

The Representation of Women in Moroccan Hassani Proverbs

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Abstract

This study explores the representation of women in Hassani proverbs, a significant component of Sahrawi oral culture in Morocco. The power of language in its various forms and modes lies in its role in shaping and transmitting gendered beliefs and social norms. Proverbs, as condensed expressions of cultural knowledge, are particularly influential in reflecting and reinforcing societal views and beliefs. Drawing on selected examples from El Hayssin's (2013) work: *Women in Hassani Proverbs*, the study examines how Hassani proverbs portray women across different stages of life and in relation to their social roles. The selected proverbs, originally in the Hassani dialect, have been translated into English and analysed for recurring themes and images. Findings reveal that many proverbs convey stereotypical and often negative perceptions of women, revealing deeply rooted gender ideologies in the community's oral heritage. This study sheds light on how proverbs function as cultural tools that shape and perpetuate collective gender attitudes within society.

Keywords: Feminism, Gender stereotypes, Hassani culture, Oral literature, Patriarchy, Portrayal, Proverbs, Representation, Social image, Women status.

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1. Introduction

Language serves as a means of communication among people in their communities. Meanwhile, it also holds thoughts and contributes to forming views and perspectives that mark the life of a certain group of people in a certain environment. Gender-related beliefs and attitudes are not an exception as they are highly present in people's everyday oral and written communication. In fact, language plays a major role in the transmission of gender views and stereotypes among the members of the community mainly via the spoken mode of communication. Year after year, this leads to the formation of an oral heritage (oral culture) which preserves those thoughts and ensures their spread and sustainability from one generation to the other.

Oral culture includes tales, songs, proverbs, and jokes which are widely used among people from different social classes within the speech community. Proverbs, in particular, are mostly used among people in their everyday interactions as they are believed to hold wise thoughts and play a significant role in connecting people to their cultural bounds and the social norms of their community.

Proverbs constitute a major part of Hassani oral culture. They are concise literary expressions which are rich in terms of their symbolic and metaphoric thoughts. Besides, they are loaded with wise meanings that summarise the past experiences and inherited teachings of Hassani people's ancestors in their Sahrawi environment. More than that, they hold many beliefs, norms, and traditions which reflect the mentality of Hassani people and their lifestyle.

This paper attempts to investigate how women are portrayed in Hassani proverbs. It aims to explore the representations of women in Hassani society and examine the social images attributed to Hassani women in the Sahrawi oral culture, mainly proverbs. In this paper, many proverbs cited in *Women in Hassani Proverbs* (El Hayssen, 2013) have been selected and translated from the Hassani dialect (a variety of Arabic) into English to analyse the images attributed to women in the Hassani society. Hence, not all the proverbs that El Hayssen (2013) included in his book are presented and analysed in this paper. Only proverbs that describe the society's views towards women, women's characteristics throughout the stages of their life, and the roles allocated to women in the Hassani society are selected and studied within the scope of this study.

2. Theoretical Approach to the Image of Women in Culture

2.1 *Feminism*

Feminism considers gender as the result or the outcome of social construction. Hence, it differentiates between ‘sex’, which stands for biological characteristics of males and females, and ‘gender’, which refers to the cultural roles attributed to men and women. Accordingly, “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” as de Beauvoir (1949) claims. This means that how women are defined or ought to function in society is not natural or biological but is socially constructed. In other words, neither man nor women are categorised the way they are in society by nature, but the distinction between the two is basically related to social, cultural, and economic factors. These factors account for numerous practices and motives which result in the attribution of certain social roles, ‘gender roles’, to men and others to women. Therefore, there are pre-defined social roles which structure the perspectives, practices, and functions of one in society based on femininity and masculinity.

According to the Collins Thesaurus Dictionary (1993), femininity includes the characteristics of: “delicacy, gentleness, girlishness, womanhood and womanliness.” However, this definition is considered to be a reflection of the patriarchal view which objectifies women and restricts them to sexual and household affairs. In the same line of thought, Kramarae and Treichler (1985) believe that this definition is a description of the female as an object, but not as a human being and that the concept of femininity is a result of the stereotypes attributed to women from a patriarchal view. Therefore, the feminist movement is the outcome of social awareness that these patriarchal views do not reflect natural and human reality as they undervalue women and their value for the benefit of male domination.

Feminism is a movement which calls for social, political and economic equality between men and women in society. It reveals that there is, and has always been, a difference in the way women and men are treated in everyday social interactions due to the rights, roles, and privileges that males. Hence, this makes men superior to their female counterparts in all aspects of life. Besides, the feminist movement shows that women have systematically been prevented from taking part in decisive responsibilities in social, political, and economic life or participating in the male-dominated institutions. Hence, feminism can be defined as a social and intellectual movement which seeks to put an end to the discriminatory, oppressive, and gender-biased views and practices, and aims to establish equality in all human relations. This movement, in general, rejects every attempt to differentiate between all members of society based on their gender. It aims to stop all gender privileges in society and raise awareness among people that such privileges are unjust to humanity. More than that, feminists do their best to defend the rights of women to participate in all aspects of social, political, and economic life and be treated as equal to men. Women have played significant roles in human societies throughout history beside men. and everyone must recognise their sacrifices and put an end to the patriarchal gender roles which undervalue women and their capacities.

Although feminist principles seem to be very idealistic as their ultimate objective is to dramatically eradicate inequality between men and women in society, feminists believe that social change, which will recognise women’s rights and maintain their status, can happen by altering the way in which society views women. Society has to change its patriarchal ideas and accept women as equal partners in all aspects of life without exception.

2.2 *Patriarchy*

The term “Patriarchy” literally stands for the ruling of the father, or “the patriarch.” Originally, this term was used to describe a male-dominated family in which the father is the head of the family and the one that has the authority to manage the household, which included not only women, junior men, and children, but also servants and slaves. Now, the term is used to refer to the male-dominated society and the power relationships which enable men to dominate women and keep them subordinate in different aspects of life.

Patriarchy shows that men have social power to decide and command in most structures in society, and that women have to execute instructions and maintain stability. Patriarchy refers to a social system in which males dominate women. It is viewed as the social structure in which males have more privileges and better status than females because of power dynamics. Hence, patriarchy does not only refer to the superiority of men in society and the prevention of women from assuming decisive positions in society, but it also produces and spreads stereotypical social images which men attribute to women. This definition of patriarchy reveals that females have been regarded as objects or second-grade human beings in society. Patriarchy is practised almost everywhere in traditional societies.

2.3. Gender stereotypes

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles of males and females and the relations between the two in society because of power relationships. Gender is the outcome of unequal value stratification of people based on their biological sex, and it leads to the assignment of specific entitlements and responsibilities to men only. The term has been used to refer to the social, cultural and psychological aspects attributed to being either male or female since birth. Gender attributions form the foundation for understanding other components of gender, such as gender roles (behaving like a male or a female) and gender identity (feeling like a male or a female). This explanation of gender points out that gender is the perceptual set of features to which a society has assigned the role of each sex. For instance, females are regarded as the keepers of their children and household. This can be justified by the natural capacity of women to give birth to children, raise them, and take care of them. Males, on the other hand, have historically been assigned the roles of protection and labour. The reason for using gender as a theory is that it is connected to the stereotypes and false images that are spread in society, especially in oral culture.

Stereotypes, within our framework of study, encompass the social and psychological divisions to which an individual has already experienced. In other words, stereotypes refer to a process through which people interact with the belief that they must behave and think in a certain way which is socially acceptable within their environment. Most stereotypes about men and women in society have downgraded the social status of women to that of an object that serves the desires and needs of men in their everyday life. This means that the gender role stereotypes of men have acquired qualities of power, authority and leadership, while those of women reflect weakness, lack of confidence, and dependence. This reveals that gender role stereotypes spread in society, via language and other means of communication, define and reproduce different expected attitudes and behaviours of males and females in society.

Females are traditionally associated to the traits of emotionality, dependence, service, and obsession with physical appearance. These preconceptions which limit women's capacities and deny their mental abilities serve men and provide them with the power to dominate females. Throughout history, societies all over the world tend to view females as being excessively emotional; men are considered to be more logical and more emotionally stable.

3. Oral Culture and Gender

3.1. Oral Culture

In different societies, people hold within themselves many common behavioural norms and social patterns learnt and acquired throughout their experiences in their social environment. This "learned habit" which defines patterns of socially acceptable behaviours within society is what many researchers refer to as "culture". According to Hofstede (1991), "culture is always a collective phenomenon, because it is at least partly shared with people who live within the same social environment which is where it is learned." Hence, culture is the collective code of thought and behaviour which distinguishes the members of one group of people from another. This means that culture is learned; it is not biological, and we are not born with it. Its source is the social milieu. This definition also reveals that culture affects social behaviour because of the background of the environment in which the individual was socialized. This background lies within the cultural set-up in which the person grew up and went through a variety of life experiences. Cultural learning begins within the household and expands later within the neighbourhood, at school, via media, at the workplace, and everywhere within the community.

Oral culture refers to the oral practices which encompass various cultural aspects and features which distinguish a certain group of people from another. Oral culture preserves the history, ideas, beliefs, and traditions of a certain community by oral transmission from one generation to the other. There are many means through which oral culture is transmitted, including songs, folktales, proverbs, etc. Such oral practices enable societies to pass on their norms, oral literature, and oral history across generations.

The ideas and practices of gender are produced and shared verbally via language in its spoken and written forms, and through facial expressions and body gestures. Language, in its various modes and registers, plays a prominent role in disseminating ideas and practices based on gender. Hence, Language is not merely a means of communication, but it is also a powerful tool to shape ideas, reproduce truth, and serve patriarchal agendas. This means that language shapes and spreads stereotypical images and representations of women through oral culture channels, including proverbs, tales, songs, adages, etc. In this regard, proverbs have played a role in transmitting

gender-biased ideas in society in a discrete and efficient way since most members of society, regardless of their status and educational level, make use of proverbs in their daily speech to argue and prove their views. Therefore, as Ennaji (2008) argues, “proverbs in specific have been widely used as tools of affirmation and resistance, of continuity and conversation, of rupture and innovation in the complex grid of gender and culture”.

3.2. Proverbs and Gender

Proverbs are concise ways of expression which aim to affect people to regulate some of their attitudes and behaviours. Although they are concise and simple in their linguistic structure, proverbs hold expertise, knowledge and human values and play a significant role in maintaining moral measures in society. They portray reality and present past life experiences that provide rich lessons and wisdoms for people to learn from and pass on to their children.

According to Ennaji (2008), “Proverbs are very concise sentences and expressions which embody meaningful utterances, and which are used for a specific purpose in a given situation”. Proverbs, hence, are interesting pieces of popular wisdom and tradition within a certain culture. They include and transmit the common values and shared beliefs held by a specific community. Proverbs are a prominent element of oral culture that best spreads into a community’s values and views among its members across generations. They are popular oral expressions and quotes that hold and refer to past human experiences and feelings. They are used in everyday communication as sources of common knowledge and wisdom to serve different communicative purposes. Hence, proverbs are considered as a cultural mirror which reflects the history and ideas of a certain group of people through language (El Hayssen, 2013).

Most of the times, proverbs hold moralistic stories and wise messages which tackle the various aspects of life and human practices. Gender relations are also among the most important topics of proverbs, most of which are full of stereotypical images. According to Hussein (2009), proverbs help us interpret our existence and everyday life experiences through oral interaction. Oral culture components, mainly proverbs, are loaded with collective wisdom which explains and provides insight into how things are and should be.

However, proverbs are not solely signs of wisdom and are not always objective when it comes to issues like gender. Proverbs have been used to maintain aspects of patriarchy and gender-biased life in most societies (Hussein, 2009). Proverbs are also used to maintain female subordination to their male counterparts in society. In other words, proverbs have been employed to portray women as emotional, unproductive, inferior, dependent and powerless members of the society. Proverbs are communicated orally and, hence, surpass the barriers of time, space, intellectuality, status, and other social factors. Their power lies in their ability to spread within society and affect the common views of the people in deliberate manners.

3.3. The Status of Women in Morocco

Moroccan women play a significant role in their country’s development in different areas of life. They contribute effectively to the social, political, and economic growth in their homeland. Throughout history, Moroccan women have been working beside men and collaborating with them to build their country and contribute to its development regardless of the social injustices and gender-based discriminatory attitudes, stereotypes, and practices women suffered from in the previous decades. After the independence of Morocco, the situation of women improved as they became able to enjoy simple rights, like education, voting, and work. These basic human rights were not given to women in Morocco prior to the independence period. Throughout history, Moroccan women have been considered as second-class humans in a patriarchal society which always views men as superior to women. Yet, thanks to the declaration of human rights in the middle of the past century as well as the spread and empowerment of feminist ideas around the globe, women have been emancipated as they started to gain their rights gradually.

Since the 1960s, Moroccan women started to pursue their high studies and get diplomas. This enabled them to work beside men in the private and public sectors in the country. Although women could not access high positions or get well-paid jobs in the beginning, their continuous struggle to prove themselves enabled them to join new domains that they have never dreamt of reaching before, including political life and decision-making positions.

4. The Representation of Women in Hassani Proverbs

4.1. Hassani Proverbs and the Status of Hassani Women

4.1.1. Hassani Proverbs

Hassani proverbs are very rich and well-structured in terms of content and linguistic form. They are connected to Sahrawi people's everyday life. This condensed narrative genre of oral literature and culture is an important component of Sahrawi identity as it stores and preserves many of its local ethics, values, principles, and traditions.

According to El Hayssen (2013), proverbs are among the most important sources of Hassani oral popular literature and culture as well as a means of education and wisdom in the Sahara. They are centered around the most important and fixed things in people's lives and experiences and traces their individual and common memory. Proverbs matter to Hassani society because they express individual experiences and reveal parts of their culture and social awareness in life.

Hassani proverbs are popular expressions marked by simplicity and ease of transmission and learning among individuals in the community. Hence, they are easy to remember and store in common memory and spread from mouth to ears to share knowledge and benefit from the experiences of their ancestors. More than that, they are a vital part of popular literature which is produced by the different social classes and represents the people of the Sahara in their thoughts, emotions, and tastes and pictures their mentality, lifestyle, personality, and culture.

Accordingly, Hassani proverbs are the outcome of a popular environment and historical heritage. People in the Hassani community make use of them a lot in their everyday communication for many reasons. They are unique as they reflect a special mode of life in the desert and hold many aspects of the Hassani identity and culture. Also, they contain tales and popular stories full of great wisdoms and values which constitute a cultural wealth that should never be forgotten. Besides, they are based on artistic and literary styles and include various types of figures of speech. They are also based on imagery, characterisation to transmit wisdom through artistic expressions. Thus, people feel motivated to learn them and use them to convey their messages in an artistic way and sound wise at the same time.

Hassani proverbs express the cultural aspects of the Hassani society and reveal the deep connection between Sahrawi people and their historical heritage. They demonstrate the religious load and moral values that bring feelings of existence, identity, and continuity. Popular Hassani proverbs are literary products and oral arguments that reflect Sahrawi society and the common knowledge they have accumulated through ages in their environment. They are sincere expressions of the customs, traditions, rituals, and common values. Their major role lies in correcting people's behaviour according to social norms and rules. Hence, proverbs can be regarded in Sahrawi culture as the constitution of the people. They function like holders of rules, amendments, and norms that regulate life. Therefore, they form a sort of oral constitution.

Moreover, Hassani proverbs stem from the non-material cultural heritage of the Sahrawi people. This cultural heritage takes from various sources and embodies religious, environmental, cultural, and historical aspects which mark the uniqueness of these people and their culture. The continuity of proverbs and their sustainable use in Hassani society is due to the effective and dynamic role they play in the education and socialisation of the society's members. They are viewed as a means and channel to spread their local stories, views, and values to inform and educate their members and instil noble morals in their personalities. Hassani proverbs combine the simplicity and elegance of their linguistic form and the importance of their messages and morals, that's why they are easy to spread among people orally.

Furthermore, Hassani proverbs are mainly based on characterisation and imagery to portray the aspects of life in the desert and show how people behave and react in everyday situations. They also aim at guiding people to good manners and behaviours, like lying, theft, agony, and arrogance. Proverbs, as a major part of Hassani oral culture, hold lots of moral principles, human values, and manners of behaviour that share rules of good conduct in society and instructions about how to manage life and solve its hardships. In fact, they play significant pedagogical roles. They include wisdoms and lessons which summarise human experience and, hence, contribute to educating generations one after one, and maintain morals and noble values, and lead people to the right path. In addition to this pedagogical side, proverbs have other roles, including sociological, cultural, critical, and psychological roles. Proverbs create unity and homogeneity among the members of the community and bring them feelings of belonging as they hold common meanings and norms that local people believe in and abide by in their society. They also preserve those meanings (knowledge) and facilitate their spread orally among the people from generation to generation. Besides, they serve as a reference which prevents from immoral

behaviours and practices which are against the social values of the community and help guide each individual to learn from his/her ancestors' experiences.

However, these proverbs are not always innocent as they also include stereotypical images that portray men and women differently as a reflection of power relationships in the society. Since the Hassani society is a male-dominated society, many proverbs diffuse gender-biased thoughts, pictures, and misrepresentations of women which serve patriarchal agendas in the community and maintain aspects of male dominance and superiority.

4.1.2. Women's Status in Hassani Society

Women have a very important value in the Hassani society. Men are not allowed to behave with women inappropriately. In the Hassani culture, a man is considered weak and despicable if he treated a woman badly or resorted to using violence against her, either verbally or non-verbally.

According to El Hayssen (2013), Sahrawi people are against using violence against women. It is prohibited for a man to insult a woman or beat her in the Hassani community. Kids are educated to respect women starting with their mother, grandmother, sisters, neighbours, and all women in general.

Sahrawi women have a very high position in society in comparison to the situation of women in other Islamic societies. While women in most Islamic societies stay at home, Sahrawi women play different roles, especially at present, in the Hassani society. They compete with men in different areas that only men dominated for ages.

Life in the Sahara is hard. The difficulties Sahrawi people face in their tough environment push them to move from a place to the other and beam in the deserts to earn their living and survive. This hard environment urges all the members of the society to collaborate in their daily tasks. Sahrawi women do housework in addition to other various tasks, like herding and fetching water.

Women herd goats, they can possess wealth, and they may participate, beside men, in armed conflicts against other tribes. The form and nature of Sahrawi residences allowed women to be free and avoid the solitude women suffer from in other Islamic communities (Islamic Harem). In the family's tent, all the members of the family live together in the same space as there are no rooms, walls, or private spaces. Therefore, Hassani women coexist with men and are always present beside them, unlike other women in other reserved Islamic societies. They do not have to hide in private places when they host male guests. They can attend meetings beside family men and male guests in the tent and know about all what is happening around in their community. More than that, a Hassani woman can host guests at home even in the absence of her husband, which is not mostly allowed for women in many Islamic societies, as long as she is loyal and preserves her honour and dignity.

The presence of Sahrawi women beside men in all aspects of life in the desert enabled them to play a political role by taking part in decision-making processes when dealing with issues related to the household or the tribe. The lifestyle of Hassani people in the desert requires the participation and collaboration of all community's members, both men and women, to face the difficulties of life in the desert. Therefore, women assume multiple tasks and play various roles, like tenting, housework, and herding.

5. The Representation of Women in Hassani Proverbs

5.1. The Image of Hassani Women as Mothers

The mother is the best person in anybody's life regardless of their origins, culture, language, ethnicity, or religion. Mothers are presented in proverbs worldwide as being the best creatures on earth and the ones that require to be given high value in society due to the vital roles they play in raising and educating their children. In Hassani proverbs, women are presented as the most precious creature in Sahrawi peoples' lives. Mothers are described as being kind creatures who sacrifice for the sake of their children. That's why Hassani proverbs stress the importance of treating mothers kindly and respectfully.

- Proverb 1: “رِيحَتْ لَمْ تُعَيِّنْ” (English translation: “Mother's scent feeds”)

This proverb (1) is generally used to express the important role of the mother in one's life, and specifically to stress the importance of the mother's natural milk in the healthy upbringing of her baby.

- Proverb 2: “الَّذِي أَحَنَ مِنْ لَمْ كَهَانَ” (English translation: “The more affectionate than a mother is a swindler”)
- Proverb 3: “لَوْصَاكَ عَلَى أُمَّكَ حَكْرَكَ” (English translation: “Whoever advised you to take care of your mother is humiliating you”)

The proverb (2) above means that whoever tries to show great love and affection towards you can never reach or replace the place of a mother in her son or daughter's heart. In other words, the expression states that nobody cares about you and loves you in all your conditions more than your mother. Accordingly, proverb (3) clearly reveals that nobody needs advice regarding taking care of his/her mother. The mother's position is very high in the Hassani society, and it is evident and unquestionable that everyone must care for his/her mother more than anybody else and treat her respectfully.

- Proverb 4: "أُمُّ لَجُودَا اغْرُوصْ" (English translation: "The mother of noble people is like a bride")

This proverb (4) expresses that good and noble people take good care of their mothers to the extent that they bring her beautiful ornaments and jewellery to look as beautiful as a bride.

- Proverb 5: "أَلِي طَيِّبَتُ الْمَعْفُونِ يَوْكُلُوهُ أَوْلَادُهُ" (English translation: "If a mother made bad food, her children would eat it")
- Proverb 6: "أَنْفَعُ لُمُو وَالتَّيِّبِ الثَّانِي لَجْدَاهُ" (English translation: "Mother comes first, and then the grandmother")

Proverbs (5) and (6) above also reassure that the mother is the one that deserves all the love and respect and must be obeyed under any circumstances. The mother is the most precious person in one's life, and she is favoured over all the other relatives. Then, the second relative whom one should serve and care for is his/her grandmother. This clearly reveals how Hassani people highly value the mother for the important role she plays in society. Moreover, the ranking of the grandmother, and not the father, in the second place after the mother implies that Hassani society educates people to highly value women, especially old ones, and be at their service.

- Proverb 7: "أُمُّ إِشْتِيرِ امْدَكْدَكَةُ" (English translation: "The mother of a newly born baby is physically broken")
- Proverb 8: "أُمُّ إِشْتِيرِ مَا تَنْفَطَحُ" (English translation: "The mother of a newly born baby is never shamed")

A woman who has given birth to a new baby is described in proverb (7) as being unable to move from her place as if all the bones of her body are broken, according to Hassani culture. The proverb metaphorically means that she cannot move because she has to stay beside the baby all the time to feed him/her and look after him/her. Therefore, she is tied to the crane of her baby to satisfy his/her needs, but at the same time, all her demands must be approved and done unquestionably. As proverb (8) above also expresses, the mother has the right to rest and ask for anything she needs. Her demands according to the proverb should be accepted since all she asks for is for the sake of the well-being of the baby. However, there are some proverbs which show that the mother who has given birth to a baby boy must be given more care and attention than the one who has given birth to a baby girl.

- Proverb 9: "أُمُّ اللَّيْثِ امْدَكْدَكُ كَأَيْمَنَةِ الْعَرَبِيِّ" (English translation: "The mother of a baby girl is broken in her right leg")
- Proverb 10: "أُمُّ اطْفَلٍ امْدَكْدَكَاثُ كَرَّ عَيْنُهَا التَّنْتِينُ" (English translation: "The mother of a baby boy is broken in her both feet")
- Proverb 11: "الطَّفْلُ ثَخَاسَنُ أَمَّنْ أُمِّهِ" (English translation: "The girl is treated well just for the sake of her mother")

The first proverb above (9) means that the mother who has given birth to a girl cannot move easily and is not totally free to leave her place due to postpartum pain. Yet, the second proverb (10) indicates that the mother who has given birth to a baby boy cannot move at all and is completely unable to leave her bed and her baby. This is not only because of her physical condition, but because the people in the Hassani society praise the birth of a boy and require his mother to be at his service and keep an eye on him all the time to protect him from any possible harm. In fact, there are many other proverbs in the Hassani oral culture which demonstrate that they favour the birth of a boy over a girl and that girls are well-treated for the sake of their mothers only, as expressed in the last proverb above (11).

5.2. The Image of Hassani Women as Girls

Girls are generally portrayed in most Hassani proverbs negatively. Many Hassani proverbs include aspects of male-dominance in the Hassani society and reveal the remainders of the old patriarchal beliefs and practices which undervalue girls unlike boys.

The following proverbs (12) and (13) reveal that that people in the Sahara do not care much about the loss of a girl as much as they care about the loss of a boy because they believe that girls can easily bring shame to her family if she is not well-controlled. Even if a house is full of girls, it resembles an empty house. This meaning which is conveyed in proverb (13) reflects the old patriarchal mentality which undervalues women and views men as always superior to women due to their physical strength. These views attach shame to girls and provide boys with freedom to do whatever they want and make mistakes because they are "men".

- Proverb 12: “مَوْتُ الطِّفْلَةِ سَنَاءٌ” (English translation: “The death of a baby girl is a blessing”)
- Proverb 13: “دَارُ الطَّافِيَلَاتِ خَالِيٌ” (English translation: “A house full of girls is empty”)

In addition to that, girls are compared to thorns in the following proverb (14) to indicate that they are not as innocent as they appear and that they are hard to deal with since their birth. So, the proverb calls parents, especially fathers, to control them well since early ages so that they would be good daughters that follow their instructions and do as they are told.

- Proverb 14: “الشَّوْكُ مِنْ أَصْغَرِهِ أَمْدٌ” (English translation: “A thorn is sharp since its birth”)
- Proverb 15: “امْتَنُ عَيْنُ اطْفَلٍ مِنْ شَيْنٍ سَعْدٌ” (English translation: “A girl should not be bold”)

More than that, proverb (15) shows that girls are not allowed to interfere when men talk about any topics or discuss any issues and should not dare to express their opinions or talk when they are not asked to talk.

- Proverb 16: “اتَّوَابِسِي اطْفَلٌ أَلِيٌّ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ أَخْلَاقَتِهِ” (English translation: “A girl may commit what is even worse than her birth in the first place”)
- Proverb 17: “اطْفَلٌ تَمَرَكُ نَوْبَتَيْنِ فَحَيَاتِهِ، نَهَارُ غُرْسِهِ وَانْهَارُ أَلِيٍّ تَمُوتُ” (English translation: “A girl leaves her father’s house in two occasions: in her wedding and her funeral”)

Proverbs (16) and (17) reflect the gender-biased beliefs which are spread in the Hassani culture. These proverbs reveal the negative views attributed to girls and the birth of girls in the Hassani society. They also reveal the patriarchal perspective which values boys over girls and considers girls as inferior in comparison to boys as boys are always given freedom to go wherever they want, experience whatever they wish, and find attentive ears when they voice their thoughts unlike the miserable oppressed women and girls.

- Proverb 18: “الْيَتِيمُ إِلَى مَا ابْتِطَطَ نَهَارُ لَحْدُ شَيْءٍ عَنْ مَا مَعَهُ خَدٌّ، وَإِلَى مَا ابْتِطَطَ نَهَارُ السَّبْتِ تُكُولُ أَنْ سَبْتُ” (English translation: “A girl should be beaten to obey her family”)

Proverb (18) above means that girls need to be well-controlled and should be treated in a tough way to force them to obey their parents’ orders. It is a clear invitation to the girl’s family to use violence against her regularly so that she walks the line.

Unfortunately, very few proverbs give value to girls or permit them to enjoy some of the unlimited privileges that are exclusively allocated to boys in the Hassani community. The following proverb (19) means that the girl has a huge importance in the house. However, her value stems from the fact that she is the one that will help her mother with housework and the one that will serve her father and brothers at home. This proverb is mainly used when motivating girls to work as bees and obey their fathers’ orders.

- Proverb 19: “الطِّفْلَةُ اغْمَارَتْ الْخَيْمَةَ” (English translation: “The girl occupies the tent”)
- Proverb 20: “لُحْكَيْنِ كَثْفٌ، مَائِلٌ إِكْوَلُ اثْفٌ” (English translation: “Help me reach his shoulder so that he stops spitting on me”)

Proverb (20), amidst lots of oppressive proverbs against the rights of girls, is used by girls themselves to say that the negative attitude fathers have towards having daughters is mistaken. The proverb means that daughters can prove their value to their fathers once they grow up as they are the ones that will always love and take care of their fathers when they get old.

- Proverb 21: “مَتْنٌ عَيْنُ اطْفَلٍ مِنْ شَيْنٍ سَعْدٌ” (English translation: “An indifferent girl is a fortunate happy girl”)
- Proverb 22: “إِمُوتُ السَّارِكِ مَا تَكَلَّمَتْ لَعْرَبٌ” (English translation: “A virgin is never allowed to speak”)
- Proverb 23: “مَ خَالِكٌ فَالْدَارُ نُؤْيِرُهُ، وَلَ فُلْعَانِيَّاتِ طَفِيلُهُ” (English translation: “There exists neither light fire nor innocent girls”)

Girls should not be curious, and they are not allowed to interfere when men talk or discuss a certain issue. As proverbs (21) and (22) above suggest, a girl is considered cute and beautiful when she remains silent and shows indifference towards issues that are none of her business. Similarly, proverb (23) continues to portray girls as evil creatures that can commit evil deeds and bring about troubles and shame to their families.

- Proverb 24: “تَنْخَاصُ فُلْخَوَالٌ” (English translation: “She gets kidnapped from her crane”)
- Proverb 25: “طَيِّفَةٌ فَدَارُ بُوَاهَا” (English translation: “A guest in her father’s house”)

According to Hassani culture and traditions, the Sahrawi girl is doomed to get married as soon as she is born. This idea which is stated in proverb (24) means that the future of a girl in Hassani society is to get married and make a family. As proverb (25) also adds, she is considered as a guest in her family’s house until she gets

married. In fact, the girl is prepared in the Hassani community since her childhood for the responsibilities of marriage and life with her future husband. The family, mainly the mother, orients the girl and teaches her how to do how work, including cooking, cleaning, taking care of kids, herding, fetching water, and other tasks that she is supposed to do in their everyday life in the Sahara. Besides, she is loaded with instructions and pieces of advice to look as a disciplined, beautiful, and good girl in the community. Meanwhile, she is also prepared for marriage by taking care of her hair, decorating her with attractive jewellery, and feeding her to be fat since women's fatness is considered an aspect of beauty in the Hassani culture.

- Proverb 26: “مَعْكُودٌ فِيهِ خَيْطٌ” (English translation: “A thread is tied to her hair”)
- Proverb 27: “مَعْكُودٌ فُرْكَيْتُ فُلَانٌ” (English translation: “She is tied to someone's neck”)

It is a tradition to tie a woollen thread to the hair of a young girl, since a very early age, when she is chosen by someone to be his potential wife. As proverb (26) describes, it is a sign that indicates that the girl is already reserved to be someone's wife. Proverb (27) is also used to announce that a girl is already reserved by someone to be his wife and that both their families have agreed on that. All these proverbs indicate that a girl is considered as an object which has no free-will or right to choose for herself and work on her own aspirations that may go beyond mere marriage and housework.

- Proverb 28: “رَدُّ لَعْمَائِمٍ يُورِثُ اِنْدَانِيَمَ” (English translation: “Refusing proposals leads to regret”)

According to proverb (28), if a girl refuses to marry those who are proposing to her over and over, she will regret that as she may stay a spinster for her whole life. The best place for a girl is her husband's house according to the Hassani culture, that's why they rush to give their girls for marriage from an early age and consider the unmarried girl a heavy burden on their chests.

- Proverb 29: “مَرْ يَا اَلِّي كُصَعْتُ مَا اَمْلَاةٌ وَ كَبَرْتُ مَنْتُ مَا اَعْطَاةٌ” (English translation: “It is a shame not to feed your guests well and not to give your girl for marriage”)
- Proverb 30: “ضَرَسْتُكَ اِلَ وَجَعَتَاكَ اَلْكَلْعَةُ وَمَنْتَاكَ اِلَ كَبَرْتُ وَدَعَاةٌ” (English translation: “Remove your tooth if it hurts, and give your daughter for marriage when she grows up”)
- Proverb 31: “اَلِّي اَنْبَغَاتُ رَاخَتْ” (English translation: “When a girl is loved, she must go”)

As indicated in proverb (29), it is the man's duty to host his guests well as favourable act of hospitality in the Hassani culture. At the same time, the proverbs stresses that a man must give his girl for marriage once she grows up as keeping her will only bring about shame. Similarly, proverbs (30) and (31) imply that a girl is a heavy burden on her father's shoulders and as she is compared to a rotten tooth that causes continuous pain, and one needs to expel as soon as possible.

- Proverb 32: “اَلْخُطْبُ لَمَنْتَاكَ سَابَاكُ تَخْطُبُ لَوْلَاكَ” (English translation: “Look for a suitable husband for your daughter before your son”)

As proverb (32) states, the father has to choose the suitable husband for his daughter and ask about the family of the person who proposes for her because she is not allowed to choose for herself or inquire about the person by herself. According to Hassani culture, the girl can not contact any man or have a love relationship before marriage. When a girl grows up, her father and family members keep watching her and following her to make sure she does not contact anyone in the desert. However, the boy can choose the girl he wants to marry and ask about her by himself before telling his family. This reflects the male dominance in the Hassani society.

- Proverb 33: “وَلَدْ عَمِّي يَصْلَحُ هَمِّي” (English translation: “My cousin suits me”)
- Proverb 34: “مَنْتُ عَمَّ اِرَاخِلُ سَرُوَالٌ” (English translation: “A man's female cousin is his trousers”)
- Proverb 35: “وَلَدْ عَمِّي بَنْعَالٌ .. وَلَا بَرَانِي بَحْمَالٌ” (English translation: “My poor cousin is better than a rich stranger”)

Concerning marriage, Hassani culture favours marriage between relatives and considers it the best sort of marriage in their communities. Sahrawi people prefer marrying their girls to their cousins to strengthen family relations, keep their family name, and preserve their common benefits and properties as the previous proverbs suggest (proverbs 33, 34, and 35). Therefore, in most cases, the girl is not given the choice to select her husband as the family chooses for her. According to Hassani culture, the girl is not also allowed to refuse the person whom her father has chosen for her because he is the one who best knows what is good for her. Cousins are favoured over others no matter what who they are and how much they have. Sahrawi people prefer this sort of marriage to keep their origins and preserve their family names and properties.

In general, it is noticed that a lot of Hassani proverbs portray girls in a passive and negative way when it comes

to their value in life and their freedom to plan for their lives as they want. Girls are objectified and are considered like maids and products that are kept only to be exploited for the sake of family benefits.

5.3. The Image of Hassani Women as Wives

Wives are presented in oral Hassani proverbs in controversial ways. Sometimes, they are praised for the role they play in the family beside their husbands, but they are most of the time represented negatively and are described in ways that make them inferior to men and under male dominance.

- Proverb 36: “إِلْ رَيْثُهَا امْبَارَكَةُ أَحْكُمْ، وَلِ رَيْثُهَا لَعَاكَةُ أَطْلُسْ” (English translation: “Keep her if you found her blessed, and leave her if she happened to be ominous”)

Proverb (36) above advises the man to keep his wife and live together for the rest of their lives if she were a blessed woman; if she were a woman whose presence in his house brings him good luck, satisfaction, happiness, and male kids. If not, she is considered ominous, and it would be better to leave her and send her to her parents' house.

- Proverb 37: “لَمُرْ أَلَا امْسَانْدَ وَلَا مُوَالِ” (English translation: “A woman either supports or disappoints”)

Meanwhile, proverb (37) means that a woman should always support her husband and never disagree with whatever he decides to do. A woman who does not approve what her husband says or decides for herself instead of resorting to her husband first is a disappointing woman whom one can not trust. Therefore, people in the Hassani society use this proverb to advise boys to choose their wives according to this principle.

- Proverb 38: “حَامِدٌ وَلَا صَائِرٌ؟” (English translation: “Are you grateful or patient?”)

Proverb (38) is a popular expression in the interrogative form in Hassani dialect. This question is normally asked to the groom after his first night with his bride to know if everything between them passed well in their first night or not. It is also asked to know whether the groom has found his bride virgin or not. If he said that he is “grateful”, then the girl was virgin, and he is satisfied and happy with that. If he said that he is merely “patient”, then there is something wrong and he is going to divorce her as soon as possible. This suggests that a woman's honour and value lie in virginity and not in the morals, educational level, or the mentality of the woman herself.

- Proverb 39: “السَّائِرُ تَسْتَرُ مَرَّتَيْنِ” (English translation: “The decent woman covers herself twice”)

Accordingly, proverb (39) means that the decent woman is the one that covers her body and does not reveal her beauty in public and the one keeps her husband's secrets at the same time and does not mention but positive things only about him. According to Hassani culture, a woman is not allowed to wear clothes that reveal parts of her body. She must cover up her hair, arms, legs, and even feet because they are considered seductive parts of women and only indecent women do otherwise.

- Proverb 40: “لَمُرْ اِغْلِ دِينِ زَوْجِهَا” (English translation: “The woman should adopt her husband's religion”)

More than that, proverb (40) calls women to follow their men and obey them under any circumstances. Women who disobey their husbands or prefer to follow their own views and ignore their husbands' demands or decisions fall into problems and may get a divorce.

- Proverb 41: “لَمُرْ بِلْ أَوْلَادِ كَيْفِ الْخَيْمَةِ بِلْ أَوْثَادِ” (English translation: “A childless woman is like a tent without its pillars”)
- Proverb 42: “النَّاسُ تَغْلِبُنِي وَأَنْ تَغْلِبِ أَهْلَ” (English translation: “People can defeat me, but I can defeat my wife”)

A wife is valuable when she can give birth to babies. However, a childless woman is considered useless and has no value in society as proverb (41) explains. Again, these beliefs are too oppressive against women as they dehumanise them and consider them as machines that are made to perform certain roles in society and satisfy their men's desires. Men may use any means and do anything against their wives to show that they are controlling them as a sign of power and manhood (proverb 42).

5.4. Women's Social Roles in Hassani Proverbs

According to Hassani's oral culture and traditions, women must stay at home. They are not allowed to study and go to school as they have to do housework and help men with some tasks, like herding and fetching water. Men, as the community is male dominated, are the ones that can work outside and earn the family's living.

- Proverb 43: “لَمُرْ كُؤَامَ وَ الرَّاجِلُ جَيَّابٌ” (English translation: “A man earns and a woman saves”)
- Proverb 44: “لَمُرْ اللَّيْ اطُوفَ مَا تُغْزِلُ الصُّوفَ” (English translation: “The woman that hangs out is useless”)
- Proverb 45: “لَمُرْ لَعْظِيمِ تَبْلُكَ قَالِدَارُ مَكْنِيمِ” (English translation: “The great woman is the one that always stays at

home”)

- Proverb 46: “رَزَقُ لَمْرُ تَحْتُ كَايْمَتُهُ وَرَزَقُ ارَّاجِلُ تَحْتُ كَدَمُ” (English translation: “A woman’s living is under her feet while a man’s living is under his feet”)

According to Hassani culture, a woman is ought to stay at home and manage what her husband brings home to cover their needs in the long run. Besides, when a woman goes out a lot or hangs out, she wastes time that should normally be exploited at home doing housework and domestic tasks. Additionally, woman’s value grows more if she does not leave her house much. It is better for a woman to stay in her house and take care of her husband and children and be busy doing her housework. However, a man’s living is under his feet as he has to work outside and earn his and his family’s living. All these meanings are expressed in the previous proverbs (43), (44), (45), and (46) consecutively.

- Proverb 47: “كُلُّ مَسَلٍ بِنْكَلْبَةٍ وَ كَلْبُ الْخَيْمَةِ مَوْلَانَتُهُ” (English translation: “The heart of a tent is its owner (the wife)”)
- Proverb 48: “رَزَقُ لَمْرُ فَخَيْمَتُهُ” (English translation: “A woman works at home”)

Proverbs (47) and (48) also show that the central place of a woman is her house. A woman is the lifeblood of the house because she is the one that assumes the responsibility of all the housework.

- Proverb 49: “لَمْرُ إِنْ كَتَبَتْ كَتَبَتْ” (English translation: “If a woman knew how to write, she would kill”)

According to proverb (49), women are not allowed to study or attend school. The nature of Bedouin life in the desert makes it hard for a woman to attend school because Hassani people always change their location from a place to the other, and because girls have tasks to do to help their family in the hardships of life in the Sahara. More than that, girl schooling might be considered a waste of time, effort, and money to people in the Sahara since their girls get married, raise children, and rarely have chances to study to get a higher degree or work in the city.

- Proverb 50: “الْعَاكَّةُ تَكُومُ وَتَطِيحُ اِعْلَ رَاسَهُ” (English translation: “The unlucky woman stands up and then falls on her head”)

Proverb (50) means that when a Sahrawi woman attempts to do men’s tasks, like hunting, riding horses, and wars, she will certainly fail. That’s why it is better for her to stay at home. Women can not do man’s tasks because they are weaker than men and because they are made to handle housework. This view limits women’s potential and abilities to assume big responsibilities other than housework or perform men’s tasks and jobs. In fact, women have proved to be as brilliant and successful in domains that were only allocated for men worldwide in the previous years and this means that many beliefs and thoughts should be reconsidered in the society’s oral culture and changed to suit the conditions of life in the twenty first century.

5.5. The Image of Women in General in Hassani Proverbs

There are only few Hassani proverbs which portray women in general in a positive manner and value their importance in the society. Many proverbs which have been found regarding Hassani women and their characteristics in Sahrawi oral culture reflect negative attitudes towards women as they portray them as being evil creatures that mix between weakness, deception, irrationality, dishonesty, stupidity, and many other downgrading descriptions.

- Proverb 51: “لَعَلَّيَاتُ اَعْمَالِمُ لُجُودَ وَ اَنْعَالِلُ لَكَلَابُ” (English translation: “Women are the hats of the noble and the shoes of dogs”)

This proverb (51) means that only noble men treat women well and put them on their heads like their hats. However, lame and bad people who are described as “dogs” treat women badly. This proverb is a call for men to value their women and recognize their precious role in society. It also aims to prevent men from harassing or using violence against women.

- Proverb 52: “اللي امعاء مر معا ملاّن” (English translation: “He who is with a woman is under god’s mercy”)

Proverb (52) means that a married man is under trouble just because he has got a wife. This attitude reveals a pessimistic view towards accompanying women or trusting them as their company can cause problems and harm their husbands in different ways.

- Proverb 53: “لَا تُصَدِّقْ لَمْرَ إِنْ حَلَفَتْ لَكَ، بَعِيرُ صَدَقَةٍ مَنِينُ يَحْمَارُ وَجْهَهُ” (English translation: “Do not believe a woman when she swears”)
- Proverb 54: “النَّيِّبُ إِنْ اِتَّكَاثَ عَلَ شَ نَاكَرَتْ أَلَا ثَاكَدَ مَنْ” (English translation: “If a woman insisted on denying something, it is an indication that it really happened”)

In fact, there are lots of proverbs which reflect patriarchal views and gender-biased presentations of women aspects in Hassani culture. Various proverbs share stereotypical ideas about women by making negative over-generalizations and attributing certain immoral acts just to them, but not to men. For instance, proverbs (53) and (54) above show that women should not be trusted, especially when they attempt to confirm their say. Hence, Women are portrayed as being unreliable by default, and one can never trust their words.

- Proverb 55: “مَا يُؤْكُفُ وَخُدُ كَيْفَ لَمَرٍ” (English translation: “He can not stand on his feet like a woman”)
- Proverb 56: “لَمَرٌ ظَلَعَ عَوْجٌ” (English translation: “The woman is as perverse as a rib”)

Additionally, proverbs (55) and (56) above also share and spread the same thought that women are very weak. They are weaker and less valuable than men.

- Proverb 57: “لَمَرٌ نَأْكُصُ عَقْلٌ” (English translation: “Women lack rationality”)

More than that, proverb (57) also adds that women are not as intelligent and rational as men. Women are generally believed to be so emotional in their decisions, while men tend to be more logical and able to control their emotions.

- Proverb 58: “لَمَرٌ أَلْيَ تَعْلَمْتُ أَظْفِيرُ امْسُوخِلْ وَلَ تَظْفَرُ مَاوِ امْسُوخِلْ” (English translation: “A woman learnt how to make a braid to one side and could not know how to make it to the other side”)

Proverb (58) is mostly used in the Hassani society when referring to women stupidity and naivety. Normally, a woman who could comb her hair to one side can just go through the same process if she desired to comb it to the other side. Yet, this proverb reveals the negative and mocking attitude toward women by considering them as being too stupid and relating aspects of intelligence and creativity solely to men.

- Proverb 59: “سَأَوْرُوهُمْ وَغَاكِبُوهُمْ” (English translation: “Ask women for their opinion and do its opposite”)
- Proverb 60: “أَزَيْنَ أَرَائِهِمْ يَرَوْحُ لَصَنَرَةٍ فِيهِ لَفْعٌ” (English translation: “A woman’s best advice leads to a snake”)

In the same line of thought, proverbs (59) and (60) show that women should not be trusted and that their opinions and suggestions always lead to problems and catastrophic consequences. They also suggest that men should do what they think is right in a completely dogmatic way, without referring to women’s views which are always considered to be silly, unreliable, and unrealistic.

- Proverb 61: “أَرَايَ مَرٌ!” (English translation: “It is merely a woman’s opinion!”)

Proverb (61) is mainly used to indicate that a certain opinion is silly and does not require attention. This proverb reveals the patriarchal view which undervalues women’s thoughts and opinions in society and prevents them from voicing their thoughts or contributing to solving issues that are related to their community. Such a male-dominated society denies the abilities women have as they consider them irrational and unable to generate fruitful thoughts and suggestions.

- Proverb 62: “كَلَامُ ارْجَالٍ وَلَا كَلَامُ لَعَلِيَّاتٍ” (English translation: “Is it a man’s word or a woman’s word?”)

Similarly, proverb (62) is usually used between men when someone wants to make sure somebody else is going to keep his promise and commit to his word as real men do. This proverb also shows the negative picture held towards women by considering them untrustworthy and uncommitted.

- Proverb 63: “لَعَلِيَّاتٍ مَا يُصِيبُ عَنْ أَحْوَالَتُهُمْ” (English translation: “Women have their own tricks”)
- Proverb 64: “الدَّهْرُ وَلَعَلِيَّاتٍ مَا يَنْفَلُشْنَ” (English translation: “Women and time should never be trusted”)
- Proverb 65: “لَمَرٌ أَلَا لَفْعُ مَسْمُومٍ” (English translation: “Women are poisonous snakes”)
- Proverb 66: “النَّيْبُ كَيْفَ اللَّفْعِ إِنْ مَرَّكَتْ رَأْسَهُ أَخْبَطُ” (English translation: “A woman is like a snake. You should hit it in its head if it dared to show it”)

In addition to all of this, proverbs (63), (64), (65), and (66) hold a unified negative stereotype against women. They all reveal that women are represented in Hassani oral culture as being tricky and deceiving creatures that men should pay attention from. They assure that women should never be trusted because they can trick the man and deceive him like if they were aliens or strange creatures than human beings. More than that, they compare women to snakes and invites men to be firm and harsh with them and always pay attention from them because they can not be trusted.

- Proverb 67: “اعْطِ لَمَرٌ أَشْبَرَ تَطَامَ اذْرَاعِ، وَاعْطِيَةِ اذْرَاعِ تَطَامَاكَ اَنْتَ كَاغُ” (English translation: “Give a woman an inch,

and she will ask for an arm¹)

- Proverb 68: “لُولِي وَلَفَرَصَ مَا يُحْمَدُو النَّعَمَ” (English translation: “Women and horses do not show gratefulness”)
- Proverb 69: “دِيرُ الْخَيْرِ فَالْإِجْلُ وَاتْرَجَاهُ، وَدِيرُ الْخَيْرِ فَلَمَرٌ وَأَنْسَاهُ” (English translation: “Do a favour to a man and expect him to return it, and do a favour to a woman and forget it”)

In addition to all these negative images attributed to women in Hassani oral culture, women are also presented in many other Hassani proverbs as being greedy and ungrateful. Proverb (67) entails that women are greedy and that they are never satisfied with anything provided to them as they always ask for more. Besides, proverbs (68) and (69) claim that women never show gratitude towards people who did them favours, helped them, cared for them, or even made sacrifices for their sake.

- Proverb 70: “الَّتِي بَغَا لَعْدَابَ يُرَافِقُ النِّسَاءَ وَلَا لَعْلَابَ” (English translation: “Accompanying women or dogs is annoying”)

Women are also described as being very talkative and boring. They talk a lot and make a lot of noise like barking dogs as stated in proverb (70) below.

- Proverb 71: “وَالِي سَوْ: التَّرَكَّ وَالنِّسَاءَ” (English translation: “Women are as childish as kids”)
- Proverb 72: “مَ خَالَكْ بَلِيَّةَ مَ سُبَابَةِ وَلِي” (English translation: “There is no evil a woman is not responsible for”)

Furthermore, Women are compared to kids in this proverb (71) as they are both immature and irrational and they both do silly deeds and make lots of mistakes. They are also portrayed as being the source of problems and conflicts and responsible for most evil issues that happen in the community (Proverb 72).

- Proverb 73: “تِسُو تَكْبُرُ لَمَرٌ تَطْلُ تَحْتَ رَاجِلٍ” (English translation: “Whoever a woman becomes, she is always under her man’s shadow”)
- Proverb 74: “إِنْ مَلَيْتَ دَارَكَ بِلَعْلِيَّاتٍ، مَعْنَاهُ أَتَاكَ كَأَن تَغْذِيَهُمْ” (English translation: “If you had lots of daughters, it means you can feed them”)
- Proverb 75: “مَرٌ تُصَلِّ” (English translation: “A snickering woman”)

All these denigrating stereotypes about women in Hassani oral culture reveal the authority of men over all aspects of life in the desert and their patriarchal views. As proverbs (73), (74), and (75) reveal, Hassani women still suffer from male dominance and social injustice in their Bedouin environments. Women are still dominated by men are regarded as being inferior in comparison to their male counterparts in society. Besides, women are considered like animals that have the right to be fed by their owners, but at the same time, they are required to obey orders and handle housework tasks. More than that, they are not allowed to voice their opinions or make decisive decisions. Worse than that, it is considered bad and inappropriate for a woman to raise her voice or shout when talking to a man.

As far as uncovering the characteristics of a woman’s beauty in Hassani oral culture is concerned, it is noticed that almost all Hassani proverbs describe the beauty of a woman in terms of her body. A woman is considered beautiful and valuable in the Hassani culture when she gets overweight. Other than that, there are no proverbs which value women and praise them for being intellectual or for having moral and humane values.

- Proverb 76: “الصَّبْغَانُ امْرُؤِطَيْنِ” (English translation: “She has big legs”)
- Proverb 77: “غَرَائِيْبُهُ يَنْبَحُ اطِّوْرُ” (English translation: “Her feet can be used as knives to slaughter birds”)
- Proverb 78: “السَّنَيْنُ ابْرُوْكَ” (English translation: “Teeth that resemble lightning”)
- Proverb 79: “الرَّيْنُ أَلَا أَمْ خَدَّ نَائِرٍ وَ اطْفِيرُ تَشَائِرٍ” (English translation: “The beautiful girl is the one that has white skin and long hair”)

As proverbs (76) and (77) state, Sahrawi men prefer girls whose feet are very small and consider big feet an aspect of ugliness among women. Besides, as described in proverbs (78) and (79), very white teeth are tempting and are considered an aspect of beauty among women according to Hassani’s oral culture. Also, very long hair and white skin are among the main indicators that a girl is beautiful and that she can get married easily.

- Proverb 80: “لَمَرٌ مِّنْ أَكْفَلَه” (English translation: “The value of a girl lies in her beauty”)

Proverb (80) stresses that all what a girl must care about is to gain weight and look beautiful to get a high value in the community. However, there are no proverbs which value educated women. Also, there are no traces of proverbs which encourage girls to study and get high degrees or establish successful businesses.

¹ “arm” is a measurement scale that is about an arm’s length

- Proverb 81: “كَلِمَتُ لَافْرٍ كَدُّ كَعْدَتِهَا” (English translation: “The word of a woman is as big as her body”)
- Proverb 82: “اسْمِينِ كَلِمَتُهُ امْتِينِ” (English translation: “The word of a fat woman is well-heard”)
- Proverb 83: “اَلتَّوَكُّطُ كَلَامَةً مَّ يَنْسَمَغُ” (English translation: “The thin girl is always neglected”)
- Proverb 84: “سَمَنْ كَهْلَةً اَنْزِ شَابَةً” (English translation: “Feed an old woman till she gets fat, and she will become young”)

Accordingly, and most importantly, fatness in the Hassani society is a main aspect of a woman's beauty and a sign of wealth and high status. As proverbs (81), (82), and (83) confirm, a fat woman is noticed wherever she is and is given value more than those who are thinner. Men give a high value to what a fat woman says and show readiness to serve her. However, the thin woman is always neglected and marginalised. Proverb (84) even stresses the importance of fatness as an aspect of a woman's beauty in the Hassani society to the extent that may favour a fat old woman over a skinny young girl.

Finally, it can be noticed that most descriptions of women in Hassani oral culture hold negative attitudes and stereotypical views that serve the old-fashioned patriarchal mentalities which still oppress women, silence them, and limit their freedoms. Women in the deserts are still considered like physical objects that serve to satisfy men's biological needs. Unfortunately, many of the proverbs presented in this paper reflect the existence of cultural barriers and gender-based discriminatory thoughts that still spread outdated views and mentalities via oral cultural tools, like proverbs, in rural and Bedouin areas like the Hassani's people environment.

6. Conclusion

By and large, this paper aims to uncover the representation of women in Hassani oral culture. Throughout the proverbs included in *Women in Hassani Proverbs* (El Hayssen, 2013), it was evident that a lot of Hassani proverbs represent women negatively and reflect the patriarchal structure of the Sahrawi society and the prevalence male dominance over women.

First, girls are presented in most Hassani proverbs as being worthless if compared to boys. They are portrayed as being evil creatures that are good for nothing but do housework and wait for their future husbands to knock the door of their family and transport them from the cell of their parents to the cell of their husbands.

Additionally, women in general are portrayed in dehumanising and offensive ways, except on few occasions when they are valued for being the queens of their houses and are valued for their roles in housework and raising children. A huge number of Hassani proverbs depict women as inferior to men, unreliable, untrustworthy, and too talkative. They are also compared to poisonous animals to convey that they are mean, tricky, and evil.

At the same time, the proverbs that describe the beauty of Hassani women focus more on their body, mainly size, and neglect the moral, mental, or emotional sides of women. This reflects the patriarchal perspective which underestimates women's capacities and considers them as fancy objects or tools to satisfy men's biological needs.

These proverbs which denigrate women and maintain old-fashioned mentalities in the Hassani culture need to be revised and reconsidered. The position and status of women in the Moroccan society have noticed a highly positive improvement which should also be reflected in its oral culture. Although these proverbs do not all represent the reality of how people really picture or treat females in the Hassani society and the recognition women have gained in the recent years in all parts of Morocco, the negative images and stereotypes they still hold and represent should be altered in order to suit nowadays' social, cultural, legal, and economic situation.

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