pain (torture and gender violence) to an agentic self-inflicted pain (hunger strike).

If the inflicted pain and the objectification of political prisoners are "insignia of power" (Scarry 51), the self-inflicted pain can be seen, according to Banu Bargu's perspective, as the ultimate pro-active path of re-appropriation of dignity within the carceral framework for women. In undergoing the hunger strike, El Bouih's and her comrades' political sisterhood produces an agentive gesture and a gender resistance giving rise to a real improvement in their conditions as political prisoners. Therefore, *Ḥadīth al-'Atama* shows the plasticity of pain and its contagious and manipulative nature.

Finally, in exploring the mutual relationship between corporeality and pain, memory and language, the suffering body has been defined as the *medium* of memorial recollecting. Pain frames events, and the memory of these events is impressed in the body. Still, the process of remembering stemming from the wounded bodies is not exempted from mechanisms of self-protection, distancing, and removals. In *Ḥadīth al-'Atama* the painful access to the past wounds, which is the basis of the idea of corporeal memory this article conveys, is fulfilled by El Bouih and Jbabdi thanks to their strenuous political commitment and their willing to make their stories publicly known. As their personal accounts testifies, making their voices heard in the public space becomes *de facto* a political matter. It concerns the issue of the public restoration of historical truth about the massive suspension of human rights during *Years of Lead* and, lastly, the possibility of rising a gendered memory in Morocco.

Notes

¹ On the commission IER (*Instance Équité et Réconciliation*), established in 2004 in a transitional justice framework in order to create reparative paths both individual and communal, see: Vermeren, *Le Maroc en transition*, Slyomovics, "Reparations in Morocco", Loudiy; Hegasy; Menin "A Life of Waiting". Criticism of the effectiveness of Moroccan community reparations and the real political will of the regime to resolve all the cases of disappearances have also been expressed (see for example: Vairel; Menin, "Descending Into Hell" and "Scomparsi (mukhtafyin)"; Hachad, "Narrating Tazmamart"). Besides, while Dennerlein points out the attempt by the commission to comply with international standards on women's rights in transitional justice (10), El Guabli has argued that the IER failed in specifically focusing on state violence against women, contributing to conversely producing an "unaware-gender history" of the *Years of Lead* ("Gender-Unaware History" 59).

² Among the former political prisoners who published their prison narratives in Arabic: Abdalqadir al-Shawi (*Kāna wa-Akhawāthā*, Kana and her Sisters; *Al-Sāhat al-Sharafiya*, Honorary Square), Sa'id Haji (*Dhākiratu al-Finiq: Siratun Dhātiyatun li-Wajhin min Sanawāt al-Raṣāṣ*, Memories of Phoenix: a Biography of a Man from the Years of Lead), Salah Oudie (al-'Aris, The Groom). In general, more numerous are the autobiographical accounts on the *Years of Lead* in French. See for instance: *Dans les Jardins Secrets du Roi du Maroc* by Ali Bourequat, *Tazmamart. Une prison de la mort au Maroc* by Christine Daure-Serfaty, *La chambre noire ou Derb Moulay Chérif* by Jaouad Mdidech, *Tazmamart Cellule 10* by Ahmed Merkouzi, *Le chemin des ordalies* by Abdellatif Laabi, *A l'ombre de Lalla Chafia and La tyrannie ordinaire: lettres de prison* by Driss Rekab.

³ See for example: *Tazmamart. Une prison de la mort au Maroc* by Christine Daure-Serfaty, *La prisonnière* by Malika Oufkir and *Tazmamart côté femme: Témoignage* by Rabea Bennouna. In wider terms, *Arabic prison memoirs* by Egyptian feminists Nawal El Saadawi (*Mudhakkirātī fī Sijn al-Nisā'*, Memoirs from a Women's Prison) and Latifa Al-Zayyat (*Ḥamlat Taftīsh: 'awrāq Shakhṣiyya*, Inspection. A Private Diary) had a greater diffusion in the MENA region. For a comparative perspective on female prison memoirs from Egypt to Palestine, from South Africa to El Salvador and United States, see Barbara Harlow's *Barred: Women, Writing, and Political Detention*.

⁴ Mustafa Kamala and Susan Slyomovics translated the text into English as *Talk of Darkness*.

⁵ Bouab's and Jbabdi's testimonials were first published in 1994 in the Moroccan newspaper *al-Ittiḥād al-Ishtiraki* (Slyomovics, "Reparations in Morocco" 144).

⁶ In comparing Fatna El Bouih's and former Marxist-Leninist prisoner Nour-eddine Saoudi's memory accounts, Laura Menin ("Rewriting the World" 58) notices how women were subjected to masculinization and, likewise, men were feminized and addressed with homophobic insults.

⁷ Translations from Arabic are all mine.

⁸ In disregard of religion, tortures were also inflicted during the holy month of Ramadan.

⁹ The word *falaqa* indicates the wooden stick to which the victim's feet are tied and raised to expose them to the blows better. This torture is known in Europe as *bastinado*, from Spanish *bastón*, stick.

¹⁰ A year after her death, in 1978, Saïda Menebhi's *Poèmes, Lettres, Écrits de prison* were published in Rabat. This poetry collection represents her legacy as a human and militant. From the prison's deprivations, her look embraces the entire suffering humanity, strengthening the ecumenism of the global struggle against injustices around the world. For a comparative reading of El Bouih's and Menebhi's literary production, see Valerie Orlando ("Feminine Spaces and Places in the Dark Recesses of Morocco's Past: the Prison Testimonials in Poetry and Prose of Saïda Menebhi and Fatna El Bouih").

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