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Women in Taarab (review)

Kennedy Walibora Waliaula

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years of Bouraoui's career, from 1995 to 2005, by focusing on the term "nomadisme" in three texts, *Nomadisme*, *Retour à Thyna*, and *La francophonie à l'estomac*. The contributions that follow explore Bouraoui's transcultural themes from a variety of perspectives: the multicultural and multilingual Toronto in *Ainsi parle la tour CN*, the possible link between "transprophétie," transcendence, and mysticism in *Rose des sables* and *Bangkok Blues*, and a geographic viewpoint, the exile and wandering of the mind from Canada to Haiti, the marginalization of migrants, and the interrelation of Jews and Muslims in Tunisia.

In the second part entitled "Poétique de l'avenir" (Poetics of the Future), the concept of transculture is approached through a metaphoric and poetic interpretation of the francophone world, the creativity of poetic language and of the "parole inspirée" (232). In "Approches diverses" (Diverse Approaches), the third part, Christiane Ndiaye analyzes the reception of Bouraoui's work. She suggests that the historians of literature have difficulties categorizing a Canadian author originally from the Maghreb whose purpose in writing is to transgress borders and barriers. According to Noureddine Slimani, Bouraoui's poetic of the imaginary brings forth what he names a subversion of the genre, writing taking a multiplicity of forms and becoming fragmentary and interstitial. For his part, Sergio Villani examines the traditional and the experimental aspects of the poet and critic's work whereby "le modernisme [. . .] s'inscrit toujours dans la tradition" 'modernism [. . .] is always inscribed in tradition' (312).

Entitled "Poétique du féminin" (Poetics of the Feminine), the last section explores the place of women in Bouraoui's novels through the questions of identity, culture, and symbolic construction in the Maghreb, Egypt, and Europe. From another angle, Cécile Cloutier and Jean-Max Tixier examine, in *La femme entre les lignes*, the theme of love as a metaphor of literature and the creative process. The last study, by Suzanne Crosta, brings to a conclusion a book that is worthy of attention in the field of francophone studies. It analyzes with depth and subtlety the last forty years of Bouraoui's literary, poetic, and critical work that is rooted in several continents, from Africa to Europe and North America.

—ERIC TOUYA DE MARENNE
ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK

Women in Taarab

BY MOHAMED EL-MOHAMMADY RIZK

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Peter Lang, 2007.

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Exploring the role of women in *taarab* songs, *Women in Taarab* is another testament to the increasing intellectual interest in this hybrid genre of Swahili music. This incisive text examines the linguistic and stylistic features of the *taarab* songs in Zanzibar and focuses on the representation of women in these songs. Following Said A. M. Khamis, Mohamed El-Mohammady Rizk asserts that although *taarab* songs are written, they bear numerous elements of orature.

The text is divided into four chapters. The first chapter provides the theoretical framework that informs the study and explores the concept and history of *taarab* in Zanzibar. In this chapter, Rizk traces the history of *taarab* from its introduction in Zanzibar during the reign of Oman Sultan Seyyid Bargash (1870–1888). The book highlights *taarab*'s dynamism, exemplified by its gradual shift from exclusive palace entertainment to the popular realm, and in recent decades from music to be listened to only, to dance music. In chapter 2 the text dwells on the cultural milieu concomitant with *taarab* music and distinguishes *taarab* songs from other Swahili songs. In chapter 3, the book focuses on *taarab* as a performance art, and analyzes the linguistic aspects of *taarab* lyrics, their deployment of figures of speech, as well as the participation of women. Chapter 4 features the writer's findings and conclusions.

It is Rizk's analysis of the images of women in *taarab* that is particularly intriguing. He argues that the representation of women as flowers, angels, birds, pearls, stars, and other precious items not only underscores their femininity and beauty, but also dehumanizes them by portraying them as objects of male sexual desire. For example, in one song a woman is presented as *nanasi* (pineapple) ready to be devoured for *ladha yake* (literally, how she tastes, or her taste, but connoting sexual pleasure) that she can provide. Rizk claims that the incongruity between the plaudits in the lyric's images and the underlining sexist connotations is predicated on the fact that there are fewer female composers. Further, he claims that even female composers replicate the same demeaning images of women, including the stereotypical temptress, submissive housewife, etc. (114).

This situation exemplifies one of the contradictions in the text, since for one, the idea of male domination and sexism in *taarab* that Rizk outlines runs counter to an earlier claim in the book that the women in Zanzibar are far less subject to phallogentric and phallogratic tendencies prevalent elsewhere in African (36). Also, *Women in Taarab* could have profited from rigorous editing, as there are a numerous typographical and grammatical errors. Moreover, the text suffers from some inaccurate or inept translations of Swahili words. For instance, the writer uses "cage" for *tundu* instead of "nest," as the context dictates (100).

Despite such weaknesses, *Women in Taarab* offers insight into the centrality of women in *taarab* and is a valuable addition to the study of the rich Swahili culture, language, and literature.

—KENNEDY WALIBORA WALIAULA
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY