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Housework and Dance as Counterpoints in French-Tunisian Filmmaker Raja Amari's *Satin rouge*

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Abstract

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, when an independent, postcolonial Tunisia emerged from under French colonial rule and began to engage in “modernized” nation-building practices, questions addressing the role of Tunisian women (and more importantly their image in this “new,” postcolonial and independent society) took precedence. Many political, artistic, and intellectual figures were concerned with how Tunisian women’s images were constructed in the public eye, in the arts, and in the media. These concerns led to a variety of reformist thoughts during this nationalist movement (and even still today), but all postulations appeared to coalesce in the perceived belief in the need to construct “modern” Tunisian women’s images into a single, unifying image of motherhood.

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In the late 1950s and early 1960s, when an independent, postcolonial Tunisia emerged from under French colonial rule and began to engage in “modernized” nation-building practices, questions addressing the role of Tunisian women (and more importantly their image in this “new,” postcolonial and independent society) took precedence. Many political, artistic, and intellectual figures were concerned with how Tunisian women’s images were constructed in the public eye, in the arts, and in the media. These concerns led to a variety of reformist thoughts during this nationalist movement (and even still today), but all postulations appeared to coalesce in the perceived belief in the need to construct “modern” Tunisian women’s images into a single, unifying image of motherhood.

An overview of many of the reformist thoughts during both the colonial and post-colonial periods reveals both conformity and resistance toward earlier, colonial or imperial discourses on Tunisian women and their image.¹ On one hand, the post-independence call for Tunisian women’s education and participation in the building of an independent Tunisia reproduces earlier discourses on women’s roles in the project of national regeneration, in which womanhood was conceived as the basis for a (French-) Tunisian nationalist or imperialist project in which educated mothers’ primary duty was to raise male children, who thus in turn either formed loyal subjects (during the French colonial period) or promising future nation builders (after independence) (Zayafoon 101).

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On the other hand, the post-independence campaign to abolish the veil, which became a “foreign custom” after the independence, flew in the face of earlier colonial discourse in which the veil was seen as a symbol of Tunisia’s Arab-Islamic identity and marker of resistance to French colonial rule and cultural influence (Zayzafoon 117). However, despite the various conformities and resistances toward the diversity of reformist discourses, the overarching question concerning the gender construction of Tunisian women in society and in the arts and media persisted and continues to persist even today.

In Tunisian nationalist discourses, Zayzafoon argues that Tunisian women’s gender construction is bound to the manner in which Tunisian women’s identity is perceived. She argues that, Tunisian women’s identity “lies in her unpaid services and sacrifices to the *umma* (‘nation’) through her dedication to her husband and children” (107). Zayzafoon postulates that, “Whereas Tunisian men embody the political and economic agency of the *umma*, women are the keepers of Islamic tradition and the *umma*’s moral and spiritual mission” (107).

Given this emphasis, it is not difficult to see how, by extension, Zayzafoon concludes that “preoccupation with female purity and modesty is at the center of the social norms governing gender relations in [North Africa],” (107) for this preoccupation “appears in the value of *ird* or the general code of honor” (Charrad 63). As Charrad explains, *ird* refers inclusively to the honor or moral purity of a group, its prestige in the community, and its strength, and is a collective characteristic (63). It is essentially a reflection of family lineage and depends on the behavior of the women of the given lineage and can be lost in cases of female misconduct (63). Thus, women

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carry a large share of the burden (or some women would say the honor) for safeguarding the family lineage.

Charrad explains that family reputation depends a great deal on “the virginity of daughters and sisters, the fidelity of wives, and the continence of widowed and divorced daughters or sisters” (63). Yet, female sexual activity is not the only factor on which a family’s reputation may ride. According to Charrad, “norms of chastity and modesty [also] apply to women’s behavior in public,” which favor modes of discretion and a certain degree of invisibility. The emphasis on the normative perception of Tunisian women in their family lineage as (married) mothers (the prescribed monolithic and homogenous representation of “acceptable” contemporary female identity) collectively persists and pervades most female gender constructions in contemporary Tunisian cultural and social thought.² As we shall see in this article, one important cultural domain of contemporary Tunisian society, its cinema, is playing a critical role in challenging these widespread traditional belief systems and underlying normative cultural values and attitudes.

Raja Amari’s *Satin rouge* (2002), her *début* feature-length film, offers interesting insights into these challenges to Tunisia’s widespread conventional belief systems and underlying cultural values and attitudes through its examination of postcolonial female gender construction and processes of (urban) contemporary female identity formation in Tunis, Tunisia. Through her cinematic portrait of the film’s protagonist, a forty-something widowed housewife and mother of one, Amari’s film also poses important questions concerning women’s representation (understood in the sense of constructed cultural identities) in contemporary Tunisian society.

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Moreover, Amari's insights and questions indirectly speak to larger preoccupations at play in many contemporary North African cinematic domestic dramas concerning the need to shift lines of gender representation and ways of seeing gender on screen and in society. As I will develop in this article, in *Satin rouge*, Amari's illustration of female housework and its associated representations provide useful points of critical inquiry since they may proffer a new or different vantage point in examining the Self-Other divide and the role this divide plays in constructing identity and gender in film and society.

Through a detailed analysis of the opening sequence of *Satin rouge*, a sequence which, in my view, captures concretely the possibility for (re)appropriating female representation in contemporary North African cinema, I turn to several formal aspects of Amari's filmmaking and question how they may begin to flesh out these shifting lines of women's representation in contemporary Tunisia. In this detailed analysis, I will focus primarily on Amari's use of the panning shot and framing because both are key cinematic techniques for creating cinematic agency (an operation critical to understanding and interpreting the representation of the female protagonist) and because both the panning shot and framing work in *Satin rouge* to subvert traditional representations of Tunisian women in a cinematic domestic drama. In turn, this subversion, which is grounded in intercultural social and artistic exchanges within as well as beyond Tunisia's cultural borders, opens up new paths to challenging many prevalent Tunisian belief systems and underlying cultural values and attitudes.

Satin rouge showcases an interesting case study of contemporary Tunisian domestic (albeit urban) drama built on the congruous and conflicting relationships between differing cultural,

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social, political, artistic, and ideological discourses (largely their contradictions, paradoxes, and overlaps), especially in regard to gender roles and gender relations, and is reflective of many of the scholarly debates taking place concerning contemporary Tunisian culture and society.³ At the intersection of these discourses in both *Satin rouge* and contemporary urban Tunisian society often rests the primordial figure of the housewife and stereotypical portrayal of her “moral and spiritual” way of life, which typically translates into her silent domestic obedience and incessant housekeeping and child-raising practices.

In this film, Amari levies new debates addressing interpretations of performances of women’s traditional roles and desire for self-expression in contemporary Tunisian society by engaging in a multilayered manner the ideological implications of this traditional social construct of the housewife and her comportment. Amari’s multilayered approach in *Satin rouge* offers a timely interpretation of Tunisia’s intercultural exchanges within, as well as beyond, its normative discourses of conventional female behavior.

Although not much published secondary work exists on Amari in North America at the time of writing this article, pieces of information appear here and there in cinematic secondary texts that purport to broaden spectators’ awareness of (especially postcolonial) women filmmakers. One such text informs that before starting her training and studies at the famous FEMIS (L’Institut de Formation et d’Enseignement pour les Métiers de l’Image et du Son) in Paris, France, Amari had spent much of the prior two years writing critical articles for the Tunisian cinematic magazine *Cin’écrits*, which is edited by the “Association Tunisienne pour la promotion de la critique cinématographique” (Gabous 184).

Again before her studies at La FEMIS, Amari also earned a “Diplome de langue et culture italiennes” from the Societ`a Dante D’Alighieri in Tunis and a “Maîtrise de littérature et civilization franc,aise (option Histoire de l’art)” at the Université de Tunis I (Gabous 184). Adding to her eclectic academic background, moreover, Amari also earned a “Premier prix de danse” at the Conservatoire National de Musique et de Danse in Tunis. We may clearly see at work in *Satin rouge* the convergence of the diversity of Amari’s academic preparation and the multiple intercultural exchanges these various domains of study enable. Specifically in relation to Amari’s intercultural cinematic exchanges in *Satin rouge*, we may turn to both France and Egypt in finding sources of inspiration for what we may call Amari’s transvergent style of filmmaking. By a transvergent style, I am suggesting a filmmaking method which is “not limited to artificial borders or boundaries of national cinemas” but that instead “proposes a clear understanding of the elements of the interconnectedness that may bind a filmmaker to a given film culture or national identity at a given time” (Higbee 87).

In addition, a transvergent style of filmmaking may also aim to expose and foreground (celebrate even) the differences whose cracks a nationalist ideology might attempt to paper over (Higbee 84). A secondary aim in this article is to develop (in)directly how these characteristics apply to Raja Amari (a Tunisian emigrant graduate of La FEMIS and filmmaker home-based in Paris) and *Satin rouge* (a French-Tunisian co-production.) In an interview given to IndieWIRE around the time of the New York theatrical release of *Satin rouge* (in early summer 2002) when answering a question concerning the filmmakers who have inspired her, Amari responds “the new French cinema” and directors like François Ozon and Arnaud Desplechin for “the way they deal with their

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characters” (Schultz). Although Amari does not develop in this interview what she understands as the way Ozon and Desplechin “deal with their characters,” it is not difficult to see when analyzing her “dealing with” the character of Lilia (the protagonist) in *Satin rouge* that she perhaps appreciates and emulates the intricate and elaborate multidimensionality (in terms of gender construction, sexuality, attitudes, behaviors, internal conflicts, and psychological dilemmas) of Ozon’s and Desplechin’s principal characters as seen in such films as *Under the Sand* (Ozon, 2001) or *Esther Kahn* (Desplechin, 2000). Yet, what appears more striking in Amari’s construction of Lilia’s character in *Satin rouge* lies not necessarily with her hybridization of “new French cinema” and contemporary Tunisian cinema but rather her interconnectedness with Egyptian filmmaking of the 1940s and 1950s.

In an interview appearing as a bonus feature on *Satin rouge*’s North American DVD version, an interviewer asks Amari if the cabaret and belly dancing are merely an “excuse” to tell the story of a woman’s independence in an Arab society (2003). In her reply, Amari explains that, as a dancer herself who had studied for many years at the Conservatoire de Tunis, she had always wanted to make a film revolving around belly dancing. She shares that she grew up watching the ‘Golden Age’ Egyptian musicals from the 1940s and 1950s and that both she and her mother loved the well-known dancer Samia Gamal and singer Farid El Atrache.

One could argue that Amari’s reworking of the Egyptian musical, as epitomized by Gamal and Atrache, through *Satin rouge*’s soundtrack and Lilia’s cabaret performances pay homage to this cinematic genre or evidences Amari’s authorial presence in the film, since the Egyptian musical genre has clearly influenced Amari’s spectator experience (and thus by extension her filmmaking)

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and by all accounts her personal interests in studying the art of raqs sharqi (an Arabic term for “belly dancing”). Furthermore, the Egyptian musical genre in general and Samia Gamal in particular offer Amari a privileged discourse on a representation of Arab femininity in which a woman (as object of the gaze) accepts and returns the gaze through a performance of self-expression in movement in which the camera faithfully follows her, keeping Gamal in the center of the cinematic frame, and thus establishes her cinematic agency in her performances.

In discussing more generally the figure of the dancer in relation to *Satin rouge*, Florence Martin finds in this constructed figure the incarnation of a multiple feminine form of resistance (54). By a multiple feminine form of resistance, Martin appears to suggest a liberating (and liberated) representation of (albeit marginal) female behavior or performance that offers an alternative construction of Tunisian femininity within Tunisian society. For Martin in *Satin rouge*, the figure of the dancer appears to function as an almost primordial figure that resists normative, monolithic, and traditional discourses of femininity—such as those that traditionally portray women as complacent or subservient, domestically imprisoned, silent, and/ or the object of male gazing or, as presented in this article’s introduction, within a restrictive framework that equates womanhood with motherhood.

Women’s roles and identities in Tunisian society, in everyday practice and normative cultural and social thought, testify to their contradictory constructions. On one hand, Tunisian post-independence society reveres the Tunisian woman as mother and perceives her as the “true guardian of tradition, the glue that holds [her] people together in the face of many threats from without as well as from within the national sphere” (Merini 156). Yet on the other hand, the family

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generally regards her needs and concerns as secondary. However paradoxically, Tunisia does stand alone among its Maghrebi neighbors for the extensive degree of freedom it has extended, since its liberation from France in 1956, to both its male and female nationals. The installation of the Personal Status Code (PSC) in Tunisia granted women citizenship and the right to vote, forbade the veil, abolished polygamy, improved women's rights in divorce by allowing women to initiate it, and challenged the practice of arranged marriages. In contrary to the general understanding of national decolonizational discourses of North Africa that deny women any voice and any identity outside their biological role within the family, we see here how official political discourses conversely granted Tunisian women a voice and created a space for Tunisian women in educational institutions and the workplace (thus an identity outside the family).

Yet double standards, ideological paradoxes, and social contradictions still overwhelmingly exist. And moreover, it is these very cultural double standards, ideological paradoxes, and social contradictions that shape the landscape of contemporary Tunisian cinema and that (in terms of cinematic gender construction and representation) remain central to analyses and discussions of contemporary Tunisian films, especially in regard to *Satin rouge* and its protagonist's "doubled identity" as socially-accepted, "saintly" widowed housewife and socially-outcast, lascivious cabaret dancer. As we shall see in this article, both archetypes play critical roles in instigating change in contemporary Tunisian social and cultural thought, most notably in the manners in which both mother and dancer express their inner desires and enact their tropes of resistances.

As asserted above in relation to Samia Gamal, the dancer (although who first appears to replay certain "expected" performances of femininity, especially insofar as object of the cabaret male

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gaze) ultimately resists the aforementioned traditional discourses since through her own self-expression in movement—her “corporal voice”—she effectively writes her own discourse on the primacy of female voice and the liberating power of self-expression. Therefore, the dancer offers an alternative construction of femininity as multiple. She may or may not be a mother; she may or may not run the daily domestic operations of a household; she may or may not be an object of male gazing; and so forth. These factors need not be taken into consideration when analyzing her cultural identity. Thus, the dancer is not directly linked to the family or the home, which are the primary stations in life for (especially upper-class) women in traditional discourses of Tunisian femininity and certainly in nationalist discourses describing women’s relationship to the umma. Moreover, the dancer need not be directly linked to male gazing either, for as Amari shows in *Satin rouge*, regardless of public or private setting (the cabaret versus Lilia’s bedroom—two places where she dances,) the dancer may dance for herself or for other female dancers and ignore male spectators. The dancer on screen (and one may argue in society) may effectively resist the institutions and pressures of family and home and the practices of male gazing simply through her existence outside these institutions and through her cinematic agency and/ or ability to return the gaze through a performance of self-expression in movement.

Martin’s notion of resistance in this form of feminine multiplicity (that is to say alternative ways of being feminine and seeing femininity that resist the aforementioned normative or monolithic forms, practices, or institutions) also brings to mind an important observation made by many scholars of postcolonial women’s filmmaking, most notably Alison Butler. Butler asserts that postcolonial women’s filmmaking is not ‘at home in any of the host cinematic or national discourses it inhabits, but that it is always an inflected mode, incorporating, reworking and

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contesting the conventions of established traditions' (Butler 22, my emphasis). It is, moreover, interesting to note that many postcolonial or transcultural female filmmakers (e.g., Assia Djebar, Yamina Benguigui, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Claire Denis, Coline Serreau, among others) often foreground the home and its associations in their films as a locus of resistance. *Satin rouge* is no exception. By drawing on Butler's assertion and Sarah Pink's (2003) recent anthropological research on gender, domestic objects, and everyday life, I underline in this article the "counterpoints" (or the multiple and often conflicting representations in the protagonist's cinematic portrait) that the home and housework establish or challenge in the film. In *Satin rouge*, I want to argue that these counterpoints create multiple femininities and multiple ways of being feminine. Thus in echoing Pink's observations, I suggest that these counterpoints in *Satin rouge* may be constructed in counterpoint with one another, may open a space for alternative gender representations that challenge the prevailing hegemonic version(s), and may allow for individual agents to act as the instigators of change (43). For Amari in *Satin rouge*, this "instigator of change" comes to life not just in the figure of the dancer, as Martin has rightly pointed out, but also in the figure of the mother.

Satin rouge narrates the "coming of age" of a forty-something widow, Lilia (Hiam Abbass), living and raising her teenage daughter, Salma (Hend El Ahem), in contemporary Tunis, Tunisia. The narrative follows Lilia's progression from a seemingly conservative and traditional housewife and mother to a rather liberal and "modern" woman and mother-in-law. In the beginning of the film, Lilia's daily existence is mostly limited to Salma and taking care of their home. One night when Salma does not return home as expected, Lilia suspects that she may be in a local cabaret. She enters the cabaret but is overcome by its atmosphere. She faints but recovers in the cabaret's lead

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dancer, Folla's (Monia Hichri) dressing room. The two forge a friendship, and Lilia soon becomes a cabaret performer herself. Lilia begins a short-lived romance with Chokri (Maher Kammoon), who unbeknownst to her is romancing Salma. In the penultimate scene, Chokri learns of Lilia's and Salma's mother-daughter relationship, and Lilia learns of Salma's and Chokri's engagement. Chokri and Lilia vow to keep their affair a secret from Salma, and the film ends with a marriage reception in which family, neighbors, and Lilia's cabaret colleagues joyfully dance and celebrate the marital union of Salma and Chokri.

Amari explains that she desired to present an image of contemporary Tunisian society in *Satin rouge* as divided into two worlds. Not the traditional social division of masculine and feminine but rather the opposition of day and night. She asserts that:

We're talking about two quite opposite worlds where everything is opposed. On the one hand, the world of the day is strict, dominant and prudish. On the other hand, the world of the night is relaxed, marginal and lascivious. I wanted them to join up at all costs through Lilia's character. (Amari 2003)

Amari continues to state that in typical traditional Tunisian society, "their paths would never cross because nightclubs are perceived as a bit creepy and a depraved environment" (Amari 2003). She stylizes Lilia's cinematic maternal portrait as "a 'regular' woman, a model housewife with a great deal of moral conviction and a strict sense of duty" (Amari 2003). However by the conclusion of the film, Lilia has gradually (and almost in spite of herself and her convictions) gone against "everything she originally stood for and everything that she forbade or reproached her daughter with: sleeping over, going out with a man" (Amari 2003). In this interview, Amari connects these

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two social worlds through the double life that she finds every Tunisian lives. When commenting on the way in which Lilia hides her involvement with the cabaret from her family and neighbors, Amari suggests that:

[In Tunisia], it is the way things are done; everybody leads a double life in a way. It is very much linked to the relationships between men and women. In Arab society, there is a restrictive code surrounding the family, women and their place in society. My friends all have boyfriends and girlfriends but their families don't know about it or at least pretend not to. Social hypocrisy begets this behavior. (Amari 2003)

Although this double life perhaps most frequently manifests itself in male/female romantic relations in contemporary Tunisia, Amari uses this concept in *Satin rouge* to observe normative and marginal cultural representations of femininity and female behavior in contemporary Tunisian society.

In *Satin rouge*, Amari uses Lilia's double life as housewife by day (the Self) and cabaret performer by night (the Other) to present two portraits of contemporary Tunisian femininity. The former portrait adopts and the later portrait questions traditional Tunisian discourses of domesticity and the modern Tunisian woman's supposed "moral and spiritual mission." Yet, Amari does not rely on oppositional and isolated settings of home and cabaret to present these portraits throughout the film. As the opening sequence reveals, these two portraits may co-exist and merge within the domestic sphere, although not without personal or familial conflict as the film will later develop.

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In addition to setting up Lilia's doubled femininity, which seems to respond to Deniz Kandiyoti's call to focus on shifting lines of demarcation in North African cinemas that exist within each gender (51), the opening sequence also suggests that the two instigators of change in the film, the dancer and the mother, share the same point of origin, and thus are not strictly pitted against one another in quasi-binary terms as seemingly witnessed in Tunisian hegemonic discourses of femininity. Furthermore, the opening sequence is also significant for it suggests that both the dancer and the mother (as instigators of change) become part of Lilia's multiple form of feminine resistance to the institutions of home and homemaking from within the home. Amari cinematically captures this multiple form of feminine resistance in the opening sequence when filming Lilia's housekeeping acts with the panning shot and framing, two cinematic tools which both subtly work to subvert and challenge these institutions and many traditional discourses of Tunisian femininity in this film.

This reading of the opening sequence of *Satin rouge* would seem to support Martin Stollery's assertion that contemporary Tunisian films that focus on domestic drama raise questions concerning "relationships across generations and between different types of masculinity [that] hint at potential openings onto wider cultural and political change" (51). Stollery and other theorists of gender working within and on North African cultures assert that, on the most general level, there is a clear "homology between patriarchal norms within the domestic and the political spheres" (Stollery 50). This "homology" generally constitutes the basis of many postcolonial artists' representations of women as the nation, which metaphorically defines how the nation should and should not be. Stollery concurs that although such representation confers a sense of (symbolic) agency to women as subjects in processes of national identification, these

representations do not necessarily “signify autonomy for women since they are typically formulated within male-dominated projects” (50). As Valentine Moghadam understands this paradox:

...women frequently become the sign or marker of political goals and of cultural identity during processes of revolution or state-building, and when power is being contested or reproduced. . . Women’s behavior and appearance. . . come to be defined by, and are frequently subject to, the political or cultural objectives of political movements, states, and leaderships. (2)

These broad assertions on the connections between gender and nation serve as useful points of departure for analyzing representations of gender in contemporary North African cinemas. Stollery finds that these assertions, “. . . may indicate abiding cultural trends [but that they often overlook] the nuances, subtleties, and contradictions which the non-official, non-programmatic cultural arenas of the cinema can often publicly articulate” (50). In her theorizations of cinematic representations of gender in North Africa, Kandiyoti offers a useful optic through which to examine gender. Her optic avoids beginning any analysis with the traditional, unified, and fixed definitions of (Arab or other) masculinity or femininity. She advocates, rather, for a reading practice that focuses on shifting lines of demarcation that exist within each gender as well as the lines that exist between the two genders. Stollery adopts a similar perspective by suggesting that:

... the identification of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities, related to factors such as age, social status, and institutional hierarchies, becomes a central concern. Attention is redirected to the ways in which boundaries between hegemonic and

subordinate masculinities are fluid and permeable. They are negotiated within individual life experiences, and redefined over time. (51)

Stollery proposes that “piercing this ‘façade’ and seeking out ‘discrepancy’ between ideology and actions is precisely what some contemporary Tunisian cinema attempts to do” (51). Stollery reveals how male privilege and authority, traditionally embodied in the father figure, became the “objects of scrutiny and contestation” (51). He concludes that contemporary Tunisian films that focus on domestic drama raise questions concerning “relationships across generations and between different types of masculinity [that] hint at potential openings onto wider cultural and political change” (51). It would appear that Amari approaches the domestic drama of *Satin rouge*, either intentionally or unintentionally, within a similar framework made clear from the very beginning of the film. However, her specific focus on multiple forms of performing “femininity” raises questions that concern relationships across female generations and between different types of femininity. Let us turn now to a detailed sequence analysis of the opening sequence and these two portraits of contemporary Tunisian femininity.

The opening scene of the film splits the opening credits into two parts. The credits (written in both French and Arabic in white lettering which literally reads as a marker or sign of Amari’s “hybrid” or transvergent cinema) begin to roll on a silent black backdrop. Then at about forty-five seconds into this opening sequence, we hear chirping birds followed by random city noises (children’s voices, automobile traffic sounds, and muffled footsteps shuffling by.) The credits continue to roll for about one minute longer, but now they are set against a soundtrack. We hear percussion rhythms sounding on a drum, a man singing, a meshing of sound as if radio channels were being

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changed, an announcement by a female voice informing the listeners of a new Tunisian soccer team and its latest match results, and then a male singer performing a song. At this point, the first image appears on the screen, and we see Lilia's reflection (although we do not realize it at first) in one of her bedroom mirrors as she is straightening the curtains of her bedroom window.

For the remaining almost three minutes of this scene, Amari captures with no cuts and only very subtle camera pans right and left and very slow camera tilts up and down Lilia's movements as she cleans and dances. In a very defamiliarized and quasi-documentary way, Amari introduces the main preoccupation in *Satin rouge*—Lilia's sense of social and moral duty and the conflict entrained by her desire to pursue her own interests and longing for self-expression. However, Amari's use of Lilia's reflection in the bedroom mirror introduces a discursive theme running throughout the narrative suggesting that nothing is quite as it seems. In a very literal and physical way through this first representation of Lilia in this opening shot, Amari uses the bedroom mirror to manifest Lilia's double life and double portrait of femininity. On one hand on the film's narrative level, this doubled image sets up her doubled existence and identity as model housewife during the day and cabaret performer during the night. Yet on the other hand and not too unlike Lacan's mirror stage, the reflected image which the spectator misrecognizes as the flesh and body of Lilia bespeaks Lilia's own eventual awakening to her initial misrecognition.

The opening sequence continues as the camera (without cutting) slowly pans right to capture the dresser top on which rests a framed photograph of a man, whom we assume is her late husband. Lilia has not yet entered the frame as the camera precedes her movements. Moving more quickly than the camera's panning, Lilia then enters the medium shot in order to dust the dresser top and

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photograph frame. Again preceding Lilia's movements, the camera continues slowly to pan right to film Lilia's vanity table on which a framed photograph of her daughter rests. As before in the previous shot, Lilia quickly enters this shot to dust this piece of furniture and photograph. Without hesitating, the camera continues to pan right, filming the other side of the vanity table upon which rest some of Lilia's hairstyling tools and products. Once more Lilia moves into the shot, and the camera continues to pan right to film a bedside table on which is placed a framed photograph of a baby. At this point, the camera comes to rest. Lilia again enters the frame in an almost full shot as she bends over to straighten the bedding.

It is often said that the panning shot tends to emphasize the unity of space and the connectedness of people and objects within that space (Giannetti 126). This is a useful definition to apply to discussions of Amari's panning shot (and by extension framing) in *Satin rouge* since both tools, in general, emphasize the literal cinematic contiguity of people and objects sharing the same space (Giannetti 126), a key to decoding most if not all cinematic domestic dramas. In this opening sequence, the unity of space is preserved but not in the traditional reactionary way. Rather than panning to keep Lilia in the center of the frame as she moves about the bedroom, Amari ironically refuses to focus on Lilia's movements and housekeeping motions. As a result, the bedroom and its objects seem to capture the focus of Amari's camera lens. The camera panning movement that precipitates Lilia's motions reinforces this reading. Thus, Lilia's actions appear intrusive as she enters into each frame and obstructs the spectator's view of the setting. We have a sense of the home as a depot of "stuff" that require maintenance and as a restrictive world of immanent acts.

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With the panning shot and framing, Amari limits the connectedness or literal contiguity within the space to Lilia and the bedroom objects. Not only does this create a feeling of isolation – for no one else is humanly present in this sequence with Lilia – but we also begin to have a sense of the home's (and family's via the photographs) dominating presence and priority in Lilia's life and in traditional Tunisian female society. This reinforces the so-called “modern Tunisian woman's moral and spiritual mission.” Furthermore, the filming of Lilia at the edges of the cinematic frame also creates a greater implied distance between her character and the spectator or even a lack of identification with the character, for the spectator's eye is drawn first to the bedroom objects and not Lilia. This use of framing allows the spectator to take more easily a critical distance in examining the traditional discourse of femininity on display at this point in the opening sequence. Additionally, the “body cropping” secondary effect of Amari's framing in this opening sequence also makes evident traditional discourses of Tunisian femininity and hints at the aforementioned nationalist project of regeneration, which Amari wishes to undo in *Satin rouge*.

Never once in this point in the extreme long take of the opening sequence does Amari film Lilia in a full shot revealing her entire body. Nor has Amari ever fully captured her face on screen. Rather, Amari cinematically dissects Lilia's body—filming her hands, shoulders and upper back, hips, and torso as if all separable from her body as Lilia moves into each frame. The effect of this manner of filming Lilia is to defamiliarize conventional ways of seeing women represented on the cinematic screen (at least in Western filmmaking practices), yet also to reflect Tunisian ways of viewing woman's traditional role in traditional Tunisian society; i.e., housework, childbirth, and childrearing. In other words, Amari's focusing independently on Lilia's hands, shoulders, hips, and torso (parts of the female body commonly associated with housework, childbearing, and

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childrearing) foregrounds women's two important functions for traditional Tunisian society—maintaining domestic order and transmitting values and morality to the next generation, her “moral and spiritual mission.”

However, much of Lilia's housework in this scene occurs on the edges of the cinematic frame or even all together off screen. The irony in this fact lies in that although Amari does foreground Lilia's housework and introduces her in the text as a housewife from her very first portrait, Amari's refusal to center Lilia's movements specifically within the cinematic frame thus renders her housework almost marginal or secondary. Therefore, from the very beginning of *Satin rouge*, Amari articulates a challenge to traditional Tunisian ways of thinking, representing, and viewing Tunisian women. Expressed differently, housework in Amari's filmmaking, which is represented in normative contemporary Tunisian discourses as rather central to Tunisian women's feminine condition, becomes an important instigating agent of change (positioned marginally on screen) in establishing counterpoints in Lilia's cinematic portrait of femininity, which we may in turn use in examining the opening onto wider cultural and political change.

In her anthropological research, Sarah Pink aligns the performance of housework with the development of agency and finds that individual agency in the home is a key force in producing changing gender configurations in society (41). There also exists a general consensus in her work that housework is a process of representation and sometimes intentional and creative strategies of affirmation of or resistance to perceived conventions, norms or discourses (42). And moreover, Pink asserts that one may read housework as “[a process] of the constitution of self that involve embodied performative actions, material objects and sensory experience” (42). The closing

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moments of the opening sequence of *Satin rouge*, to which we will now turn our attention, will reveal how housework, as a performative act, allows Lilia self-consciously to articulate her trope of resistance in a form of feminine multiplicity and (re)constitute her (shifting) gendered identity.

The opening sequence continues as Lilia stands up after having straightened the bedding. The camera tilts slightly up and begins to pan left but this time following Lilia as she moves back to the mirror in her vanity table. Lilia begins to wipe the mirror, but in this second mirror she pauses to look at her reflection. Her actions slow down and soon stop. She touches the gold pendant necklace she is wearing and begins to examine her reflection more closely. She removes her barrette from her hair, letting her long dark hair fall down past her shoulders. For the first time, Amari allows us to see Lilia's full face, albeit in her reflection in the bedroom mirror.

With the traditional folkloric music playing in the background, Lilia begins to dance before the vanity mirror. The camera pans left as Amari films Lilia moving over to the dresser to the left of the vanity and dancing before her husband's photograph. The camera follows her as she moves back to her original position before the vanity mirror. At this point, the camera remains in place and films Lilia dancing. From this angle and for the first time, we are able to see a full frontal shot of Lilia, but again only via her reflection. After a moment, Lilia stops dancing, pulls her hair back up, picks up her cleaning items, and returns to the dresser to dust it once more.

The camera follows her but Lilia quickly steps out of the shot returning to her initial position on the opposite side of the bedroom, where Amari first filmed her at the opening shot of the scene. Again, the camera finds Lilia's reflection in the original mirror and then films her back as she

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prepares to exit the room. The camera rapidly swish pans left in time to capture Lilia grabbing the can of furniture polish as she exits the room, cleaning spots on the walls as she walks down the hallway. Amari slightly raises the angle in order to look straight upon Lilia as she walks down the hallway, still wiping the walls, until she takes the bend at the end of the hallway and disappears. The camera fades to black as she exits the frame.

Amari uses the motif of the bedroom mirror within these closing moments of this opening scene to represent a portrait of contemporary Tunisian femininity as one of alterity. In other words – and as aided by the understanding of H'el'ene Cixous' theorization of alterity as a form of Otherness which is not reducible to the binary self/other but which exceeds it – Amari positions Lilia as the cultural Other of herself. The reflected image of Lilia's body expressed in the language of raqs sharqi as she dances raises her "Othered" or somewhat unconventional desire to pursue her own interests and pleasures. In contrast to this reflected representation of the unrestricted female body in dance, Amari primarily shows Lilia's actual body throughout the scene performing housework, which reflects her sense of social and moral duty.

In this split framing of Lilia, Amari creates a doubled-Other. Additionally, the fact that Amari directs Lilia to step away from the mirror momentarily and move over to the dresser in order to capture the late husband and the dancing Lilia in the same shot reifies Lilia's social "Otherness." Yet unlike the earlier camera movement which preceded Lilia's movements in cleaning and thus rendered them marginal and secondary, the camera in this sequence of actions (at first blush much like the manner in which Samia Gamal was filmed in her dance scenes) follows Lilia's movements in dance and thus suggests an importance and agency in her self-identity and self-

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expression in dance. The reflection of her dancing self upon returning to her original position before the second mirror ushers in her doubled-Other as an independent and liberated woman with personal desires.

Lilia's return to her everyday housekeeping performativity at the close of this scene becomes part of the process through which her conscious actions (cleaning or dancing) produce the gendered identities that are multiple and conflicting in Lilia's portrait. What becomes significant in Lilia's return to dusting and straightening up in this sequence follows Pink's theorizations in that Lilia performs these acts on her terms. Pink asserts:

To be conversant with existing (hegemonic) discourses and the constraints they imply, performative actions must be sufficiently recognizable on their terms, but because they are creative, expressive and transgressive, they might also stretch these constraints and be instrumental in processes of change. (59)

Rather than just performing a prescribed set of actions for dusting and straightening in a routine or housekeeping manual-like fashion, Lilia interrupts the housekeeping performative act with her impromptu raqs sharqi performance. Each performative act, then, may be recognized in resistance to the other as well as in its own terms as "central" (housekeeping) and "marginal" (dancing) to hegemonic ways of seeing women's roles in contemporary Tunisia. Amari's use of the panning shot and framing in this sequence, in which the lens marginalizes Lilia's housekeeping and centers her dancing, underpins in an "outside-in" manner Lilia's gradual reconstruction or rewriting of her shifting identity and introduces Amari's goal in the film to bring these two "worlds" or discourses of femininity together.

Thus, both Lilia's housekeeping and her dancing enter the narrative as counterpoints that paradoxically work as binaries to divide Lilia's subjectivity between "domesticated, good" Self and "emancipated, bad" Other; whilst at the same time, they also (increasingly throughout the remainder of the film) work together to resist such a reification of doubled subjectivity in favor of a plurality of in-between female subjectivities, as Lilia's domestic world broadens through her association with the cabaret network of employees (i.e., "other" women) she joins whilst still maintaining (albeit perhaps unrealistically) her respectable position as a widowed housewife. In other words, we see in *Satin rouge* how a "modern Tunisian woman" transgresses (or perhaps even transcends) the "Self-Other" divide by embracing (not repressing) the "Others" residing within her "Self." In relation to contemporary Tunisian cultural and social thought, such engagement enables new ways of seeing, constructing, and (re)presenting various "other" forms of femininity or "other" notions about or definitions of "womanhood."

In summation, through her defamiliarization of Lilia's portrait as the model housewife who resigns herself to and accepts traditional discourses of domesticity (albeit only marginally and temporarily), Amari reveals the cultural double standards that may be imposed upon contemporary Tunisian women. She opens the film with the seemingly traditional, unified, and fixed portrait of the Tunisian housewife in order to employ it as tool in observing normative versus marginal cultural representations of the feminine condition and female experience in contemporary Tunisia. By inviting spectators to compare and contrast the different versions of Lilia's dispersed housewifery portrait, in effect, Amari asks the spectator to recognize the shifting lines of demarcation that exist within "the" feminine portrait of Tunisian women. By linking

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domestic skills to self-expression (the opening sequence in which dusting provides an avenue to dancing and later the act of sewing cabaret costumes an avenue to cabaret dancing), Amari reveals how housework (as a performative act) may lead to a reconstruction of gendered female identity in contemporary Tunisian society as multiple and hybrid.

Notes

1. See Lamia Ben Youseef Zayzafoon, *The Production of the Muslim Woman: Negotiating Text, History, and Ideology* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005): 99.
2. See Zayzafoon 107–108.
3. In addition to Zayzafoon, see also Kenneth J. Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), Mounira M. Charrad, *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Post-colonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2001), and Jarrod Hayes, *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000).

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