

Toxic Masculinities in Post-9/11 Islam-Themed French Novels: *Plateforme* and *Syngué Sabour. Pierre de Patience*

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore the perspective of toxic masculinities in two French literary works, namely *Plateforme* by Michel Houellebecq and *Syngué Sabour. Pierre de Patience* by Atiq Rahimi, whose stories are related to Islam after the September 11, 2001 tragedy. Islam became a hot topic in French literature after the collapse of the Twin Towers in the United States, which was considered a religion-based act of terrorism as it was carried out by terrorists who brought the name of Islam into their actions. Toxic masculinities are suspected to be present in both works, namely by placing women in the position of objects of sexual gaze and symbolic violence. This article dredges the concept of toxic masculinities, which is a derivation of the concept of hegemonic masculinities introduced by Raewyn Connell. This paper employs a critical discourse analysis method by examining the language used by the authors at levels of linguistic practice, discursive practice, and social practice with corpus data taken from the wordings and rewordings of the texts. This paper concludes that sexual gaze and symbolic violence are toxic because they can be drivers of physical violence.

Keywords: Toxic; masculinities; French literature; Islam.

INTRODUCTION

Toxic masculinities as a concept is usually used to identify masculine behaviors that are considered dangerous due to its physicality, such as the violent behaviors practiced in wars, domestic acts of violence, the murder of a human being of another race or of a specific gender, homophobic acts of violence, xenophobic acts of violence, and so on. However, in day-to-day experiences as well as in literary works, toxic masculinities are progressively dynamic and often symbolic, not physical.

Toxic masculinities are conceptually used to explain the dangerous traits and values of masculinity that tend to be embedded in men (Kupers, 2005). These traits include being harsh, rude, and socially harmful. These traits and values are practiced by groups of people (usually men) who adopt these values in their social, political, and cultural lives (Kunz, Myrntinen, & Udasmoro, 2018). These groups were initially identified by Raewyn Connell as the Hegemonic Masculine (Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity itself is the adopted value of the highest strata in the gender order. Connell describes those who adopt hegemonic masculinity as being tough and militarized. In its theoretical continuation, this hegemonic

masculine trait can develop a toxic value when it becomes harmful to its surroundings, both private and public (Udasmoro, 2021). Hegemonic masculinity becomes toxic when violent behaviors are practiced and exercised as a form of power. The assumption that it is natural for men to practice violence is a construct that is firmly anchored, both systematically and culturally, in societies.

The concept of toxic masculinities culturally continues to be part of the normal practice in society. However, as a concept and in practice, toxic masculinities are anything but stagnant. Toxic masculine values constantly develop, which sometimes parallels shifts in political and social regimes. For example, when the ruling political regime is the military, the practice of toxic masculinities is stronger than when the civilians are in power. In the context of France, there are several indications that the shifts of toxic masculine behaviors were in line with changes in political regimes and events.

France experienced a different situation after September 11, 2001. After the collapse of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center (WTC), there appeared to be a change in direction in the way that toxic masculinities are viewed, steering away from

their more heroic reputation. Politically, there are different ways of looking at the issue of “insider” and “outsider” identities. Identity politics in relation to Islam and immigrants intensified during this period. A highly reinforced siding with the Muslims, shown by, among others, French authors — white or immigrant — led to various definitions of toxic masculinities, which became attributed to men in different ways. Understanding the redefinition of toxic masculinities after September 11, 2001 is necessary in exploring of the varied existence of these supposedly dangerous masculinities in different literary works. The destruction of the WTC in the United States and the bombing of several public facilities in France brought about a polarity in the ways that toxic masculinities are viewed (Udasmoro, 2018, 2020). The first way sees toxic masculinities being associated with Muslim migrants who became stereotyped as terrorists. Meanwhile, the other polar identifies white men supremacy, in which white men are considered to hold Europe’s most legitimate “truths”. For example, populist parties in several Western European countries are indicated to be political parties that uphold white western supremacy by marginalizing the immigrants. This happened in several countries in Europe, such as in the Netherlands, or in France.

The 9/11 attack had been changing the political structure in France where the white western supremacy groups became increasingly stronger. These groups were allegedly held by, among others, the National Front political party under Marine Le Pen, having an ideology that marginalized the immigrants, especially the Muslim immigrants. The Muslim immigrants were in a difficult position for two reasons. Firstly, they were Muslims, a group that became socially outsiders after the attack. Secondly, they were immigrants who come from different ethnic groups and were economically dependant on the structure of the majority groups, having negative sentiments towards Muslims. The Muslim immigrants in France, both men and women, were often marginalized and fell into the lower category of the masculinity hierarchy. They belonged to a group economically, ethnically, and socially marginalized.

Women were the vulnerable group being narrated as the objects of male authors in French literary narratives after the 9/11 attack. Different male authors took the 9/11 attack as a moment to describe Muslim women with their stereotype reproduced. The objectification of women, especially their bodies, occurs because in the context of Europe or especially France, women and their bodies are often described as the most marginalized compared to non-Muslim women. The way they dress with hijab as well as the veil is seen as

the most obvious form of subordination of Muslim women in the European context. This is the important point of this article, why when a terrorism occurred, which was remote incident happened in the United States, women in different part of the world were also depicted but not in relation to terrorism because the perpetrators of the 9/11 attack were men. They were also depicted but in relation to their subordinate position in Muslim societies and communities.

This study will look at two French literary works by two French male authors. Michel Houellebecq, despite having lived in a Muslim country, is white and his work that is analyzed in this study is titled *Plateforme* (Houellebecq, 2001). The other novel is by a Muslim migrant author, Atiq Rahimi, titled *Syngué Sabour. Pierre de Patience* (Rahimi, 2008). The selection of two works by two authors of different social and religious backgrounds, despite both being French citizens, provides diversity of ideas. However, both Houellebecq and Rahimi are contemporaries. Born on February 23, 1956, Michel Houellebecq has produced a list of controversial literary works related to the existence of migrants in France, including *Plateforme* and *Soumission* (Udasmoro, 2018, 2020). His novel *La Carte et le Territoire*, published in 2010, won the prestigious *Le Prix Goncourt* award in 2015. Atiq Rahimi, born on February 26, 1962, is an immigrant from Afghanistan. Apart from being a novelist, he is also a film director (Taqiyya, Udasmoro, & Firmonasari, 2020). He was awarded the *Le Prix du Regard vers l'Avenir* at the Cannes Film Festival in 2004 for his film *Terre et Cendres*. The film is based on the novel he wrote in 2010.

The second reason for selecting the two authors is to be able to explore thoughts on toxic masculinities through their responses to the tension between two increasingly strong identity politics, namely the white men supremacy and the existence of “the other”, especially Islamic groups as somewhat persona non grata factions following the 9/11 tragedy. The third reason is, both literary works used women’s body as objects of depictions although they had different point of views in describing them. This study will not focus on the novels’ stories as these have been studied before (Sentana, 2016; Taqiyya et al., 2020; Udasmoro, 2018). This previous study used the novel *Plateforme* as a material object by analyzing the content of the story. It explains the aspects raised by Houellebecq when talking about the Asian women and their bodies, especially in Thailand. They are stereotyped as prostitutes, for instance. However, as an overview, *Plateforme* tells of French travelers who set out on a sex tourism in Thailand, and it specifically tackles the issue of Islamophobia. On the other hand, *Syngué*

Sabour. Pierre de Patience tells the story of a woman who repeatedly becomes the object of her husband's violent behavior until the day he lays in paralysis and comatose, allowing her to make complaints before his immobile physique.

The exploration of toxic masculinities post-9/11 in these French literary works is largely directed toward the violent practices conveyed by the migrant French author in *Syngué Sabour. Pierre de Patience* on the one hand, and the white French author in *Plateforme* on the other. Toxic masculinities are defined as "the constellation of socially regressive (masculine) traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence" (Kupers, 2005: 71). Other attitudes related to toxic masculinities include bullying, sexual harassment, social dominance, and homophobic bullying. In relation to this, two questions are raised. First: the kind of toxic masculinities practices described in terms of men-women relationships in these works. Second: the underlying differences between the two in the ways that they position women when viewed from the conceptual framework of toxic masculinities.

The method called for the completion of several stages. The first is data collection, namely collecting data in the forms of words (wordings, rewordings, and alternative wordings), sentences, and paragraphs suspected as bearing relevance to toxic masculinities. The data were then analyzed using critical discourse analysis, namely by employing levels of linguistic practice, discursive practice, and social practice introduced by Norman Fairclough (Fairclough, 1989, 2010). The linguistic level comprises the production of meanings by the authors, who convey their thoughts through language. The discursive practice shows their references to other texts (consumption of other texts). Finally, the social practice shows the relevance of their thoughts to social context. The three levels of analysis were used to obtain the connection between the order of discourse and the mindset of toxic masculinities (Van Dijk, 1985) as represented in the two novels.

Toxic Masculinities through Sexual Gaze

Toxic masculinities come in many different forms. Masculine gaze that demean others, especially women, have become an important part of the history of fiction writing by men. Many studies on toxic masculinities have stemmed from Raewyn Connell's writings entitled *Masculinities* (Connell, 2005) and *The Men and The Boys* (Connell, 2000). In Connell's view, "masculinities" are not men per se. Masculinities are values or traits embedded or established in men as if they are values inherent in them (Udasmoro, 2021).

These are values or behaviors that are harsh, violent, aggressive, strong, and dominant either physically, verbally, or psychologically. Connell places masculinities into different categories based on their different characteristics. The first is called *hegemonic masculinities*, a category which comprises those who are extremely powerful and aggressive, carry militaristic tendencies and often use violence in their attempts to solve problems (Kunz et al., 2018). Those included by Connell in this category are heterosexual, caucasian, and physically potent males. The second category is *complicit masculinities*, which includes those who are not of the same capacity as the above and yet do not try to challenge their existence. As they do not contest the gender order system, it thus allows them to gain benefits as men who concur to hegemonic masculinities. In the third category we have *marginalized masculinities*, namely men who do not have access to hegemonic masculinities due to their different characteristics, such as race. However, they imbue themselves with attributes of hegemonic masculinities, such as an aggressive attitude, emotional aloofness, and great physical strength. Examples in this category include men of color and disabled physically. The fourth category is *subordinate masculinities*, namely men with characteristics opposite to hegemonic masculinities, such as physically weak, emotionally prone to express sadness, and on the receiving ends of judgments that deem them feeble, both physically and mentally. Gay men and males in other spectrums of homosexuality are examples of males with subordinate masculinities.

In its development, the category of aggressive hegemonic masculinities received explorations in terms of theoretical framework. The term "toxic masculinities" is used to describe a masculine entity that is harmful to their environment (Kupers, 2005). The American Psychological Association (APA) offers toxic masculinities as a concept drawn from traditional masculinities, which carry dominant and aggressive traits (Pappas, 2019). Toxic masculinities have become APA's recommendation to explain racist and radical characteristics, which include the tendency to rely on weaponry to commit violence against their surroundings. Among their clear examples are mass shootings and bombings (Boise, 2019), which are today's toxic masculinities in practice.

Discussions on toxic masculinities in relation to sexuality often put forward examples of rape, sexual exploitation, bodily abuse, bodily humiliation, as well as bodily bullying. However, for the same sexual context, the two novels present different ways of how toxic masculinities are practiced.

It is important to note that a gaze that degrades, insults, and positions women as objects of pleasure is as dangerous as toxic masculinities in various forms of physical violence. I call the aforementioned aspects as *sexual gaze*, which is the basic nature of all forms of violence. This is the concept that I put forward as a continuation of the male gaze proposed by Mulvey. I add this concept to emphasize that objectification of women has more aspects of sexual gaze than other male gaze aspects. The sexual gaze, such as humiliation and objectification of the female body are aspects that lead to other forms of domination, such as physical and psychological dominations.

Sexual Gaze as a Thinking Mechanism

A gaze that demeans the female entity, including Muslim women, in relation to sexuality (sexual gaze) becomes an especially strong aspect of the novel *Plateforme*. The word “gaze” here is derived from concepts proposed by Laura Mulvey, namely the *male gaze* and *visual pleasure* (Agustin & Udasmoro, 2018; Mulvey, 1999). These two concepts are interrelated. According to Mulvey, the male gaze is an act of portraying women and the world from the visual lens of heterosexual men. On the other hand, in visual pleasure, women become the visual objects of men’s pleasure. Mulvey places more emphasis on gaze and visual pleasure as a way in which women become objects of men’s gaze (Mulvey, 1999; Sari & Udasmoro, 2020). Sexual gaze becomes a thinking mechanism because there is a habituation process in everyday life where placing women’s body as sexual objects is frequently considered as a normal practice. For example, when a man place a woman’s body as a sexual object, then socially and culturally it is considered as something normal because that is how men are. If according to Mulvey male gaze is a power to look, which is traditionally held by the dominant gender (men) (Mulvey, 1999) in many different ways. sexual gaze is a focalization to the point on the issue that most gazes are sexual. In reality, this sexual gaze can be done by both men and women, although in this context the perpetrators are men and the victim is a woman. However, this sexual gaze is a practice that emphasizes on the sexual gaze, which in Mulvey’s context is still concentrated on men. In other words, in Mulvey’s concept, men are typically given more freedom to visually explore their surroundings than women.

Apart from that, as a development of this concept, it is quite clear in both novels that the gaze is not only about men’s pleasure; there are blatant attempts to objectify women that involves not only sexual desire but also humiliation and ridicule of the female body. Women

become objectified not to be admired but to be humiliated; their bodies, deemed worthless, are thus justified of insults. The following can be found in *Plateforme*:

J’eus à ce moment une espèce de vision sur les flux migratoires comme des vaisseaux sanguins qui traversaient l’Europe ; les musulmans apparaissaient comme des caillots qui se résorbaient lentement. Aïcha me regardait, dubitative. Le froid s’engouffrait dans la voiture. Intellectuellement, je parvenais à éprouver une certaine attraction pour le vagin des musulmanes (Houellebecq, 2001: 30).

At the time, I had the view that the flows of migrants were like blood vessels that traversed throughout Europe; those Muslims appeared like clots that were being absorbed ever so slowly. Aïcha looked at me, doubtful. The cold was pouring into the car. Intellectually, I managed to feel a certain attraction to Muslim vagina.

Through the above quote, a blatant sexual gaze on migrants, especially female migrants, manifests. As a linguistic practice, its choice of wording associates migrants in general with “blood clots” in “blood vessels.” The clots are also described as being absorbed very slowly. In this linguistic practice, they are considered as disrupting a flow. Moreover, in relation to sexual gaze, the narrator describes himself as having an attraction in the sexual organs of migrant women at some point in his life. The use of the words “Muslim (woman’s) vagina” is a strong sexual gaze when it comes to toxic masculinities. The mention of the vagina as an object to be seen and then directed specifically at Muslim women contains aspects which on the one hand comprise the sexual gaze of men in general, and on the other hand is a sexual gaze aimed at a certain ethnicity, namely Middle Eastern (women), which in social context is often marginalized in France. The passage: “At the time, I had the view that the flows of migrants were like blood vessels that traversed throughout Europe; those Muslims appeared like clots that were being absorbed ever so slowly.” suggests an argument for an entry point, namely how the migratory situation in Europe appears to be as troubling as blood clots in the veins. As a bottom line, the linguistic view and the reference to the migratory situation in Europe have positioned Muslim women and, even more extreme, the vagina of the Muslim woman as a message carrying a great deal of ideological and sociological weight from the author.

The description openly of women’s sexual parts, such as the vagina is a taboo in many societies, including in Muslim societies. Women in Muslim societies are

culturally even asked to cover their body parts tightly. The description of this taboo is a form of humiliation for them.

The novel is strewn with sexual gaze, which also happens to be racial in various places, as seen from the selection of countries whence prostitutes are said to have hailed in the story. They are Muslim, European and Asian women (Houellebecq, 2001; Taqiyya et al., 2020). It presents a view of Western male dominance, which is toxic, for it objectifies women as properties that are meant to be controlled, as seen in the following quote:

Le racisme, continua Robert en me jetant un regard de côté, semble d'abord se caractériser par une antipathie accrue, une sensation de compétition plus violente entre mâles de race différente; mais il a pour corollaire une augmentation du désir sexuel pour les femmes de l'autre race. Le véritable enjeu de la lutte raciale, articula Robert avec netteté, n'est ni économique ni culturel, il est biologique et brutal: c'est la compétition pour le vagin des jeunes femmes (Houellebecq, 2001: 121).

Racism, continued Robert as he glanced sideways at me, at first seems to be characterized by a rising antipathy, a sensation of violent competition between the males of different races; but its corollary is an increase in sexual desire for women of the other race. The real stake of the racial struggle, said Robert clearly, is neither economic nor cultural, it is biological and brutal: it's the competition for the vaginas of young women.

In the above description, Houellebecq as an author chooses to have racism explained differently from the definition of racism in general. In explaining it, he illustrates racism as “une sensation de compétition plus violente entre mâles de race différente” — a sensation of violent competition between men of different races. However, in the next sentence, it is written: “but its corollary is an increase in sexual desire for women of the other race.” The author takes a linguistic practice that contradicts two different views. The initial, customary reference is that racism is usually used to explain aggressive male competitions. However, in linguistic practice, which is the argument, it is stated that racism is a matter of an increased sexual desire for women of different races. He adds that racial struggle is thus biological, namely a competition for the vaginas of young women. The bottom line, again found at the end of the paragraph, presents the desire for women's vaginas (in this case those of young women) as a blatant display of toxic masculinities, where women

are but the ultimate objectives of men's vulgar ambitions. In the previous example, it was the Muslim woman, whereas in this example they are young women of different races. In this context, as a result of the deepening analysis of the novels, the important point found is that, they are subordinated not only because they are women. However, other aspects that arise are they are Muslim and also immigrants, who come from different ethnic background.

Female Body, Mockery and the Male Desire

The female body as a male's sexual desire is very clear in the novel *Plateforme*. These women can come from both developed and developing countries. However, mockery of Muslims becomes the main thing in the story, as can be seen in the following passage:

Le problème des musulmans, me dit-il, c'est que le paradis promis par le prophète existait déjà ici-bas: il y avait des endroits sur cette terre où des jeunes filles disponibles et lascives dansaient pour le plaisir des hommes, où l'on pouvait s'enivrer de nectars en écoutant une musique aux accents célestes; il y en avait une vingtaine dans un rayon de cinq cents mètres autour de l'hôtel. Ces endroits étaient facilement accessibles, pour y entrer il n'était nullement besoin de remplir les sept devoirs du musulman, ni de s'adonner à la guerre sainte; il suffisait de payer quelques dollars (Houellebecq, 2001: 358).

The problem with Muslims, he told me, is that the the paradise promised by the Prophet already exist here below: there are already places on this earth where available and lascivious young girls dance for the pleasure of men, where you can also get drunk on nectars while listening to music with celestial accents; there are about twenty of them within a five-hundred-meter radius of the hotel. These places are easily accessible, to enter you don't need to perform the seven duties of a Muslim, or to carry out a crusade; all you need is pay a few dollars.

At the level of linguistic practice, Houellebecq uses the wording “there are already places on this earth where available and lascivious young girls dance for the pleasure of men”. Two main ideas are used to describe women in this quote. First is the word “available”, which may seem to be a common or linguistically neutral word. However, in a social context, when the word is intended for a woman's body, it indicates objectification. The connotation becomes stronger with the wording that follows, which is “lascivious young girls dance for the pleasure of men”.

The above linguistic practice is related to the author's view that takes reference from Islamic teachings about heaven, which is often associated with the presence of divine virgins (as part of discursive practice). In an ideological context, it is important to note that the author takes the female body (as part of desire) and relates that to Islamic teachings (as intertextuality), which then leads to the ideological conclusion that all of those teachings are very easy to obtain, namely by paying a few dollars.

The author's view by choosing a place in the world as a substitute for heaven, a place imagined by Muslims as a beautiful place because of the presence of women provided for men explains the form of mockery to the believed imagination. There is a form of rationality that the author tries to explain in the language choices and the rational arguments presented. However, the most obvious thing in the author's narrative is the argument that male desire equal power. Men are depicted as being able to buy anything, even what is imagined as paradise, namely the woman's body.

Physical Violence and the Male Dominance

Unlike Houellebecq, whose novel reflects toxic masculinities with sexual gaze as its main aspect, Atiq Rahimi manages to reflect on the toxicity of men through their physically violent behavior toward their environment, particularly toward women.

Mon père, quand il est rentré, trouvant la cage vide, est devenu fou. Hors de lui. Il hurlait. Il nous a tabassés, ma mère, mes sœurs et moi, parce que nous n'avions pas surveillé sa caille. Sa maudite caille! Pendant qu'il me tapait, j'ai crié que c'était bien fait... parce que c'était à cause de cette maudite caille que ma sœur avait dû partir! Mon père a tout compris. Il m'a enfermée alors dans le sous-sol (Rahimi, 2008: 28).

My father, when he came home, finding the cage empty, went mad. As if he wasn't himself. He was screaming. He beat us all, my mother, my sisters and me, because we hadn't taken a good care of his quail. Damn quail! While was he hitting me, I shouted that it was just as well... it was because of this damn quail that my sister had to leave! My father understood everything. So he locked me in the basement.

Similar kinds of physical violence can be found in almost every chapter of the novel. The narrator in the above quotation is a woman, the daughter of the violent father. The quotation tells of a father who is so domineering in his family that it is very easy for him to be triggered and act with violence when he merely

loses his pet quail. In linguistic practice, the wording "il nous a tabassé" or "he beat us all" is very strong; it does not merely mean *frapper* or strike, but something more violent. The other sentence: "Il m'a enfermée alors dans le sous-sol" or "So he locked me in the basement" describes another toxic masculine mentality. In discursive practice, the author, through the narrator, explains through the irony that because of something meager, in this case the missing quail, he lost his sister. The author's mentality manages to capture how dominant men can be with their masculinities. It is such a toxic way of thinking when men prioritize their pets' value over that of other human beings. This raises the social practice of the kind of social logic that men commit acts of violence in society because of petty things. In a social context, many forms of violence perpetrated against other family members stem out of very trivial matters.

In addition to physical violence related to daily life, toxic masculinities are also shown through the depiction of sexual violence, such as in the following quote:

Ils me mataient... tout le temps, durant les trois ans de ton absence... ils me mataient par la petite fenêtre du hammam pendant que je me lavais, et ils se... branlaient. Ils nous mataient aussi, la nuit... (Rahimi, 2008: 25).

They peeked at me... all the time, for three years when you weren't around... they peeked at me through the small window of the hammam while I was showering, and they masturbated. They peeked at us too, at night...

The above description also presents sexual gaze as a dominant aspect in *Syngué Sabour. Pierre de Patience*. Women become the objects of pleasure and desire of men. In linguistic practice, a specific wording is repeated, namely the word *mater*, which means to spy while peeking. It is used to describe men's sexual gaze toward women while the latter are bathing and sleeping. The woman knows, but she cannot do anything about it. The irony presented here is that the men are her brothers-in-law. It is ironic because in many collective societies, it is taboo to physically approach the in-laws, let alone conducting a form of sexual gaze as in the aforementioned example. Culturally, the depiction represents an anti-culture described as an individual act.

The dominance over the female body by the male gaze that seems very clear is the issue of virginity. In the context of Islam, this has been widely discussed, for example by an Islamic scholar, Fatima Memissi, who strongly rejects the practice of preserving virginity as it

puts psychological and cultural pressures on women. According to Mernissi, virginity is a perspective that men invent. She has this to say about it:

Curiously, then, virginity is a matter between men, in which women merely play the role of silent intermediaries. Like honor, virginity is the manifestation of a purely male preoccupation in societies where inequality, scarcity, and the degrading subjection of some people to others deprive the community as a whole of the only true human strength: self-confidence. The concepts of honor and virginity locate the prestige of a man between the legs of a woman. It is not by subjugating nature or by conquering mountains and rivers that a man secures his status, but by controlling women's movements related to him by blood or by marriage and by forbidding them any contact with male strangers (Mernissi, 1982: 183).

From Mernissi's explanation above, it is clear from Rahimi's depiction that what is experienced by the female character is part of the symbolic and cultural cooperation of men to regulate women's bodies. This tradition has long existed in societies that adhere to Islamic cultures where Arab cultures are strongly intertwined. When men expect their future wives to maintain their virginity, and when women try to find a way out because of their anxiety, this is where it becomes clear why sexual domination is a toxic act. From here, something that looks symbolic, namely virginity, engenders social problems, namely women's fear and feeling of being oppressed.

L'œil, qui porte une cicatrice, perd de son inquiétude. « Je ne t'ai rien dit. Et toi, tu croyais que... le sang était signe de ma virginité ! » Un rire sourd secoue son corps ramassé à croupetons. « Voyant le sang, tu étais ravi, fier ! » Un temps. Un regard. Et la crainte d'entendre un cri de colère, une insulte. Rien. Alors, douce et sereine, elle se laisse aller dans les recoins intimes de ses souvenirs (Rahimi, 2008: 16).

The eye, which had a scar, lost its worry. "I didn't tell you anything. And you, you believed that... the blood is a sign of my virginity!" A muffled laugh shook her crouched body. "Seeing the blood, you were delighted, proud!" A moment. A glance. And the fear of hearing a scream of anger, an insult. Nothing. So, gently and calmly, she lets herself go in the intimate corners of her memory.

The narrator in the above quotation is the woman who experiences violence done by her husband. She becomes the narrator who explains that she experiences multiple violences. When she was a

daughter, she became the victim of the toxic masculinities done by her father. However, when she is married, she is the victim of her husband toxic masculinities. The notion that the female body and sexuality belongs to men is clearly reflected in the novel. The virginal blood becomes the novel's wording of choice, a very important aspect in the placement of the man-woman relationship or, in this context, the relationship between a husband and a wife. "Seeing the blood, you were delighted, proud!" becomes the sentence that describes how a woman's virginal blood is a man's property.

The issue of virginal blood brings about a positioning of women in society, not only in the relationship between a husband and a wife. This can be seen from how the same woman relates something to her aunt.

"Quand j'en ai parlé à ma tante, elle m'a conseillé de ne rien dire... Je me suis donc tuée. Et cela m'arrangeait. Bien que vierge, j'avais vraiment peur. Je me demandais ce qui se passerait si jamais je ne perdais pas de sang ce soir-là..." (Rahimi, 2008: 17) "

When I spoke to my aunt, she advised me not to say anything... So I stayed quiet. And that was good for me. Even though I was a virgin, I was absolutely terrified. I asked myself what would have happened if I hadn't bled that night."

In discursive practice, this female character has to ask her aunt about the virginal blood. The aunt becomes a reference, giving her the advice not to talk about it at all. Fear and worry about not bleeding on the wedding night are part of a social practice, a masculine ideology applied by men (husbands) who are socially positioned as owners of women's bodies. Women are forced to acquiesce to the domination upon their body (Rossi, 2017).

The notion that women are property has also become a social logic. It is said that the woman's husband is a soldier fighting a war. The following quote explains:

Les armes deviennent tout pour vous... Tu dois connaître cette histoire dans un camp militaire où un officier essaie de démontrer aux nouveaux appelés la valeur d'une arme. Il demande alors à un jeune soldat, Bénâm: Tu sais ce que tu as sur ton épaule ? Bénâm dit : Oui, chef, c'est mon fusil ! L'officier hurle : Non, imbécile ! C'est ta mère, ta sœur, ton honneur ! Puis il passe à un autre soldat et lui pose la même question. Le soldat répond : Oui, chef ! C'est la mère, la sœur, l'honneur de Bénâm ! » Elle rit toujours. « Cette histoire est tellement juste. Vous les hommes ! quand vous avez des armes, vous oubliez vos femmes (Rahimi, 2008: 27).

Weapons become everything to you. You must know this story in a military camp where an officer tries to demonstrate to new recruits the value of a weapon. He asks the young soldier, Bénâm: Do you know what you have on your shoulder? Bénâm says: Yes, chief, it's my rifle! The officer shouts: No, fool! It's your mother, your sister, your honor! Then he moves on to another soldier and asks him the same question. The soldier replies: Yes, chief! It is the mother, the sister, the honor of Bénâm!" The woman laughed. "That story is totally fair" You men! When you have guns, you forget your women.

The above description is the author's message conveyed by the narrator, namely the wife whose husband is in comatose. She makes it as if the story is fair, but in actuality, in it lies a paradox. The passage: "Do you know what you have on your shoulder? Bénâm says: Yes, chief, it's my rifle! The officer shouts: No, fool! It's your mother, your sister, your honor!" is a linguistic practice. The words chosen are "mother", "sister", and "honor", which are considered the correct answer rather than the word "rifle". In actuality, what the army carries is simply a weapon. However, he gets corrected and told that what he has on his shoulder is a woman and a form of honor. In discursive practice, this explains a culture of the story that the war is for the honor of women. The culture becomes a reference for the chief. In social practice, the social aspect being fought for appears to be a struggle on behalf of women. However, when viewed from the perspective of masculinities, this culture of violence in the name of women and honor is a toxic masculine behavior. For example, in this case, wars are fought under the pretext of protecting their women, when in fact are to show the power of men. In various wars, women are fought over and used as an excuse for war. Women become a property and a symbol of victory for men.

The position of women as property controlled by men in this novel explains that the sense of belonging is far from elevating the status of women. On the contrary, it allows the emergence of physically toxic masculinities. Something symbolic, namely the male sense of belonging, is transformed into a behavior so toxic it engenders wars, violence, and other militarized masculine acts.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis on the toxic masculinities found in the two novels, it is seen that there are similar patterns described although both of them have different points of views toward women's sexuality. The important aspect

is the existence of a strong sexual gaze which explains the subordination of women not only on the issue of visual pleasure (as emphasized by Mulvey), but also to the issue of humiliation and other forms of sexual gazes in regards to their bodies and sexualities. Although in both novels, sexual gaze is carried out both verbally and physically by men, but this specific concept of sexual gaze can be used to explain gazes that are not carried out by men but also by women.

The positioning of the female body as the object of sexual gaze has various potentials of violence. The first potential is that of physical violence. This is because men feel they have the right over a woman's body through their sexual gaze, inciting violent acts when their expectations of ownership are not met. This mechanism (from male gaze to physical violence) is represented from the two novels. The second violence that ensues is psychological violence brought about by the view of the practice of toxic masculinities. Women will continue to feel pressured because they are in a position of humiliation, suppression, and oppression because their bodies and sexuality are controlled and regulated by men. The third is symbolic violence. There is often an opinion that demeaning views of harassing women is not a big deal because it is considered not physical. On the contrary, this symbolic violence is extremely toxic for it becomes a kind of energy to feed both psychological and physical violence.

The two novels in general describe the positioning of Muslim women who are also immigrants coming from different ethnic communities, as the object of ridicule and the object of male desire. They also present the symbolic violence perpetrated against women with the objective of explaining aspects of Islamic cultures and traditions that have violent attributes. Both novels show the male dominance who exercise power towards women in diverse mechanisms.

However, regarding self-positioning, the two authors hail from different backgrounds. *Plateforme* was written by a non-Muslim author, whereas *Syngué Sabour. Pierre de Patience* was written by a Muslim. This results in differing perspectives. *Plateforme* describes the process of mockery and outsidering toward Muslims, which became a new problem in French society after the 9/11 tragedy. Meanwhile, *Syngué Sabour. Pierre de Patience* serves as a way for a French Muslim migrant from Afghanistan to self-criticize the cultural context that has become part of his upbringing, namely Islamic or Arabic culture. However, in his auto-criticism, the author reproduces violence in the context of a culture that is claimed to be Islamic.

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