



The Slumber and Wake of Dada in Mahi Binebine's The Slumber of the Slave

M'hammed Benjelloun

Received: 02 May 2022; Received in revised form: 05 Jul 2022; Accepted: 11 Jul 2022; Available online: 17 Jul 2022
©2022 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— Mahi Binebine published his first novel *The Slumber of the Slave** in 1992. Unlike his subsequent publications which all received the due critical acclaims, this first book did not seem to draw the expected attention and went almost unnoticed. It was praised by few critics and was considered as a shy debut. Nevertheless, for a first novel, *Le Sommeil de l'Esclave*, seems – to me – to gather all the elements of an incoming successful career. Let us not forget that we are thirty years back, and that we are before a former mathematics teacher who spent eight years in Paris, and who decided to chose a completely different path, and give free vent to his imagination and creativity**. Accordingly, and for a first novel, one can already track down some traces of genius. Obviously, we can ask ourselves where the man draws his source of inspiration from, and wonder about the «secret of the craft» which the man has shown, and which many other craftsmen, before him, had failed to prove.

Keywords— *The Slumber of the Slave, craftsmen, novel.*

*Fr ; *Le Sommeil de l'Esclave*, Editions Stock, 1992.

**since his artistic debuts, Binebine has been– and still is – much more acclaimed as a painter and a sculptor than as a novelist

When it comes to dealing with the novel's content, Binebine chooses to recount the life of a female slave. The name by which she is called by everyone around her is *Dada*. This, however, cannot be taken for the woman's first name. It can only be viewed as the surname which any other female – in her stead and in her situation – may take to be called by. The surname, then, specifies much more the position and function of the woman in the Mansion (*Dar Lekbira*) than her identity. In other words she is considered in the light of what she *does*, not of what she *is* in *Dar Lekbira*.

What the essay below tries to explore is Dada's journey from a female slave, and a former concubine, to a supposedly « freed » slave whom the family keeps for the sake of keeping up with appearances. For that purpose, the exploration of the narrative in the present essay has tried to follow a linear direction and go through the interstices of the events which have been considered as *crucial* to reach the analytical objectives set beforehand. The essay also tries to spot the social hypocrisy which Binebine has decided to attack in pre-colonial Marrakchi society; the

latter being a microcosm of what may be taking place at any other imperial city of Morocco. Binebine also – with due boldness – decides to speak about other aspects of social hypocrisy through some local community specimens. One of the most striking aspects of this hypocrisy is that of the Grand Master who – to justify his acts of lechery with Dada and other female slaves – claims that « *Allah, being beautiful, loves beauty* »*. The Grand Master's nightly visits to Dada, always take place after – never before – dawn prayer; a case of religious hypocrisy which, remorselessly, sugarcoats lechery with piety.

Another aspect of hypocrisy is that of the white mistress's refusal for Dada to accede to a second wife status when the slave proves pregnant by the Master. In due course, however, this would not prevent the white mistress from celebrating the same slave's « emancipation », and be personally present in the event. The reason for this is the mistress's concern with

*Ar. الله جميل ويُحب الجمال

appearances; with the image that she is trying to cast of herself to the external world.

The great achievement of Binebine – in my view – is the way he makes of Dada's journey a chronicle in which the slave becomes the eyewitness. Seldom is she given a chance to speak. Yet, she is the novel's undisputed center of consciousness. Through her lenses, *all* the events are being seen, processed and recounted.

The novel – in my view – seems to end with a highly positive note. The author, having entrusted the narrator with the task of recounting Dada's story, seems to infuse a note of acknowledgement; of gratitude to the pivotal role Dada had undoubtedly played in the narrator's life. Not only is the author exorcising the mansion from the Haunting injustices of the past, which Dada had been victim of, but he is also rehabilitating Dada's status through the visit he pays her. On that ground, the words used to conclude the novel (and which are identical to the ones with which the novel opens) take another significance. They seem to take a reconciliatory tone; one in which the narrator is – at last – in peace with his past and his conscience.

In Binebine's *The Slumber of the Slave** The first lines and last lines of the novel read alike. A door is about to open, and a story is about to unfold.

I knocked on your door. You used to live in the Medina, at the end of an alley where I was born a boy.

*That was she, Dada**, who opened the door to me.*

Dada, that strange small piece of a woman, whom a friend had offered to the captain, your grandfather the hero, for some services provided, a long time ago.

The novel, in its epigraph, starts with the author's «intentions» behind his telling Dada's story.

It is not to dress the wounds of the past that I am coming back today to rouse your memory; time has already done it. No. If I want to relate your story, it is, perhaps, because I want to find a meaning for mine.

* Fr. *Le Sommeil de l'Esclave*, Edition le Fenec, 1993, trans. M'hammedBenjelloun

** In post colonial Morocco, most of the freed slaves were assigned not only the task of house maids but also of babysitters. They would take care of their former masters' children, and most of them had developed special relations with their former masters' progenies. Some were (officially) seen as second mothers for those children, especially if some of these former women slaves could not have their own children.

The story unfolds from the narrator's perspective, except that the author feels that it is much more the female slave's point of view (P.O.V.) which is presented, not really his. However, he successfully adopts her P.O.V without overtly taking her position or manifestly expressing his sympathy for her. He rather makes the slave's P.O.V unfold before us.

In his interview with **France 24**, BineBine states that Dada (the woman who inspired the novel) died when he – BineBine – was three. This means that if the character had been inspired by a true person and perhaps a true story, the events might be seen mostly as fictional, or – at best – fictionalized. This means that the narrative can by no means be seen only as biographical; and Binebine's objective is to make the biographical at the service of the fictional. The challenge before the author, then, is not to check the veracity of the events, but rather to make sure that they render the purpose that the author has in mind: giving meaning to his existence. The narrator speaks about the environment he has been brought up in: a microcosm of ante and post-colonial Morocco, where only a few things had really changed as far as people's *modus operandi* and *modus Vivendi* are concerned. What is being meant here is the Moroccan people's attitude towards slavery. In most cases, what can be said is that it is an attitude full of hypocrisy. It is much more a charm offensive than a true desire to end with a horrendous practice that reduces human beings to animal-like creatures.

BineBine ingenuously illustrates this hypocritical relation when he states that Dada when « freed » has failed to find meaning to this act.

On the day of her emancipation (she had never understood anything about the freedom which everyone had been speaking about) she still – as usual –accepted her master's decision as long as these decisions should not lead to her expulsion.

There is a dictum in French which says, «Never make others' happiness in the absence of their knowledge*» For a woman whose pre-slavery life is nothing but a vague memory, which dates back to more than half a century, being emancipated is – in its meaning – next to meaningless. What is being meant is that she still remembers « *P'tit frère* ** », but how? She remembers him only as a child, being raped by the slave trader. What she can still recall of his voice is the whining sound he was making while being raped. Doubtless, the fact that this rape scene is presented in the beginning of the novel is highly symbolic. A whole childhood (actually a

* « *ne jamais faire le bonheur des autres à leur insu* »

** Teeny Brother

generation) is being abducted. Those children are deprived of everything: their innocence, and their virginity (with all the meanings which the word «virginity» could bear). Nothing is presented about *P'tit Frère* afterwards. Binebine seems to deprive the child of any possibility to speak to tell the reader what he (*P'tit Frère*) has undergone. Still it is rather through this «silenced» (or muted?) testimony that the child's tragedy unfolds. The child's groans, not his words, seem to speak louder. In Dada's ironic interpretation of the groaning of *P'tit Frère* unfolds the extent to which Man gives himself the right to decide the fate of others. The slave trader decides that *P'tit Frère* would be a good sex object, that Dada (being a virgin in full bloom) would be – literally – an excellent pillow for the trader to sleep on etc.

The novel's last chapter ends nearly with the same words, like the first lines of the first chapter. This may imply that the novel starts with the end:

I knocked on your door. You used to live in the Medina, at the end of an alley where I was born a boy.

That was she, Dada, who opened the door to me.

Despite their word for word similarity, those lines cannot be read from the same perspective. After having read Dada's story, those same words resound differently in our mind at the end of the narrative. The human like creature (as she has been described in the beginning) now rightfully takes her status of «the noble slave». Throughout the narrative, the woman is spoken of and about. When brought to the fore, it is through action, much more than through words, that she is expressing herself. When she is made to speak, it is usually either to the sparrows (which she feeds in the patio with the crumbs she jealously hoards for them), to M'barek the albino, or to the dead body of her newly born baby. On the other hand, most of the information we glean about the woman come from the narrator.

Even when not directly telling the story, the narrator's point of view is guiding us; it is «justifying his presence». It is strongly present in the sense that - for him – even the wrinkles of the slave (which look like furrows on the land of her face) *can speak her past* of slavery, of shame and exploitation, with nobody being in a better position to bear testimony of this than the author/narrator himself.

At this stage, when we are not yet informed about what Dada had endured, we already hear about Milouda, the white mistress, whose main concern is with appearances, and with the family image that must remain spotless. The same Milouda, who is now «celebrating» the feast of Dada's emancipation, is the one who did

everything to occult Dada's giving birth to a baby whose father is none but the Grand Master himself. And in the same way that Dada has submissively accepted being sexually exploited by the Master, she now has to accept all the other «[M]aster's decisions as long as [they] should not lead to her expulsion»

Apart from the narrator who obviously alternately displays either sympathy or neutrality towards the slave, there is someone who is unconditionally taking Dada's side: Yamna, the terrace neighbor. A former slave herself, Yamna is presently the wife of the neighborhood's shop keeper. Had the Fqih (the narrator's father) accepted the baby he had from Dada, the latter would have been seen as another Yamna with the status of a second wife of the narrator's father, while the baby would have enjoyed the status of the narrator's half brother.

Another manifestation of the hypocrisy that reigns around the Grand Master's house is exemplified by the Master's indulging in lechery with the slave *after* (not *before*) dawn prayer time.

Actually, Dada is not the only fresh flesh that the Fqih would wish to fornicate with. Of course, all this is coated with the tailor made, phalocratic ideology, put forward to justify the Master's lechery (*Allah is beautiful and He love beauty !!*)

Thus he would justify – in relation to himself – his vaguely ridiculous air when (in the middle of the night) he would hasten to check if, by any chance, Milouda had forgotten to lock up the room where the young maids used to sleep.

Institutionalized hypocrisy is also witnessed in the way the «*Fouqaha**» who come to recite Koranic verses at the Grand Master's house, compete over the young slave who used to have «rebellious breasts».

The flashback now cedes the place to Dada's present status as the woman who has been able to befriend the sparrows to the extent that they would pay her daily visits under the cedar tree to feed on the crumb she jealously hoards for them. This brings us back to the relation that Dada herself used to have with Boulal in her pre-enslavement phase. She herself used to be treated like a sparrow. The man would give her sun flower seeds, the way she now gives bread crumbs to the sparrows. In either case, the trust between the seeds/crumbs giver and the seeds/crumbs taker is based on innocent love and care with no intention beyond the act itself. To further entrench this

* Plural of «*Faqui*h» which can either imply a religious scholar, a Coranic school teacher, or simply someone who has learnt, by heart all the verses of the Holy Koran.

innocent relationship between Dada and Boulal, the author makes Boulal blind. This further wards off any malicious intention on the man's part, and further confirms that his love is one of (and for) the young girl's innocence and purity. Nothing else.

The narrator now specifies the relation between him and Dada. She has been a second mother for the narrator. She even used to do things for him that *La Maitresse blanche*** did not do.

Throughout the narrative, Dada's past, before her enslavement, is hazily recalled. The first mentioning of her brother who – like Dada – had been kidnapped is being made: *He was the hero of her story in spite of her having forgotten his very name, and despite his having remained but her « teeny brother*** »!* This epigraphic attribute seems to freeze the boy's image in the eyes of Dada. Here one may recall Fairouz's song *Shadi*. The speaker in the song tells about the young boy called Shadi who disappears, during some skirmishes opposing his village natives to some foreigners. The speaker in the song says that, after the boy's loss, the snow came and left twenty times,

*Twenty times did the snow
Come and go.
Twenty times during which I
Kept growing, while Shadi
Remained a young boy
Playing on the snow.*

Just like Fairouz's speaker in whose mind only the image of young Shadi remains, 'Ptit Frère shall know the same fate. The young boy shall eternally remain young in Dada's memory. On that ground (*P'tit frère*) is never given the floor. Not only is he kidnapped but also raped; and his young age does not intercede in his favor before the slave trader.

Immediately after Boulal's caring – exclusively – for the child in Dada, the slave trader's « care » is described:

Drenched in sweat, Dada's loincloth was sticking to her body. Her buttocks were taking the shape of an adult's bust. They were round shaped, delicate and firm like those of a boy. Having spotted them early, the chief made of them his private realm. At night, he would not have any rest until he

made use of this warm and trembling part of her body like a pillow.

The slave trader abstains from abusing Dada sexually. Again, this abstention is only grounded on materialistic considerations. The loss of a young slave's virginity would make the latter devalued at the slave market:

The rule was unbreakable. During the egg test preceding the sale, the prices would go down as soon as the egg is swallowed by the genital of the female nigger. That everybody knew. On account of that, the girls could peacefully sleep.

But somebody else had to pay for this: *P'tit frère*.

The slave trader remains nameless. This is because it is not his name that matters but the type of person he is. When a frail boy dies, because he could not stand the hardship of the journey, he is denied even a decent burial by this – everything but human – slave trader: « *Let him rest in peace; and that shall be for long, I promise. The wind will take care of him.* »

In the *Teeny Brother* rape scene, Dada, despite her young age, knows (but refuses to admit) that her brother is being raped by the slave trader. Having been a silent witness, she has never been able to exorcise what *teeny Brother* had undergone,

Immobile on her belly, she would be repeating to herself: « He is just licking him; it is far less serious than sleeping under the sand ... »

Then, comes the time when they had to depart. She would never see him again,

There was so much noise that nobody had heard her crying. Perched on the camel, Teeny Brother was waving his arms...

This is why, panic stricken at the least call, Dada used to rush towards your room, switch off the little sun which you would constantly keep turned on, lie on the ground close to your cozy bed, put your warm hands in hers and, eyes closed, would strongly press them against her heart.

In the subsequent chapter, Dada's world is being extended through the depiction of her «organic» relation with the terrace. The novel moves from the description of Dada's relationship with beings to her relation with space. She asks herself some seemingly existential questions: « *What could all the people be saying to each other in there? What are they doing? How many secrets must be burrowed in those holes?*

Yamna who has just been formerly mentioned is now going to be presented: she is a former slave promoted

** the white mistress of the house

*** 'Ptit Frère in French

to a free woman's status. She is now the wife of H'med, the shopkeeper who is the neighborhood's laughing stock. H'med is also the unavoidable shopkeeper whom every living soul in the neighborhood has to deal with.

After hearing that her father had decided to marry her to the shopkeeper, Yamna, supported by Dada, cries all night long, but ends up consenting. By all standards, it was not an ideal marriage, but (most certainly too) it was a means of social ascension. The marriage gives yield to a child who – unsurprisingly – becomes his father's spitting image. From another angle, the marriage may be seen as another slave trading transaction. H'med sees in his wife a means, not an end, and Yamna sees in her husband a springboard to emancipation which her new social status will offer her. This seems to further reinforce the links the former slave used to have with Dada, hence their feeling «free» when meeting on the terrace:

Thinking. For a whole day. Receiving Dada at home, each day, ten times a day; drinking tea at the lounge. Rolling together on the unrolled carpet. ... Thinking in the company of Dada, each in the head of the other; exchanging thoughts out of which a bouquet could be made; a sheaf of colors with the red color inside. Thinking, free of charge, without having to pay with one's flesh nor bones. Good Lord! Being free to think for a whole day!

Another image of slavery formerly alluded to is that of Mme Kolomer (or *Widow Kolomer*). If Dada is the emancipated slave of a bygone past, Mme Kolomer is literally (and ironically) the slave of a past she cannot free herself from. She refuses to leave the Medina, and is still ensnared in the web of a bygone glorious time. Binebine seems to push the irony even further when he describes her as the widow of an army officer who died in his bed !! Here one may recall Jonathan Swift's *A Satirical Elegy On The Death Of A Late Famous General*. The resemblance meeting point is the fact that Swift's army general and Binebine's army officer both die in their respective beds, not on the battle ground!

Technically, Binebine makes the reader meet Madame Kolomer because the young narrator used to go to her house to learn French. «*The old woman had a good hundred cats, all coming from the gutter.*» The narrator was not enthusiastic to Kolomer's place, especially with its cats' colony. Later, however, he gets used to it.

Soon you got used to that ceaselessly agitated mass, and to its smell too; to that kitten laden tree in the middle of the patio. «My lemon tree in bear clothing» female

Kolomer liked to say. Very soon, you made yours that novel universe – one which was far more magical than your dreary dwelling.

Kolomer's presence, gives her the appearance of *une fausse note* (wrong tone). The author makes her presence further tasteless by making her house swarming with cats and pampered female cat *Primera*

The woman's adopting hundreds of cats at a neighborhood where some people cannot find what to eat gives way to all types of fantasies. The neighborhood has even gone hysterical about the cats' presence. Some are likening the cat's invasion to the grasshoppers' invasion. The dwellers decide, for this reason, to speak to *Dindon*, the *Mokadem*.

This – once again – we come to know through the narrator's point of view «*You were in her house when her door was violently knocked on. You followed her, believing that Dada had come to pick you up before time.*»

Mme Kolomer comes up with a convincing discourse when speaking to the Mokadem, to the extent that the latter, who is usually always armed with counterarguments before his interlocutors, finds himself completely disarmed. The young narrator feels bewitched by Kolomer's narrating capacities. As has been mentioned earlier, one may wonder what purpose Mme Kolomer's presence may serve in the narrative. Once this question posed, the narrator comes up with an actual answer: The woman is the second person who has an influence on the narrator, apart from Dada. She is the one who – through her countless books and stories – contributes to the narrator's *gusto* for reading.

You could see neither the sky nor the magicians she was describing to you, and much less openings in the walls! However, somewhere, the old woman's words used to lodge themselves inside you, in your heart perhaps; but your adolescent spirit could not yet receive them.

She has also inculcated in him the virtues of reading: «*When female Kolomer used to launch herself into her theories about the virtues of knowledge, nothing could stop her*» Nostalgia also springs out of her accounts

Very often, she would link her narrative to her native village ... there, in Alsace, and tell about the long winter evenings before the counter of the coffee and tobacco shop, owned by her parents.

The French expatriate's brief appearance in the narrative proves to be decisive: She is «the other» who does not belong to (nor follows the rules of) the community where she finds solace. On the other hand – and from a purely technical angle – she proves to have kindled the young narrator's imagination through all the attention she used to provide him with. Through the opening of her house, and her library, she helps the young man become a well positioned witness; a legitimate narrator who ends up following her steps and adopting a distance which proves necessary for him to tell his story.

Then, the «holy war» breaks out between Kolomer and the kids of the neighborhood on the day their football accidentally lands on her garden (which she takes for an intrusive act). She – accordingly – takes a knife from her kitchen and tears the ball. This leads the kids to their decision to retaliate. The kids never knew before that Kolomer was wearing a wig until they snatched her hat to discover that they had snatched her wig with it. The only person who has taken her side is Dada. She spontaneously takes off her *haik* and covers Mme Kolomer with it. The latter goes through a long monologue in which she gives ample details about her background when she was in Alsace, and how she had met her *soldat*. Here one can pinpoint a stroke of genius on Binebine's part.

Driven by her delirium, Madame Kolomer did not interrupt her monologue. With her own scarf, Dada covered the bald woman's head. Then she hastened to look for the wig, the shoe and the basket which the French woman had lost. She helped her put back her shoes by holding her hand, the way one would hold that of a lost child.

The meeting between Dada and Kolomer relegates language to a redundancy status. There seems to be no necessity for talking since sympathy takes the upper hand. Dada and Kolomer are both hostages of a past that they cannot free their respective souls from:

She stopped crying when they both reached the door of her house. For the first time she looked at the slave's eyes that were slightly moist, like hers. She took off the veil and gave it back to her. They exchanged a smile, then some words, but none understood the other's language. What for?

Another character worth stopping at is M'bark, the water carrier, «*blanc de peau malgré lui**» and nicknamed the «German». His existence, in his eyes, can only be confirmed through his making himself available to, and at

the service of, the Big House: «*Each time the door was opened, he used to lift his head, clear his throat in order to better underline his presence, and announce his readiness for the least errand*» For M'bark, being a servant of *Dar Lekbira** is a privilege. Dada's relation with M'bark is portrayed as one of sympathy and compassion. She would spare him food and knows exactly what would (and what might not) please the albino. Dada views M'bark with her innocent eyes as a sparrow (*Dada used to draw as much pleasure from feeding M'bark, as from feeding her little sparrows*).

The German becomes an accomplice when he finds Dada washing herself at a public fountain. Dada's attitude towards her own pregnancy is given away

*How can one imagine the master's honor being soiled by a story of fornication with a slave? Your father, a saintly person covered with dignity, was barricaded from the inside of his white burnous***

... What were they going to say, those neighborhood's big mouths? Dada did not even dare think about that.

Still, the mother's instinct takes the upper hand:

Still, a newborn instinct – a motherly one – was preventing her from uttering a single word about that. It was one more secret, which – like the other ones – was buried in a well of silence.

Dada's pregnancy becomes a source of shame which only Dada should be blamed for.

How can she forget the ladder on which she was stretched for a whole day, with her hands and feet tied? She could still feel the burns caused by the cayenne pepper with which Milouda had rubbed her still pubescent genital.

When meeting her at the fountain, M'bark tells Dada, «*As far as I know, the public bath is not forbidden to the slaves. Not yet, at least!*» This sentence proves to be quite symbolic, for what is forbidden is not really the public bath but the right to claim the parenthood of a slave's child from a white father. M'bark becomes Dada's confidant «*But speak; speak! Bring relief to your silence.*» he tells her. Then, like a sinner before a priest,

* Literally meaning the Big Mansion or Big House. Symbolically, however, *Dar Lekbira* stands not just for the opulent status of the dwellers but of their noble values and generosity. Accordingly when someone is described as «*Dar Lekbira* descendent», this means that he is of a noble breed.

** a hooded sleeveless coat, usually put in winter over the *Djellaba* to protect from cold.

* White skinned despite his will.

she confesses her deed. A whole conversation goes between them in which she makes a full account of her «rape» story, but from her own perspective. Binebine's genius is – once again – being displayed when he makes the slave's narrative gain the upper hand. The irony of the situation culminates when full blame is to be born only by Dada.

... In the beginning, it was hurting me. ... Later on, it became easier. I ended up getting used to it. You know, I would even go sad when he did not show up, missing thus his smell! At night he would call me «my little child». Tender in the night would the Masters go.

The way M'bark concludes his « listening session »

Dada, my child, your slumber belongs to your master. Your dreams, on the other hand ... are yours!

Le sommeil de l'esclave stands for the sole realm over which the white masters and mistresses have no control – a world where Dada becomes rightfully the supreme and undisputed owner and ruler. The other realm of which Dada seems to be the sole proprietor is the reflection of her image on the mirror. Just like the oneiric world which offers the woman all the bereft dreams which she could never fulfill, Dada's reflection on the looking glass unveils the woman's wish for another image of herself – one in which due consideration is made to her. Here, one can recall Dada's monologue:

- *Do you know that you are very pretty, Madam? She whispered, with her lips almost sticking to the looking glass.... Come, come it's so mild around here.*

The Slave – Master relationship keeps being violently echoed through the various reminders of Dada's social position as a slave. And the conclusive statement of the seventh chapter seems to sum up – in the best way – the situation: *A master's blood. A slave's caftan*. In other words, having a son from a « half – noble » white origin is no guarantee that yesterday's slave may become today's free (or at best freed) slave.

The above claim is buttressed by the months preceding the baby's delivery

In the big house, and during the slave's pregnancy, an unusual calm had settled in. A mystery for Dada. She would go wondering: have they gone blind, or have they chosen to see nothing?

The fact that they should not react to her pregnancy makes her bewildered

She would lean on her hips, hold her breath, and swallow them as though she would swallow her saliva. But Milouda would conspicuously divert her look. Of course she was in the know. Everybody was.

Next to the character of M'bark, another character is worth focusing on: Serghinia. Formerly a prostitute and presently M'bark's « landlady », the woman had conserved the « dexterities » of her former profession. And as the Egyptian adage goes: *the flutist may die, but his fingers will still keep playing tunes**. The woman's description in the novel goes as follows:

The whole neighborhood was dreading her. It was not that people were reluctant to wage a row, but nobody was armed with Serghinia's same tenaciousness. Her rivals would simply get defeated by attrition

The barber is the sole nemesis of Serghinia. Still, she would find ways to face him

It's not with barbers that I may run the risk of being pensioned off.... They are all but fagots!

Serghinia has a contemptuous relation with women in general. However, her relation with Dada is exceptional. The woman's « vulgarities » do but unveil the already mentioned hypocrisy of the community, and the hushed truth which nobody wishes to see or talk about. Despite her innate vulgarity, and aggressive attitudes towards people in general and women in particular, at no part of the novel is she described as having a row with Dada.

Serghinia is also uncompromising when it comes to her tenants' duty to pay their rent in time:

Grubby hands off! I shall not be the only thing missing, nor shall I open my legs wide apart for free! Ask the rich for help; not a defenseless miserable woman ... the rich are created to give, the poor to collect!

The appearance of this woman on stage seems to lift the veil off another side of hypocrisy which the community seems to remorselessly cherish. The woman's past is obliterated on the ground of her ferocious battles to assert herself. The various failures to face her turn into the neighbors' attempts to co-exist with her, lest they should be smitten by her fiery tongue! Never are the reasons mentioned for her resorting to prostitution. (The « morality » of the neighborhood would not admit it). However, aware of the woman's battling capacities, the

* الزمار بيوت وصوايحه بتلعب

community chooses to live in a state of truce with *l'ex prostitué* (the former prostitute).

Another scene worth considering is that in which the talk is taking place about Dada's child *The talk was about her; the slave was dead sure Her invisible presence had never produced such a silence*. The conversation taking place between the White Mistress and Dada:

Why is it that the smoke comes into my direction, Dada? One would say that it is blaming me for something! ...This filth is chasing me like flies! But there's no wind, though

Later on, she asks Dada another question. *Do you think I'm beautiful, Dada? Really so?* The slave becomes the confidante. Could one, in a conversation like this, imagine Dada reply by saying, *«In all honesty Madame. You are not»?* Here again the *rapport de force* is pushed to its extreme. The words are put in the slave's mouth – the words which the masters wish to see the slave utter. And that echoes what a British politician once said, *«The citizens shall be allowed to do and say what the government shall allow them to say and do!!! »*

Another seemingly intriguing pair of characters raise quite a few questions: the two European nuns. In the beginning, Dada had failed to make out the reason for their presence. (*They are the Good Lord's wives* as they are hypocritically described). Then she finally comes to understand that the sisters are in the white mistress's house to take Dada's baby.

The Slave's reaction to the white mistress's and the nuns' offer may be described as «the Wake » of the slave. The scene of Dada's talking to the dead baby illustrates this. The woman is talking to the dead body while digging the hole.

I shall keep an eye on you; you can trust me. In the morning, you will be in the best position to listen to the chants of birds. They get up as early as your father, but ..., not in order to pray; birds do not need that. They fly! You will see.

From the outset, Dada is portrayed as someone who undergoes and endures, not as someone who reacts or – much less – acts. The last scene of the novel in which Dada is talking to the dead baby, prior to his burial, is a scene in which the woman – for the first time – *decides* what, and what not, to do. The chain of slavery (leading to her reception at *Dar Lekbira*, her enslavement, her ill treatment and the fate awaiting her) seems to have been broken at last, with no heed paid to what should ensue.

From this perspective one realizes the degree of irony that the title might be hiding. Binebine chooses to play with our nerves and expectations. From the outset, he presents us with an apparently lenient and passive creature. At the end, the same submissive slave grows wings and takes off before our eyes. Her motherly instinct makes her say «NO », in her own manner, to her entourage. Accordingly, a great irony unfolds before the readers' eyes, which makes them wonder: shouldn't the novel have been called *The Wake* rather than the *Slumber of the Slave*?

REFERENCES

- [1] Mani Binebine, *The Slumber of the Slave*, Trans. M'hammed Benjelloun (unpublished translation)
- [2] « Le Sommeil de l'Esclave », L Trace de Mahi Binebine, (Anonymous author)
- [3] Bnejamin Dromard, « *Esclaves, dependants, déportés les Frontières de l'Esclavage*»
- [4] « l'Afrique de l'Esclavage»
- [5] L'Histoire de l'Esclavage au Maroc :
- [6] Les éléments fondateurs de l'ethnocentrisme et le racisme dans l'Afrique du Nord
- [7] Le Traite trans-saharienne des esclaves noirs
- [8] La Marginalisation de l apopulation noire au Maroc
- [9] Femmes et Esclaves
- [10] Marat, Jean Paul, les Chaînes de l'esclavage (1792)
- [11] https://youtu.be/AtpZ5_GzxxQ
- [12] https://youtu.be/pwJSe_p_2iM

-