



## **Abstract**

This dissertation project explores three main important issues, gender, discourse and politics in relation to the Mauritanian context. Though Mauritania has recently adopted strategies, through positive discrimination, to engage women into politics, women are still under-represented. In this respect, the aim of the thesis is to understand the dimensions and circumstances surrounding Mauritanian women's inclusion into politics and to deconstruct the feminine 'domestic' subject analyzing the Mauritanian sociocultural perceptions of the effective political actor.

Admitting that power relations shape women's position in language and that since there is no existence beyond discourse, the study aims at analyzing women's political discourse as well as the representation of femininity both in the discourse female political actors and their male counterparts'.

Two types of data are conducted for the study. The data that are meant for the investigation of Mauritanian women's political participation is released through the questionnaire and the interview. Concerning the second type of data that is conducted for the evaluation of women's political participation it is based on applying different approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis on 50 political discourses that are delivered by Mauritanian women politicians in different political events.

The study achieved a number of results the most important of which are: Mauritanian women's political participation is influenced by traditional gender roles. Women are associated with positions that are attached to the private sphere. More significantly, another important point which the study reaches is that the majority of Mauritanian women politicians are satisfied with the inferior political role they play. Moreover, it has been observed that Mauritanian women politicians use the discursive style that is labeled as masculine. This is that women politicians

depersonalize some aspects of their feminine identity and categorize themselves more with the image of the masculine leader. The results of the study reflect that the majority of Mauritanian women political actors do not have feminist orientation. The absence of feminist orientation is noticed in different aspects of Mauritanian women's political discourse, which contributes to their political passivity.

**Keywords:** *political discourse, feminine political discourse, masculine political discourse, women's political participation, feminine identity construction.*

## نبذة مختصرة

تتناول هذه الدراسة ثلاث قضايا رئيسية مهمة هي النوع الجنسي، الخطاب والسياسة في السياق الموريتاني، رغم أن موريتانيا طبقت مؤخرا بعض الاستراتيجيات من خلال منهج التمييز الإيجابي، لإشراك المرأة في السياسة، إلا أن تمثيل المرأة في الميدان السياسي ما يزال ضعيفا.

في هذا السياق يهدف البحث إلى فهم الأبعاد والظروف المحيطة بمسألة إشراك المرأة في السياسة، كما يهدف إلى تفكيك الوجود الأنثوي في المجال العام من خلال تحليل التصورات الثقافية والاجتماعية الموريتانية، لصانع "القرار السياسي المثالي".

إن علاقات القوة القائمة على الأبوية تتحكم في موقع المرأة في اللغة، وطالما أنه لا وجود لهويّة خارج اللغة و الخطاب، فإن الدراسة تهدف إلى تحليل حضور المرأة الموريتانية في الخطاب السياسي وذلك من خلال تحليل الخطاب السياسي للمرأة والخطاب السياسي حول المرأة، من أجل تقديم تصور للأوثرة سواء في خطاب صانعات القرار أو في خطاب نظرائهن من الرجال.

وفي سبيل إنجاز هذه الدراسة تمت معالجة نمطين من المعلومات، المعلومات المستخدمة في تقصي المشاركة السياسية للمرأة الموريتانية، وقد تم عرضها في الاستطلاع والمقابلة، أما النوع الثاني من المعلومات فقد تمت معالجته لتقييم المشاركة السياسية للمرأة ويعتمد على تطبيق مناهج "تحليل الخطاب النقدي" مطبقة على خمسين خطابا سياسيا تم تقديمها من قبل سياسيين وسياسيات موريتانيات خلال عدد من المناسبات السياسية.

وقد توصلت الدراسة إلى عدد من الاستنتاجات، أهمها أن المشاركة السياسية للمرأة الموريتانية تخضع لتأثير الأدوار التقليدية للنوع الجنسي، مع وجود نقطة أخرى أساسية توصلت إليها الدراسة لها من الأهمية مكان، وهي أن غالبية النساء السياسيات الموريتانيات يكتفين بالدور الثانوي الذي يعلّبه، فقد لوحظ أنهن يستخدمن أسلوب الخطاب اللغوي المصنّف على أنه ذكوري، وذلك لأن المرأة السياسية تنزع الصفة الذاتية عن بعض جوانب هويتها الأنثوية وتصنف نفسها أكثر في صورة القائد الذكوري.

وتعكس نتائج الدراسة كون غالبية النساء السياسيات الموريتانيات ليست لديهن قناعات نسوية، فغياب التوجه النسوي تمت ملاحظته في مختلف أوجه الخطاب السياسي الأنثوي في موريتانيا، وهو أمر يساهم في ترسيخ صفة الخضوع لدى ذاك الصنف من السياسيات.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved father, Sid Mhamed, the great man who challenged patriarchal principles and believed in. Without his endless support and encouragement, I would have never reached this level. They say that behind every great man there is a great woman, but I will say that behind every success there is a great mother. I dedicate this work to my mother, Ezza Cheikh, who has always been a source of inspiration for me. Without her support, love, and the nights she spent asking Allah to enlighten my path and protect me, I may have never been able to progress in my academic life.

This work is also dedicated to my dearest sisters and beloved brother who have always been there for me.

Moreover, it is dedicated to everyone who has helped in achieving this accomplishment.

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## INTRODUCTION

In a patriarchal society like the Mauritanian society where women have been always associated with traditional gender roles, women's presence in politics is questionable. Thus, this study deals with three main issues, gender, discourse and politics in relation to the Mauritanian context. Though the country has recently implemented strategies, through positive discrimination, to engage women into politics, women are still under-represented. The matter is not to get women through the door into politics, but it is to help them survive in this masculine domain. Mauritanian women political participation reveals the subtlety of the political discourse especially concerning gender and social change.

I was first conceived of the idea of searching for the validity of Mauritanian women's political discourse in July 2014 when attending a political event organized by the Islamist Mauritanian party 'Tawassoul'. The event started in the usual way as any other political event; men were the masters of the space and women were pushed into the corners. However, what attracted my attention and inspired me to search for this topic is both the way that women speakers were introduced by their male counterparts as being a secondary add to the political event and the type of political discourse they performed.

Later on, the idea got into a better shape when I started reading about political discourse in general and the way that language constructs individuals as social subjects and determines their positions in society. Then, I came to discover that it is not only the Islamist women's political discourse that influences one to question the invisible role that women play in the political arena but in fact the political performance of the majority of female politicians.

Admitting that power relations shape women's position in language and that since there is no existence beyond discourse, there is considerable contestation about whether women should



bring their own language into the public domain or whether they should use the existing language of power. Poststructural feminists, especially the French feminists believe that women will not be seen as separate, independent, and different subjects unless they use their own language. However, in an ironic sense one can question if the language that is labeled as feminine or as the language of the private which is imposed on women as the only linguistic possibility available for them can provide an independently different existence for women politicians in a male dominated domain. However, through adopting different poststructural theories, the study argues that unless women emphasize their difference they will not be visibly recognized in the mainstream which is par excellence malestream.

In this context, this dissertation aims at delving into a deeper inquiry about the nuances of the Mauritanian political arena with an effort to dissect the socio-political and cultural agendas that construct the identity of the female politician. Thus, the main foci of the dissertation are: first to critically analyze the validity of women's political discourse investigating how the feminine identity is expressed or suppressed via this discourse and, second, to examine the effectiveness of their political participation. It is also important to note that the study is concerned with testifying whether there is a unique feminine discursive style. It is important to note that the 'feminine discourse' is used in this dissertation to refer to the discursive style which emphasizes the feminine aspects of the woman politician's identity.

Three main hypotheses are examined in this dissertation: (1) Mauritanian women are imposed on politics because of the illusion that their physical presence constructs a fake democratic image of the country, (2) adding unfeminist women into politics is just as that of adding more patriarchal men to power institutions, and (3) women politicians depersonalize

some aspects of their feminine identity and categorize themselves more with the masculine political leader image.

A number of academic researchers have tackled the topics of gender, discourse, political discourse, and feminism; but few have brought these topics together to produce a critical analysis of women's political discourse. Still, there are two main factors that are considered touchstones for the originality of this paper. The first is that the topic has never been dealt with in the Mauritania context. The second and the most important is that the dissertation's aim is not only to analyze female political discourse, but also to explore the effectiveness of their political performance and investigate the nature of the cultural factors that shape the Mauritanian women's public experience. More significantly, the study argues that unless women take thorough feminist view toward their discursive behavior and public presence their political participation would remain invisible and shaped according to the patriarchal perceptions of womanhood.

Adopting a triangulation approach to research in which three data methods were used to collect data (the questionnaire, interview, and observation), the dissertation first explores Mauritanian women's political involvement through collecting and analyzing data on attitudes toward women's leadership. In this respect, the dissertation aims at evaluating the female political experience. More significantly, the second stage, which stands at the core of this dissertation is to apply a corpus-based analysis on the selected political discourses in order to provide an analytical reading of the discursive behavior of Mauritanian women political actors. It is in this particular juncture that the study unveils the real face of the female politician through analyzing the representation of the public feminine subject both through self-reference and women's representation by the male public subject. The dissertation takes into account poor

documentation on data about women's political discourse in Mauritania's early years; thus, the scope of the study is limited to 2009 to 2018, which is the ruling period of the current president, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz.

The thesis is divided to two major parts. The first part provides a theoretical background that contextualizes the work within general fields of feminist theory, sociology, discourse, and political theories. This part is entitled: "Discursive Practices and the Construction of Gender" and it is divided into four chapters that not only provide a review of literature on the discursive construction of the gendered identity but also get and strengthen the theoretical and socio-political ground for the study concentrating on the political discourse and political change in relation to women. In this part, the focus is on the theoretical review and discussion of the most relevant theories that help in analyzing the main research issues and question addressed in the present study.

Identity construction is taken as the point of departure for this dissertation in order to investigate the process of becoming a feminine as a cultural factor that has hindered women's public participation and has influenced their political performance. Thus, the first chapter of the theatrical part aims at defining the main concepts that the topic revolves around. However, it does not only provide definitions, but it also identifies the essential philosophical theories underpinning those definitions and the concept of becoming a feminine subject. Starting with problematizing the concept of gender paradigm and the influence that biological determinism has on this concept, this chapter digs deeper into the discursive construction of the feminine identity and the feminine body existence in this discursive formation.

As the first chapter introduces theories of construction, Chapter two explores the process of construction in details. In so doing, the second chapter is devoted to an overview not only of

the socio-cultural mechanisms of construction but also the religious mechanisms explaining different aspects of the construction of the gendered subject.

Based on the assumption that individuals are linguistic beings, which means that they are constituted through language, the third chapter aims at exploring the construction of patriarchal ideological discourse. Moreover, it explains the different forms of political discourse, with the purpose of identifying the most effective form drawing, of course, on the argument of the present study.

The last chapter of Part One questions the relation between women and the state as power institute and mediator for socio-political mobilization. It examines feminist theories related to the question of whether women's presence in this power institute, the state, is a prerequisite condition for empowering women and creating a gender neutral public space where women can freely exercise power or it is enough for women to work through non-governmental socio-political feminist organizations.

The second part of the dissertation, which is entitled "A Practical Analysis of the Socio-Political Discourse of Women in Mauritania", is divided into four chapters. The first chapter of this part is meant for contextualizing the dissertation through providing an introduction to the history of Mauritanian women's political participation. The different historical events that shaped the country are classified in four distinct stages: pre-colonization, years of the colonization period, the emergence of the state, the implementation of democracy, and post-Arab spring era. All of these stages are covered in this chapter.

The second chapter of Part Two presents and discusses the research methodology used in order to set the methodological framework for this study. It describes the methodological procedures of data collection techniques, sampling, and data analysis; it also discusses the

methodological issues raised at each stage of conducting this research. It is also interesting to highlight that since the core issues of the thesis revolve around language, different feminist approaches to critical discourse analysis (CDA) will be used as the main methodological approach.

The third chapter of this part, which is the first analytical chapter, is devoted to the analysis and interpretations of the data collected through the questionnaire, observation, and the interview in order to investigate the Mauritanian women's political participation. As will be discussed throughout the chapters of this thesis, Mauritanian women have been involved in politics since the independence of the country. Though their political participation was influenced by the traditional gender roles that are associated with womanhood, it should be noted that the number of women in political positions has recently increased. This chapter reports the quantitative and qualitative analysis and interpretations of the data and the results obtained in relation to one of the main research questions. The question that this chapter revolved around is whether women's presence in Mauritanian politics is achieved as a result of women's struggle for political rights or if it is just an international obligation that the country is forced to follow in order to cope with the signed international conventions regarding women's rights. Thus, this chapter testifies the first hypothesis of the study (see page 2).

The last chapter of Part Two is meant to discursively explore the mobilization of women from the private to the public sphere analyzing whether their entrance to politics is a real act that reflects their feminine identity or if they are just shadows that guarantee the propagandistic gender balance. This is to say that men promoted women's political participation, but the masculine power dynamics control this political participation inside the walls of patriarchal

realm. In other words, though women are quantitatively represented in the political sphere, their oxymoronic qualitative representation is the core and the heart of this chapter.

**PAERT ONE: DISCURSIVE PRACTICES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER**

## Chapter One:

### Man vs. Woman: Questioning Sex, Gender and Language

#### 1. The Gender Paradigm: Nature versus Nurture

*If I am someone who cannot be without doing, then the conditions of my doing are, in part, the conditions of my existence. (Butler, 2004, p. 3)*

*Labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision. We may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decision, but only our beliefs about gender -- not science -- can define our sex. (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 3)*

The nature/nurture debate has a long history on the literature on sex, gender, and language. Feminist philosophers, for example Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir, have been concerned with the biology verses culture view on this issue with the purpose to explain the origin of women's subordination. In this section, the focus is on looking into exegetical discussions of sex/gender distinction. The intellectual debate about sex and gender has been underpinned by three main theories: 1) the nature theory, 2) the nurture theory, and 3) the poststructural theory. Below presents and discusses these three theories and the three historical phases in which they dominated and characterized.

#### 1.1. Sex: The Nature Theory

The nature theory holds that men and women's social occupation is based on the sexual difference between men and women. Proponents of this explanation are known as biological determinists. They claim that males and females are different by nature and so should be the roles that are assigned to them. Johns Hopkins states that

The positions which women already occupy in society and the duties which they perform are, in the main, what they should be if our view is correct; and any



attempt to improve the condition of women by ignoring or obliterating the intellectual differences between them and men must result in disaster to the race.

(Quoted in Moi, 1999: 370)

Definitely, Hopkins' view summarizes biological determinists' perspective toward the different social positions occupied by males and females, which are accordingly rooted in biological factors. They believe that it is nature that has inspired humans to live the way that is appropriate for both sexes.

The biological determinist position is based on the assumption that psychological and behavioural manifestations of gender identity are a result of the different biological nature of the sexes. As it has been discussed in Shields (1982), the biological explanation of sex differences assumes that men are inherently being "ketabolic" while women are inherently "anabolic". Consequently, the male sex is seen as naturally capable of certain gender qualities such as independence, confidence, activeness, aggressiveness, impersonality, and the so like; while women are regarded as holding the opposite characteristics including: dependence, passivity, caring, emotion, sensitivity, biological economy, warmth, and expressiveness. Thus, these biological qualities of males and females **influence** the gender roles they should play.

Clearly, from this perspective, each sex is associated with the tasks which are considered to be 'biologically appropriate'. Pringle (1980), as cited in Ekundayo and Babatunde, states that "it may be well that because only women can conceive and bear children, they have developed a greater capacity for nurturing and caring which has then further enhanced by the traditional division of labour between the sexes" (cited in Ekundayo & Babatunde, 2015: 143 ). To put it differently, the social roles, according to the biological determinist approach, are regarded as a destiny.

In this respect, it is interesting to note that adopting the biological determinism allows women few possibilities for social change. Certainly, labeling women as biologically weak has been the most successful strategy to exclude them from certain social roles and keep them attached to the domestic sphere under male supremacy. However, the majority of feminists reject the biological explanations of social positioning of women. As Oyewùmí comments, the idea of gender as being socially constructed “was one important insight that emerged early in second-wave feminist scholarship” (2008: 168). The next subsection deals with the nurture theory which emerged as a reaction against the misogynistic biological determinist view and as a result of the criticisms leveled against the nature theory.

## **1.2. Gender: The Nurture Theory**

Challenging biological determinism, feminist theorists argue that the construction of social norms is that which pushes females and males to occupy different hierarchal social positions. The feminist questioning of the different activities which are performed by individuals depending on their sex gave birth to the concept of gender. The argument which differentiated sex as a biological appearance from gender as a social identity is a reaction against the biological determinist perspective that biology is destiny. Feminists advocates of this approach agree that it is true that females and males are different in physiology and reproductive function, but they deny that these biological differences should determine the social roles occupancy of the sexes (Young, 2005). As Chevannes explains, individuals acquire the different values, customs and behavioural norms from the society and they are not born with them. Reviewing different studies, Chevannes adds that “biology provides some basis for the later development of gender identity and behaviour [...], but nothing more.” (2001: 15). To state it differently, there are certain learned behaviors that biological based theory cannot explain.

Starting from the French feminist Simon Beauvoir's famous saying, "one is not born a woman, but rather one becomes one" (1953: 301), Haraway draws on Beauvoir to quote that "all the modern feminist meanings of gender have [their] roots in this phrase" (1991: 131). In this context, many definitions of this new concept came to existence during this period. Butler defines gender as "an identity tenuously constituted in time, an identity instituted through a stylized repletion of acts" (2008: 97). Moreover, in drawing distinction between sex and gender, West and Zimmerman define sex as the recognition of social agreed upon biological criteria for classifying individuals as females or males. They point out that "the criteria for classification can be genitalia at birth or chromosomal typing before birth, and they do not necessarily agree with one another" (1987: 127). Gender on the other hand, is the social meaning given to membership in a sex category. Furthermore, Rubin defines gender as "a socially imposed division of the sexes [that transforms] males and females into men and women" (1975: 80).

From the above definitions, one could argue that the term sex is seen as biological remark according to which society construct individuals transforming them into different human beings with different gender identities. Beauvoir argues in the introduction to her interesting book, *The Second Sex*, that everybody agrees that human beings are divided into females and males, but not every female is a woman. To be a woman, the female has to go through a process of engendering and to fulfill a set of criteria associated with being feminine (1953). Therefore, for Beauvoir, "one is not born, but, rather becomes a woman." This is to say that the biological existence, sex, is independent from the cultural identity, gender. This quote from Beauvoir underpins the distinction between biological sex and gender explaining that gender is the cultural meaning given to an individual when recognized as having biological remarks of being female or male. Following the same philosophical thought, Battler explains that gender is to be understood "as a

modality of taking on or realizing possibilities, a process of interpreting the body, giving it cultural form” (1986: 36).

In the same line of argument, D'Amico and Beckman (1994) support the idea that women and men are not born but rather constructed. Gender identity is created through a labeling system that gives opportunities for some and denies these opportunities for others. Thus, they explain that “[t]o label individuals as ‘women (or ‘men’) is to exercise power” (p. 7), because labeling creates social expectations and shapes which range of choice is available for individuals to conform to these expectations. Questioning the relation between sex and the socio-cultural constructed gender roles that identifies woman as subordinate to man, Gayle Rubin wonders:

What is a domesticated woman? A female of the species. The one explanation is as good as the other. A woman is a woman. She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human dictaphone in certain relations. Torn from these relationships, she is no more the helpmate of man than gold in herself is money... etc. (1975: 158)

Clearly, as Rubin elaborates on the above quote, males and females share various characteristics such as belonging to the human species, but the feminine identity is what makes woman inferiorly evaluated and accordingly dominated. Stunningly, in spite of the attempt for the naturalization of femininity and masculinity, it is clear that what distinguished women from men is socially constructed rather than being natural. Consequently, feminists holding this thought agree that it is nurture and not nature which constructs gendered women and men. This social construction, they agree, is achieved through socialization.

Obviously, the gender meaning given to sex is achieved through the process of socialization. Sociological theories of socialization hold that the child gets involved in a wide range of socialization institution starting from the domestic grouping to the wide successive

institutions. In the domestic grouping, family, the child acquires a personal and gender-based identity. In this view, Chevannes (2001: 19) explains that “as [he or she] grows [he or she] internalizes through imitation and reinforced instruction the values and behaviour of those around it, gender identity”.

For Witt, gender is the social recognition of women and men as occupying certain roles in the social life; thus, what she refers to as the engendering process is achieved through socialization, which means that without going through this process, there would be no woman and no man in society but female and male. This is to say that “[b]eing a man and being a woman are social positions with bifurcated social norms that cluster around the engendering function” (2011: 40). More significantly, being corporeally recognized as male or female plays an important role in socialization. Feminists such as Butler support the idea that gender is acquired through social interaction. Thus, she states that gender “proves to be performance—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (1999: 25).

Analyzing the above quotations, it becomes clear that through the different social practices that individuals go through since the day they are recognized as males or females, their gender identity comes into existence. In this respect, Davies (1989) explains that individuals (especially when children) use “different gender positions when they are in the presence [or] absence of” others, which means that the social recognition and pressure play an important role in disciplining gender identity (cited in Yelland & Grieshaber, 1998: 4). Therefore, individuals have to be conscious regarding the selectivity of which action is more appropriate to their gender identity. The fact that children adopt different gender identities in different situation and in different contexts explains that gender identity is not fixed but forced and preformed.

Drawing on the idea that the adoption of different gender identities varies from one particular context to another, Butler (1990; 1993) develops her gender performance notion. She asserts that the truths about gender are a social product of certain circumstances in space and time. Therefore, gender is rather doing than being. This implies that normalization and the social eye play an important role in constructing gender identity and labeling masculine and feminine social characteristics which occurs during the socialization process. This is to say that certain behaviors are regarded as socially acceptable idealized gender identities.

However, this view does not assume that the individual takes a passive role in his or her engendering existence as social agent. Butler, for example, argues that Simone de Beauvoir's concept of one becoming his or her gender has a descriptive claim. "[I]t asserts only that gender is taken on, but does not say whether it ought to be taken on a certain way. [Beauvoir's] prescriptive program in *The Second Sex* is less clear than her descriptive one" (1986: 41). Butler criticizes Beauvoir's use of the word 'become' which means that a person has the choice to be the gender he or she is. This same idea has been discussed by Witt (2011) in her concept of social normativity. She argues that individuals can accept and identify with the norms associated with the social position they are occupying; thus, they become voluntarists. However, if individuals reject these norms or even if they are conscious of them, the social normativity will be ascribed. Then these are termed as criativists. This is to say that individuals have no choice concerning the social role they play in society because it is reinforced.

In the long history of research about sex and gender, on the one hand, some theorists such as Archer (1992), Harraway (1996), Hood-Williams (1996), and Scott (1999) have assumed that sex is fixed by nature and as a result gender roles should confirm to the biological capacity of the individual. On the other hand, in their attempt to explain the secondary role played by women,

feminists distinguish between sex as a biological factor that construct the masculine/feminine binary according to which individuals are expected to act. However, some other feminist theorists have developed a third view which is based on the assumption that both sex and gender are socially constructed. The following subsection presents and discusses the poststructuralist theory that argues that there is no preexistent 'sex' or 'gender' but rather both categories are culturally constructed.

### **1.3. Sex/Gender: The Poststructuralist Theory**

The post-structuralists feminists, such as Christine Delphy, provide new understandings for the issue gender/sex. Delphy stresses that since the use of the term gender, the majority of scholars working in the field have started questioning the idea that gender and sex are independent. Delphy states: "We have continued to think of gender in terms of sex: to see it as a social dichotomy determined by a natural dichotomy" (1993: 3). She explains that those researchers and thinkers that question the relationship between gender and sex consider gender to be the content and sex as the container. Therefore, the content, gender, can vary, but the container, sex, is fixed because it is part of nature. Instead of asking the question whether gender is really independent from sex, most authors continue to ask what sort of classification and roles does sex give rise to. She points out that "what they never ask is why sex should give rise to any sort of social classification" (Delphy, 1993: 3). Thus, Delphy criticizes the theory that sex causes gender. She explains that the authors who adopt this theory build their argument on presuppositions.

The post-structuralist feminist perspective emerged opting for new understanding of sex and gender. As it is noted in Ekundayo and Babatunde, this new feminist thought is based on social interactionism, the Foucauldian philosophy, and psychoanalysis. It questions the binary

terms of 'man' versus 'woman', 'masculine' versus 'feminine', "arguing that they are not biological but rather products of society and history" (2015: 144). Within this post-structuralist perspective, the distinction between sex and gender takes a new direction which is that they are both seen as culturally constructed.

For many scholars, the construction of sex, like that of gender, is a product of complex social relations. Foucault (1978), for example, argues that sex and sexuality are constructed through a set of social practices that manipulated the body for the continuity of power. In this respect, sex and sexuality are not based on natural force but are rather based on the normalization of the social life that each society produces through the regulation and control of knowledge as a means of power.

West and Zimmerman (1987), for example, suggest that there is a set of "Socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males" (p. 127). In the same vein, Butler sees sex as "an idea construct which is forcibly materialized through time. [Then, sex is] the norm by which 'one' becomes viable at all" (1993: 2). This is to say that culture determines the sexed identifications of individuals; thus, one is sexually identified at birth as male or female. Then, it is gender that produces sex and not the other way around. The theorists supporting this idea argue that it is culture that constructs sex, which makes it not naturally fixed.

Feminists who propagate a rejection of the nature/nurture distinction between sex and gender assert that knowledge itself was a male domain through which patriarchy manipulates and controls power. Thus, biological determinist explanation of male-female differences is part of the huge patriarchal intellectual legacy. Both Butler and Haraway argue that the biological science which produced the sex differences between males and females is socially constructed. Thus, biology, from the very beginning, was built on a patriarchal discourse. (Butler, 1990; &



Haraway, 1991). Undeniably, for some researchers including Fausto-Sterling, the discipline of biology is manmade. The story of human creation and biological differences is, then, a patriarchal production. It is society, thus, that creates sex norms.

In this vein, Foucault comments that “we have become a society of normalization” (quoted in Fausto-Sterling, 2000: 7). In this respect, Fausto-Sterling went so far in her analysis of the normalization of the male heterosexual knowledge saying that it is the medical discipline that forces the existence of only two sexes, male and female, and maintains a methodology of the normal by changing the intersexual body to fit into that normal. Individuals, as history firmly records, are not born only within the categorization of males and females. There are some people who are born out of this circle. The involvement of society to label infants as males or females has its roots in culture and not science.

Moreover, Witt illustrates that thinking of sex difference as a biological matter and gender as purely cultural is problematic. The division between human animals, which divided them into males and females, is based on anatomical, hormonal, and chromosomal criteria. However, it has been proved by feminist historians of biology and medicine that there are more than two sexes. To state it differently, the categorization of human animals into only two sexes does not reflect what happens biologically. This is to say, as some feminists argue, that it is culture that forces labeling human animals as only males or females; thus, gender produces sex and not the other way around. Witt comments that this is not to deny that there are biological markers that indicate if an individual is male, female, or intersexed, but it is significant to state that “culture forces involved in categorizing all human animals as either male or female” (2011: 35).

For Fausto-Sterling, sex is not produced by nature; on the contrary, it is a social product. She asserts that human body is very “complex to provide clear-cut answer about sexual differences” (2000: 4). Thus, she argues, sex is not a pure physical category, but people cultural beliefs about gender are the main cause for identifying individuals as males and females.

Although the three theories are cited for the explanations they have advanced for the gender/sex issue and for their contribution to the debate on the question of gender and sex, the present study adopts the perspective of the nurture theory, which holds that gender roles are socially assigned to individuals on the basis of their biological differences. Accordingly, the definition that is adopted in this study is that gender is the cultural meaning given to the social recognition of individuals as females and males. The adoption of this definition, which is a key defining element of the nature theory, is justified by the nature and objectives of this study, being based on the assumption that the patriarchal nature of society has determined male female social positions through complex mechanisms of power control.

## **2. Biological Determinism: The Female Body in Discourse**

### **2.1. Body Mind Dichotomy**

*There is something genetically inherent in the male of the species, so the biological determinists would argue, that makes them the naturally dominant sex; that “something” is lacking in females, and as a result women are not only naturally subordinate but in general quite satisfied with their position, since it affords them protection and the opportunity to maximize maternal pleasures, which to them are the most satisfying experiences of life. (Ortner, 1974: 71)*

Biology tends to be troublesome for feminists. Advocators of feminism have focused their efforts on challenging the traditional conception of women as less than fully human. The

dualistic view which linked women with the anatomical bodily functions has been rooted in Western philosophy. This view assumes that the individual is thought of as being made up of two dichotomously opposed characteristics, mind and body, thought and extension, reason and passion, and psychology and biology. The dichotomous thinking, as the Australian feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz argues, “hierarchizes and ranks the two polarized terms so that one becomes the privileged term and the other its suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart” (1994: 3). Based on this dichotomy, men become the norm and women their compliment.

The biological determinist discourse as aforementioned holds that women are fundamentally different from men because of the nature of their bodies. That is, a woman’s bodily ability is what creates the division between the different social positions occupied by men and women. This idea of difference serves to justify the social hierarchy of male dominance and female subordination. Within patriarchal societies, there is a tendency to associate women with nature and men with culture, which means connecting women with the natural body and men with the thinking mind. This hierarchal division identifies women as objects and men as subjects. The man is the mode, as Gatens argues, “it is his body which is taken for human body; his reason which is taken for Reason; his morality which is formalized into a system of ethics” (1996: 90). Therefore, woman in this dualism is treated only insofar as she that which does not belong to the category of manhood.

Explaining this dualism from a psychoanalytic point of view, it can be argued that woman within this framework is represented as a body, as an incomplete human. Woman’s lack appears in the work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. The psychoanalytic theory emphasizes that when a girl discovers her anatomical difference from the little boy, she automatically feels that she has been castrated, lacking the phallus. This feeling of incompleteness can be overcome

only by giving birth to a male child. Freudian psychoanalysis sees that the respective tasks of women and men “are, for women, to take over the place of the object, passive, castrated, the feminine and, for men, to combine the values of subject, active, phallic, masculine” (Gatens, 1996: 13).

The psychoanalytic account for femininity and the female body has been criticized by feminists such as Friedan, Beauvoir, Firstone, and Millett. However, some feminists tried to rescue Freudian theory saying that what girls discover is not the superiority of penis or the lack of their bodies but the social inferiority of their own sex. Responding to this claim, Moi (2004) discusses that this argument is homogenous for there are girls who grow up in societies dominated by women and still the Freudian psychoanalytic theory sees them as having penis envy. This means that women from the very beginning are looked at as missing something. They are biologically inferior because they lack that male organ which culturally signifies being an active subject. Moreover, Malson discusses that the phallus does not only signify the lack in being but also it signifies “subjectivity and the desire which arises precisely because of the lack or gap in the Symbolic” (1995: 92) Thus, subjectivity is constituted outside of the self. Femininity and masculinity are not natural category but symbolic positions acquired in societies.

To illustrate, the female identity is constructed in relation to her anatomic body. Thus, femininity is the process through which a subject becomes an object by the inhibitions of her body. In this regard, Gatens argues that Freud and Lacan’s depiction of the female as lack is built upon the assumption of seeing. Both the male and the female child notice the absence and presence of the penis. She states that “seeing is itself an active and constructive process rather than a passive experience” (1996: 34). This is to say that the body image that children perceive in their psychosexual development is not natural but constructed and learned. She further explains

that “lack can only ever appear at the level of Symbolic- the Real lacks nothing” (p. 34). Thus, the body is a cultural product.

## **2.2. Constructing the Female Body**

Social constructionist feminists adopt a philosophy of distinguishing between the material body and its social/cultural representations. For example, Brook (1999: 11) points out that “the body is seen as natural biologically sexed object that pre-exists but is affected by the workings of culture or, as some writers term it, a *tabula rasa*: a blank surface ready to be inscribed”. This distinction motivated the aforementioned discussions of sex/gender division. The concept of gender as the cultural meaning given to the biological sex assumes that there are biological attributes of the body that cannot be changed without medical intervention. Of course this concept of the body as *tabula rasa* has been criticized by a number of feminists such as Elizabeth Grosz, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Moira Gatens, and others. These feminists believe that bodies do really matter and that they are not a passive.

However, the feminist theorists who adopt the *tabula rasa* opinion believe that the body is the main remark in the social signification according to which individuals will be distinguished as women and men. Their view of the body as being passively inscribed by the appropriate social behavior is criticized by feminists who believe that bodies matter because if they do not matter it will be acceptable for the feminine to perform the supposedly masculine roles if assigned to her in the social construction process.

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s view that the body subject is transcendent, Beauvoir (1953) argues that as long as the body is a source of signification, it is the basis for being. In this respect, she means that the body is directed toward the world and not part of or piece of it.

Beauvoir agrees with Merleau-Ponty's body transcendence. In her groundbreaking feminist text *The Second Sex* (1953), she argues that "in girls as in boys the body is first of all the radiation of subjectivity, the instrument that takes possible the comprehension of the world" (quoted in Scarth, 2004: 118). However, Cataldi explains that due to socialization and the social expectations, "a girl learns to view her bodily functions and appearance with shame." Whereas, "a man ignoring his own anatomical peculiarities, thinks of his body as a direct and normal connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively" (2001: 86-88). For Beauvoir, subjectivity is constructed in relation to the bodily ability to manipulate the physical world. Thus, women are subjects only when they were infants, before they enter into the symbolic order, before becoming gendered bodies.

In Beauvoir's phenomenological framework, women regard their bodies as obstacle and perceive their bodies' abilities to be more limited than they would normally be. In this sense, women are imprisoned in their immanence anatomy. Consequently, according to this view, women's immanence is not natural but socially constructed because the original perception of the human body is transcendence and subjectivity. Surprisingly, Beauvoir blames women on taking part in their own oppression. To elucidate this, she turns again to Merleau-Ponty's argument of "body's ability to repress its own abilities" (cited in Cataldi, 2001: 92). Beauvoir explains that women's bodily behavior is not only an externally imposed suppression but also an internally sanctioned repression. This is to say that women take over the socially imposed beliefs to the extent that they themselves believe that they cannot act or behave in a certain way or into a specific context due to anatomical abilities.

Supporting this arguemnt, Cataldi also states that "a woman's consciousness may be described as ambivalent (simultaneously active and passive) as she "lets herself be led" to

*incorporate* the oppression in her situation by taking it up, by living or acting out the restrictions of femininity in her own behavior.” (2001: 92). Similarly, Brook points out that “the dominance of male heterosexual desire organizes the body perceptions of young women” (1999: 66). Put another way, women’s body capacity changes because of the consciousness of the male gaze. Applying this perspective to the Mauritanian society, for example, for a woman to be feminine and therefore attractive, she should be physically weak and ignorant. Thus, women suppress both their physical and intellectual abilities and act as sexed bodies. This rejection of the mind functions and association with the body shows the influence of the male gaze on women in this society. However, the poststructuralist philosopher Judith Butler disagrees with this view. She argues that “[f]emininity is not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is in dissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, and punishment” (Butler, 1993: 232). It is that individuals who fail to perform their gender right are socially punished.

When Beauvoir claims is becoming woman, she distinguishes the body as biological and the mind to be cultural. For Beauvoir, the becoming is a cultural process that assumes the body to be a blank page on which the society inscribes the gender identity of the passive subject. This arbitrary connection between femininity and the female body and masculinity and the male body has been criticized by some feminist philosophers including Judith Butler and Moira Gatens, to name a few. Gatens in an essay written in her interesting book *Imaginary Bodies* (1996), argues that “there is no neutral body, there are at least two kinds of bodies, the male body and the female body” (1996: 8). This is to say that the presumption of the social biological account of the individual is what makes the cultural division between the sexes. She adds that the sex/gender division that claims that gender is the social meaning given to the biological sex is based on the

assumption that the body is passive. Thus, through the neutralization of sexual difference, socialization theorists accept the unarguable supposition of body/mind dualism.

Following Foucault's account that discourse produces subjects, Butler explains that the body cannot exist without or outside of gendered discourse. She argues that "it is not discourse actually [that] creates the body, but that the body cannot be accessed or referred to without discourse. This means that every reference to the body will construct the body in some way" (quoted in Jeffries, 2007: 21). Individuals, then, through discursive interaction develop their body image and gender identity because "persons only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (Butler, 1990: 22). In other words, Butler does not share the neutrality of the body. She believes that gender roles are not hung on the natural body but they are an outcome of a continuing performance of interactions between bodies and discourse.

Language constructs the body and this can be noticed in the gendered discourse of patriarchal societies. For example, in Mauritania, the female body is formulated in the everyday language. The androcentric nature of the Mauritanian society subjects the girl to a set of idioms that make her conscious of the biological functions of her body and repress her from interacting or engaging in activities that are supposed to be masculine. The idiom, "female is a drop of butter", which means that she should not frequently move from a place to another, is an example. This idiom nicely demonstrates that it is not supposed for a woman to over react or gets engaged in bodily action. Another idiom says that "a woman grabs people's favorable attention in proportion to how much space she fills". This means that the larger a woman is physically the more attractive she is. This concept makes the woman aware that it is her anatomical appearance that makes her recognized in the society as feminine. She is a body; thus, through being



identified by her body, a woman is established discursively as “other”. Therefore, there is no pre-discursive self or body. This idea has also been discussed in Foucault’s famous book *Discipline and Punish* (1995), arguing that the body can be shaped through engaging in certain disciplinary practices.

Furthermore, Grosz (1994) argues that “[b]odies and minds are not two distinct substances or two kinds of attributes of a single substance but somewhere in between” (cited in Brook, 1999: 3). Grosz gives the example of Mobius strip to show the inflection of mind into body and body into mind as well as the relation between the outside and inside of a subject. Also, Gatens (1996) argues that there is no arbitrary relation between the acquired masculine and feminine behaviors and the body. On the contrary, the anatomical lived body is not passive.

The anatomical function of the female body has been abjected and devaluated. The concept of the abject body is introduced by the Bulgarian-French philosopher, Julia Kristeva. For Kristeva, the child gets separated from the mother as long as he/she enters into the symbolic language. The mother is left behind abjected “with her all elements of the self that threaten or violate codes of behavior and discursive expression [...] she is separated from the clean and proper subject whose body is regulated by codes of good social behavior” (Cavino, 2004: 21). In other words, in order for the human subject to become a good citizen of the social constructed world, the abjection of the mother and women in general must occur.

Moreover, it has been observed that associating woman with the biological function makes society believe that women’s bodies are presumed to be incapable of men’s achievements. Brook argues that “menstruating women were debilitated and thus incapable of sustaining high-powered jobs or engaging in physical activity” (1999: 52). Thus, women are reduced to their biological body system and as a result prevented from certain activities. As

Brook adds, “the pregnant body and the breast-feeding body most obviously enact aspects of abjection” (p. 45) and creates a dissolution of boundaries between self and other. Female reproductive body is therefore seen as a sign of her absolute otherness.

In this respect, Brook (1999: 6) explains that “for most history, the female social situation has been dominated or even prescribed by the identification of women’s bodies with child-bearing and, frequently, those bodies have been the objects of exchange between men”. Therefore, the majority of second wave feminists such as Beauvoir tried to minimize the birth marker of bodily difference which links women to nature and counts, for them, to their social oppression. Thus, feminist thinkers in the 1970s following Simone de Beauvoir started demanding women’s right to refuse being pregnant bodies or minimizing it as far as possible. However, this call for abortion and women’s refusal to bearing children received criticisms from anti feminist thinkers as well as some other feminists such as Islamic feminists and feminists of color or womanists. Those who criticize this stand point argue that if a womb and ability of giving birth is the core of femininity and thus oppression, those females who are unable to bear children should be less identifiable as women. Thus, being feminine means automatically being culturally listed in the woman category. The following section will provide a discussion of the construction of the feminine identity through power and discourse.

### **3. Power and Discourse: The Construction of the Female Identity**

*Power not only acts on a subject but, in a transitive sense, enacts the subject into being. (Butler, 1997: 13)*

*If I feel the truth about myself it is in part that I am constituted as a subject across a number of power relations which are exercised over me and which I exercise over others. (Foucault, 1988:39)*

The above quotations direct the reader to ponder thoughtfully about the relation between power, discourse, and identity construction. Before going deeper into the discussion of the relationship between the three concepts (power, discourse, and identity formation), providing some definitions may be needed. Thus, subsections 1, 2, 3, and 4 present and discuss some definitions for the concepts discourse, power, and identity.

### **3.1 Discourse**

The concept “discourse” has several definitions and usages across different disciplines. In linguistic discipline, discourse refers to the speech patterns of language and meaningful statements within a community. For sociologists and philosophers, the term is used to mean conversations and meanings behind which a group of people share certain ideas in common. A basic understanding of the term “discourse,” as it is discussed in Litosseliti and Sunderland (2002), within linguistics is that it refers to language beyond the sentence. Though most linguists agree that discourse stands for spoken and written texts, sometimes it is used to refer only to speech. On the other hand, Stuart Hall (1992: 201), the cultural theorist, defines discourse as “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic.” He explains that discourse does not only construct a certain topic but it also limits the other ways by which this topic can be represented.

Foucault, on the other hand, defines the concept of “discourse” as “a practice that has its own forms of sequence and succession” (1972, p. 169). For Foucault, “it is through discourse (through knowledge) that we are created; and that discourse joins power and knowledge, and its power follows from our casual accepts of the reality with which we are presented” ((Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013, p. 24). Furthermore, Chouliaraki and Fairclough, influenced by Foucault, define

discourse as “the sort of language used to construct some aspect of reality from a particular perspective, for example the liberal discourse of politics” (1999, p. 63).

Some theorists use discourse and ideology interchangeably. However, Foucault differentiates between the two concepts. In this respect, Hall explains the distinction that Foucault makes between ideology and discourse stating that ideology is based on a clear difference between true (scientific) and false (ideological) statements. Thus, ideology is usually the negative belief that produces knowledge about a certain topic. However, Foucault, as Hall discusses, argues that “statements about the social, political, or moral world are rarely ever simply true or false” (1992, p. 203). This is to say that the language that is used to describe the so called “facts” is not neutral, which means that it constructs the individual’s perception about a certain issue.

### **3.2 Power**

Power, on the other hand, has been defined by so many theorists and philosophers. Many liberal humanists assume that power is a violation of someone’s rights. Marxist theorists, on their part, believe that power relations are determined by economic relations. Foucault, in contrast, sees that “power is dispersed throughout social relations, that it produces possible forms of behavior as well as restricting behaviour” (cited in Mills, 1997: 20). Power, therefore, produces different forms of identities and behaviors rather than repressing them.

### **3.3 Identity**

Identity in general is defined as the process by which an individual develops a self-concept as belonging to a certain social group. For example, when a woman defines herself as being feminine, femininity becomes a part of her identity. Identity is an arguable concept that has

been discussed by a number of theorists. Andreouli, for example, defines identity as “a process which incorporates identifying oneself and being recognized by others” (2010: 14.1). This means that identity is embedded in social relations. Put another way, identity is conceived in the relation between the self and the other. Sindic, Barreto and Costa-Lopes, on the other hand, define it as being psychologically constructed “since it concerns the particular way in which human beings define their self-concept and since it draws its strength as an engine of human thought and action from its psychological existence” (2014: 2). For the purpose of this study the definitions and perspectives advanced by Foucault on the concept of discourse, power, and identity will be adopted.

### **3.4 Identity Formation**

Drawing on the Foucauldian perspective discussed so far, identity construction takes place through a highly intricate process that involves both power and discourse as its basic constitutive ingredients. The process of identity formation could be straightforwardly traced by inquiring about some extremely foundational and subtle “truths” regarding the self, both in an individual and a collective sense. Valeriano-Flores, for example, claims that “The primary question for the subject is “Who am I?” or “Who are we?” and pastoral power offers an answer. [...] Pastoral power is thus concerned with the self-knowledge of individual’s essence” (2015: 51).

In his essay “The Subject and Power,” Foucault defines the subject (identity formation) in relation to power as follows:

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him [*sic*] by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others

have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word “subject”: subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Once the subject believes this truth, they also reproduce it in their self-governed actions. (1982: 331)

In spite of the fact that Foucault has greatly succeeded in explaining the mechanisms of identity construction in their relation to discursive power, one could still argue that this eminent author was eventually engulfed in the very ideological circle that he has meticulously detailed in the majority of his publications. Undoubtedly, taking a feminist stance towards the abovementioned quote by Foucault, one could affirm that the very language that he used to express his perceptions had already been a locus of an ideological patriarchal power control that turned it into an apparatus for the subjugation of women. Without a doubt, the taken for granted use of the generic term “he” to include the category of women, reflects the extent to which the author himself a product of language norms and conventions which definitely find their roots in the power dynamics that construct the individual and collective identity, was trapped into that very patriarchal discourse.

Moreover, when thinking of discourse as influencing the construction of identity, factors of truth, power and knowledge should be taken into consideration. Foucault explains that:

Truth is of the world; it is produced there by virtue of multiple constraints. . . . Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is the types of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorised for obtaining truth: the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1979: 46)

Thus, truth is constructed through social practices and is not naturally founded. Consequently, those who have power are able to exclude certain discourses from being considered as true and make others described as being true. In this respect, female identity is constructed accordingly. The society produces discourses of femininity that contribute to women's adaptation to these truths and their internalization as self-knowledge. Moreover, Foucault claims that "discourse is one of the systems through which power circulates." He explains that knowledge which is produced through discourse constitute and serves power. Put another way, "those who produce the discourse also have the power to make it *true*" (cited in Hall, 1992: 205).

Identity is, thus, constructed in relation to discourse. In this view, Litosseliti and Sunderland (2002) explain that the way individuals talk about both themselves and others contribute to the existing discourses which shape certain realities about the world. However, the way that others talk about us is more important for identity formation which goes through a process that is shaped by the taken-for-granted concepts and assumptions (*truths*) which are embedded in discourses. Supporting the same idea, Cameron points out that "whatever else we do with words, when we speak we are always telling our listeners something about ourselves" (2001: 170). In other words, discourse is a powerful tool in constructing identity.

Foucault argues that "discourse produces power, it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (1978: 101). It is this greatly intricate relationship between power and discourse, particularly with regard to the construction of identity that would allow us to question the very process by which women's identity was shaped and reinforced in patriarchal societies. Still, the above quote also sheds light on how institutional power—in this case patriarchy-- could be rendered fragile through the fluid and slippery dynamics of control.

Foucault (1985) discusses in an essay entitled “The Order of Discourse” that the production of discourse among every society is controlled, organized and selected. The role of this process of production is to serve power interests. Pitsoe and Letseka explain that discourse “is created and perpetuated by those who have power and means of communication” (2013, p. 24). In other words, those in power and who usually have access to the mechanisms used to the construction of discourse decide what topics can be talked about and who can talk about them. The intricacy of the patriarchal discursive formations lies in the fact that women have not been able to take part in the social, cultural, economic and political dynamics of their identity construction.

However, not everyone has equal access to discourse; power controlled, as Van Dijk argues, those “[w]ho may participate in such communicative events in various recipient roles” (1996: 86). As a result, women may not have the same access to public discourse as men. In other words, women are expected to be silent specially when in mixed-sex contexts. Grosz explains that “patriarchy does not prevent women from speaking; it refuses to listen when women do not speak universal, that is, as men” (1989: 126). She adds that in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, women are given only two choices: either to identify with men acting and speaking through a male voice and then they will suffer from what Freud labeled “masculinity complex” or to “accept their castration and their inferiority to men and accept a symbolic position” (p. 127). (Psychoanalytic account explains that identification is an essential mechanism in the construction of identity. Because the first person that is attached to the child is usually the mother, the female acquire her primarily identity as an identification with the mother whereas the boy through the Oedipus complex experiences a separation from the mother and adopts the role of the father). Therefore, through power control of discursive activities, women



develop a passive identity when in public sphere. This is expressed in the Mauritanian culture through idioms that help in the socialization process of young girls. For example, “a thief could get killed without need for a young girl to intervene” is an idiom which means that a young girl should not stick her nose in every matter. There are numerous idioms expressing the same idea. This is that the young girl is told from the very beginning that she should not get involved in public domain discourse. Accordingly, she constructs her identity on that base.

Power relations are, thus, constructed through discourse. Hook argues that “discursive rules are hence strongly linked to the exercise of power” (2001: 521). Accordingly, exclusion, inclusion, access and domination are forms of social systems which reproduce power through discourse and construct the individual’s self-conception. Foucault comments that “[w]e do not have the right to say everything, that we cannot speak of just anything in any circumstances whatever, and that not everyone has the right to speak of anything whatever” (1985: 52). Here, the basic argument of discourse theory is that the manners through which people talk about a subject influence their perceptions of that subject. In other words, discourse shapes the social perception of a certain “fact” contributing to its taken for granted attribute.

Relating power relations and discourse to identity formation, Urbanski (2011) argues, “Identity is not fixed but rather a discourse mediated by our interactions with others” (p. 4). Butler claims that “no subject comes into being without power” (1997: 16). Following Foucault, she explains that power is not “simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are” (p. 2). This is that the individual needs power for its own existence as a social subject who gains position in the society and plays a recognizable role.

Social recognition is very essential in the construction of identity. Based on this idea, Andreouli argues that recognition or the absence of recognition “is a key issue in identity construction” (2010: 14.6). This is simply because the self-other relations is significant not only for the subordinated but also for the subordinator. Put another way, the individual needs to go through certain process in becoming a self or subject. In the female case, for example, it is necessary to be recognized as being feminine for one’s existence as a “normal” subject. Drawing on the aforementioned idea, Gardiner claims that each child constructs a primary identity that fits into the social expectations. He states that “this core identity sets the pattern according to which the person thereafter relates to other people and to the world” (1982: 350).

Social recognition is controlled by power relations. For a person to be labeled as feminine, one should behave in certain ways that fit into the social expectations. Thus, becoming a woman means accepting and internalizing the terms of power. Through this recognition, the individual is placed under the social gaze that monitors her/his performance of certain behaviors and repressing of others. As Beauvoir claims, self-repression is what defines the female self-concept. Kruks explains that for Beauvoir, “‘becoming a woman’ also involves subjectification which can be more explained with Foucault’s panoptic practices. But, to understand this process of ‘becoming’ she also explores the ways in which subjectification is lived and taken up by the subject, be it in modes of complicity, of resistance, or both” (2001: 57).

Panopticism, Foucault explains that “the quintessential form of the hierarchical observation that integral to much disciplinary power. It is a mechanism ‘in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power” (cited in Kruks, 2001: 57). The effect of Panopticon is to make the individual conscious about the presence of an observing gaze. Thus, the subject becomes self-policing. The subject, then, is not only receiving power but also playing

it. The individual is thus playing the roles of both the effects of power and the bearers of power. Thus, Beauvoir in her famous concept of one becoming a woman believes that in order for a person to become a woman, she needs to develop an awareness of her permanent visibility. That is, she must view herself “through the eyes of the generalized male inspecting gaze and, in so doing, taking up as one’s own project those constraints of power that femininity entails” (Kruks: 58 ).

In addition, in his book, *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre explains the concept of the look which is similar to Foucault’s panoptic schema. Sartre argues that to be aware that you are seen by another means being aware of yourself as object-like. Therefore, to be subjected to a gaze means to experience objectification. Beauvoir and Sartre develop their concept which they call “shame” from the individual’s awareness of being subjugated to the panoptical gaze. The shame is “a relation to oneself, in the presence of another, in which one evaluates oneself negatively through the look (or perhaps the presumed look) of the other” (Kruks, 2001: 62). This is the recognition of the self as being an object that the other is supposedly judging. Consequently, the panoptic gaze (or the look) is very powerful in constructing the individual self-perception.

Through internalizing the inspecting gaze, each individual becomes his/her own overseer. Thus, each individual exercises power against him/herself. In this regard, females may act in a certain way because they are conscious of the social and religious gaze. El Habbouch (2011) argues that in Muslim patriarchal societies the lines between religion and culture are mixed. Therefore, the interpretations of religious texts are culturally influenced. This is to say that women are controlled through the religious discourse. In this respect, religion is playing the role of the panopticon gaze.

#### 4. Discourse and the Binary Oppositions: Male/Female, Public/Private

*Already I know all about the 'reality' that supports History's progress: everything throughout the centuries depends on the distinction between the Selfsame, the ownself (what is mine, hence what is good) and that which limits it: so now what menaces my-own-good (good never being anything other than what is good-for-me) is the 'other'. [...] But in History, of course, what is called 'other' is an alterity that does settle down, that falls into dialectical circle. It is the other in a hierarchically organized relationship in which the same is what rules, names, defines, and assigns 'its' other. (Cixous, 1986: 201)*

The abovementioned quote by the French feminist Helene Cixous explains that there is no place for an equal 'other' in the cultural binary system. Throughout history of humanity, people's thought is structured on the basis that everything is defined according to its opposite. The 'other' disappears in this dichotomous thinking as if its only role is to indicate the importance and hierarchal position of the 'selfsame,' the dominant. This binary opposition thought has been troublesome for feminists and post-structural philosophers.

Within binary opposition, the meaning of each term depends on its opposite. In other words, in the binary structure usually one part of the binary pairs is given higher cultural value than the other (Landman, 2002; Klages, 2006 & Fourie, 2007). To put another way, binary oppositions such as black/white, up/down, male/female and so on are socially internalized as part of individuals' perception of the world in terms of the hierarchal definitions given to these opposites.

Inspired by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, structuralism was the first to emphasize that language does not reflect the world but rather shapes it. The core argument of structuralism, thus, is that things are primarily definable in relation to what they are not (Cavallaro, 2003). Interested in how meaning is derived from binary oppositions, the French

anthropologist and structuralist Claude Levi-Strauss explains that each term represents a unique meaning by itself, but more importantly that the relationship between these pairs gives more elaboration on the meaning they signify. The purpose of Levi-Strauss structuralist analysis is to uncover and describe the fundamental structures that determine the individual's way of thinking.

Relating the binary system to women's social position, The Norwegian feminist theorist Toril Moi argues that in the patriarchal valuation, "each opposition can be analyzed as a hierarchy where the 'feminine' side is always seen as the negative, powerless instance" (1997: 124). In other words, the biological binary opposition male/female is used to create numerous of negative feminine values that represent the feminine as negative of the masculine. That is the female is defined with accordance to what the male is not; discursively the female gender is portrayed as an 'Other'. Irigaray argues that in the social order, there is only one sex, the masculine, that "elaborates itself in and through the production of the 'Other,'" (cited in Butler, 1990: 24). This is that the masculine is taken as the norm against which the feminine is compared. Thus, the feminine is defined as the lack and the inferior. As Monique Wittig (1983) admits, gender is used in the singular sense for there is only one gender, the feminine while the masculine is the general.

Thus, the female has no place as an equal subject in the binary system. "She must recognize and recuntnize the male partner, and in the time it takes to do this, she must disappear, living him to gain Imaginary profit, to win Imaginary victory" (Cixous, 1986: 204). Put another way, the dominant male is dependent on the otherness of the subordinate female. Cixous (1986) adds that throughout history there has always been two races, master and slaves. She explains the paradoxically master/slave dialectic in which the slave must exist in order for the master to be

recognized. Thus, the cultural dominant binary requires the other side of the binary pairs to give it its hierarchical meaning.

Though structuralism encourages a critical interrogation of the process through which meaning is culturally produced, it is poststructuralism which challenges radically the idea of universal systems stained by binary oppositions. As Cavallaro (2003) argues, Poststructuralism questions the process through which binary oppositions instead of presenting only two opposites in relation to each other, the one sign can evoke multiple meanings. Foucault supports the same idea through his theory of discourse and power. He believes that in any culture, knowledge and power are completely interconnected and that through discourse the dominant beliefs are maintained, which helps in constructing the way people see the world.

Criticizing structuralism, Petrovic (2004) argues that the study of signification, or principles that enable the production of meaning, such as binary oppositions, was not a path to knowledge but a way of serving cultural regimes that imposed repressive categorical orders on the world and structuralism, which relies on these principles to describe the world, was found to be methodologically conservative. In other words, poststructuralism came as an urgent challenge to the power that structuralism initially took upon itself to describe but ended by authorizing. Structuralism came to explain the 'why' and 'what' concerning the binary oppositions; however, poststructuralism explains the 'how'. Poststructuralist thinkers question how to undo the structures that result in such system.

Derrida criticizes structuralist dichotomous thinking arguing that "meaning cannot, as claimed by structuralism, be schematically understood in a binary A versus non-A model" (cited in Lykke, 2010: 100). In other words, through language, culture construct binary oppositions of which the first term is established as the signifier that defines the pair while the other becomes a

mere negation of the first. Thus the aim of Derridian deconstruction is to disrupt and displace hierarchies and binary oppositions. The basic idea of deconstruction, according to Klages (2012), is built on the assumption which Derrida comes to when questioning binary oppositions. Derrida asks what would happen if one supposed that the opposite 'false', for example, is not the opposite of 'true' but rather each one contained elements of the other.

“Deconstruction acknowledges that the world has been constructed through language and cultural practices; consequently, it can be deconstructed and reconstructed again and again” (Stinson, 2009: 322). Deconstructional analysis works on the idea that the first term of the binary to be dependent on its identity by the exclusion of the other term. Thus, poststructuralism in general and Derridian deconstruction in particular has a significant role in the politics of feminism. Feminists use deconstruction to illustrate how language is used to frame meaning that serves power. French feminists adopting a deconstructive approach show that since the system upon which the binary oppositions are built is based on the assumption that the first term in the pairs represents a positive concept while the second is marginalized and negative concept, it can be argued that this dichotomous philosophy enables men to occupy privileged positions at women's expense. Jennifer Hansen argues that

The opposites man and woman are not symmetrical, but clearly hierarchical. . . . Man alone is the paradigmatic metaphysical concept of human beings, and women are merely inferior instances of this concept. The operation of binary oppositions in culture works insidiously to shape our psyches so that we learn that man is the Universal, while woman is contingent, particular, and deficient. (cited in Cavallaro, 2003: 24)

Accordingly, Hansen explains that binary thought is cultural constructed by patriarchal language to present man as the universal, the norm, and woman as inferior. Makaryk (1993)

explains that drawing on a deconstructionist approach, both Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous disrupt patriarchal language in their writing claiming that it is through the attendant order, logic and authority of the masculine discourse that woman is excluded. Chakraborty (2013) comments that, Cixous aims at deconstructing the popular male/female opposition in which the male is represented as the active being whereas the female signifies the passive.

Inspired by Derrida, Cixous explains what she terms ‘death-dealing binary’ in which for one term to acquire meaning, it must destroy the other (cited in Moi, 1997). Therefore, in the struggle battle in which victory is achieved through activity and death through passivity, the male is always the winner. Cixous adds that in this binary tradition, the woman is either passive or she does not exist. This is to say that coping with this patriarchal thought is the essence to subject recognition and existence. Cixous, attempting to deconstruct the logocentric ideology, calls for the importance of creating a feminine language which challenge the fundamental ideas of patriarchal binary system. She calls for thinking beyond the dominant dichotomous schema which exposes misleading oppositions that govern the exercise of power within society (Davis, 1999). There will be more elaboration on the feminist use of deconstruction in the last section of the following chapter.

As this chapter introduces the main points of debate defining concepts that the study revolves around, the following chapter will delve deeper in discussing the mechanisms of construction through which the individual comes into social being.



## **Chapter Two:**

### **Patriarchal Identities: Ideology, Power and the Construction of the gendered Subject**

The aim of this chapter is to present and provide a discussion into the socio-cultural and religious mechanisms of constructing the social subject. Each section of this chapter will elaborate on a set of mechanisms. The last section is meant for discussing deconstructing these mechanisms.

#### **1. Patriarchal Mechanisms of Construction**

Feminists from different schools of thought question the mechanisms of women's oppression. Marxist and socialist feminists examine women's subordination emphasizing capitalist economic system. Marxist feminists theorize gender relation within the contradiction of economic relations; whereas, radical feminists believe that sexual difference is a direct cause of women's marginalization. On the other, hand liberal feminists view the exploitation of women as a consequence of male domination of public life. On the contrary, poststructural feminists explain women's oppression through the elaboration on the process by which cultural relations produce gender relations while Islamic feminists go further in deconstructing the male interpretation of the sacred texts as an attempt to explain the subordination of Muslim women which is socially taken for granted as being God's will. Thus, when examining the factors behind women's inferiority, one should talk about the socioeconomic, cultural, and religious practices that produce patriarchal mechanisms of construction.

##### **1.1 The Sociocultural Mechanisms: Norms and Normalization**

The 'gender' concept, as discussed in Chapter One, is based on a number of norms and beliefs that force women to acquire certain gender roles as being the 'natural' way for the

constitution of the feminine subject and to define themselves in relation to these requirements. As explained in the introductory paragraph of this section, patriarchal control over women takes different forms and uses several practices. In this respect, Majstorovic and Lassen argue that men's superiority over women can be achieved by different mechanisms. They explain that "these include for instance gender socialization denial of education and knowledge of women's history, division of women through disciplinary means such as punishment and rewards, or by discrimination in terms of limited access to political power and economic resources, to name but a few" (2011: 1-2). However, all of these can be achieved through an essential specific technique by which patriarchy maintains and naturalizes its ideology. To understand how females associate themselves with feminine identity and internalize their oppression, an analysis of normalizing power is crucially needed.

Since the construction of the feminine subject is influenced by power, feminists try to decode the process of normalization that serves power circulation within a hierarchal social context. Depending on Foucault's concept of technology of the self, Muonwe (2014) states that for the individual to develop a social identity, she must go through a process of production of the self in which she should utilize cultural models that are imposed upon her. Despite the fact that Foucault's insight into power relations is gender neutral, feminists use Foucauldian theory for explaining patriarchal practices of victimization.

Elaborating on how power infiltrates human relationships constructing their individuality, Foucault advances about two types of modern power, disciplinary power and biopower. He explains that

[power] functions differently within disciplinary and biopolitical contexts. With discipline, the norm establishes the normal: individuals are brought and bring themselves into conformity with some pre-existing standard. With biopower, the

norm is established from several ,normals,' as represented specifically by ,curves of normality; statistical analysis, according to Foucault, constitutes a key technique for regulating and managing populations. (Cited in Taylor, 2009: 50)

Modern power, as the above quote indicates, does not only function on the individual level but also operates on the population level through the process of normalization.

The norm is, then, the technique that connects between disciplinary power and biopower; it produces the 'ideal' social individual and at the same time it regulates the body population as a whole. Taylor explains that for Foucault, "while the norm still founds and legitimizes power, it does so specifically by linking disciplinary and biopower and thus facilitating the flow of power through and across all facets of modern societies" (2009: 50). In other words, Foucault places emphasis on the vital role that norms play in the construction, enforcement, and circulation of modern power through the process of normalization which is gained through norm creation. Taylor adds that "[p]ower passes through and along norms, and these points of intersection can either facilitate or inhibit the further circulation of power" (p. 52).

In the majority of his work, Foucault illustrates the disciplinary technologies through which power constructs its subjects. Foucault, as cited in Taylor, explains that "there is an originally prescriptive character of the norm, in the sense that the norm determines what is normal. Subjects constitute themselves and are in turn constituted through techniques of power that presuppose the norm, construed as an ideal or, optimal model" (2009, p. 50). Critically, when Foucault argues that the individual constructs herself and is constructed through norms, it is obvious that there is a complex power relation involved in the process of the patriarchal constitution of norms. In other words, there are 'inner' and 'outer' mechanisms that construct the feminine subject in relation to the norm. The outer mechanisms are those through which the normal is created while the 'inner' have a relation to do with the very process through which the

female responds to the norms. It is important to note that the latter operates as interactional more than oppressive because it provides the individual with means of resistance.

The 'inner' and 'outer' mechanisms of construction have been identified by Foucault's explanation of the techniques through which the individual is constructed as a social subject. Heyes lists these three features as follows. First, hierarchical observation is a technique through which those on whom power is applied become clearly visible and recognize that there is a power gaze on them. The awareness of the social gaze or the panoptical gaze makes the individuals (as it has been already discussed in the section on identity formation in Chapter One) police themselves. The second feature is normalizing judgment, which functions through the construction of the 'normal' by the practices of rewards and punishments. Through normalization individuals ensure greater conformity to norms because social behavior is defined according to a spectrum of good and bad (this is where resistance can take place). The third feature of disciplinary power is examination, which integrates the normalizing gaze as a technique of evaluation. (2007) Placed under its controlling structure, patriarchy systematically constructs subjects that are aware of the standards they are supposed to follow in order to fit into the social meaning of existence.

By examining the above techniques through which gender norms are invented and enforced, norms are maintained through the assumption that gender identities are essential and natural. Theorizing for normalization, Butler emphasizes that the gender identity is a "matrix of norms and repeated practices" (as cited in Spade & Willse, 2016: 552). This means that subjects become the sort of being they are through the internalization of the repeated social acts.

According to Spade and Willse (2016), normalization "facilitates inquiries into how norms are internalized so that we enforce them on ourselves and each other, despite the fact that

such enforcement limits our realm of possibility or causes us suffering (p. 552). In other words, the internalization of cultural norms pushes women unconsciously and maybe sometimes consciously to conform to these norms. Simply put, patriarchy represents itself as the only natural and normal way of being; therefore, it is obvious that individuals inside this power system will represent themselves in accordance with its standards.

Consequently, normalization has a vital role in all social techniques. In this respect, Blood states that “the idea of the ‘norm’ is at the heart of surveillance, establishing what is ‘normal’ and classifying people in relation to this norm. Norms serve as models against which the self continually judges, measures, disciplines and corrects itself” (2005: 53). Supporting this idea, the French historian and philosopher Francois Ewald points out that “the emergence of norms makes a new system of reference whereby the norm no longer refers to a standard outside itself but rather to the internal ‘play of oppositions between the normal and the abnormal or pathological” (quoted in Yeyes, 2007: 33). This is that through norms, things are regulated into a dichotomous system classifying them into bad and good. Spade and Willse, also, argue that disciplinary power “establishes norms of *good* [italics added] behavior and ideas about proper and improper categories of subjects” (2016: 553).

Social norms are thereby naturalized through the repeated behavior that is embodied in the social interaction. Basing her concept of performativity on the lived repetition of gender norms, Butler (1990) concludes that under the threat of punishment and the desire of rewards, individuals act unthinkably in accordance with the culturally appropriate behavior. Thus, norms, as Taylor discusses, “are perceived not as a particular set of prevailing norms, but instead simply as ‘normal,’ inevitable, and therefore immune to critical analysis” (2009: 47).

Therefore, Punishments and rewards are also techniques used to force subjects into compliance with norms. Individuals are thus encouraged to adhere to the patriarchal attitudes towards the appropriate behavior. Norms guide women's ideal role within society. Violating gender norms causes social sanctions. Because women are aware of the punishments and rewards associated with the failure to follow the norm, they themselves adopt self-regulatory and self-monitoring strategies. The self-policing concept is discussed in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1990) as the panoptical gaze. (See Chapter One for more explanation of panopticism).

Because they are aware of the moral code of femininity, women willingly conform to social norms. Thus, they get involved into a process of construction as dictated by the patriarchal attitudes of their society. Patriarchal disciplinary power controls women's movements, posture and gesture. As Brtky argues in her article "Foucault, femininity, and the modernization of patriarchal power," "feminine faces, as well as bodies, are trained to expression of deference" (1988: 68). To be the 'nice' girl, females learn from their early childhood to train their gaze, lower their voices and regulate the space their bodies occupy. Cultural norms of femininity do not only govern women's behavior but also shape their physical embodiment and the type of language they use as well. For example in traditional Mauritanian society, the fatter the woman is the more feminine she becomes. Therefore, the woman goes through a process of disciplinary practices to make her body meet the patriarchal standards of beauty. Critically, the Mauritanian feminine embodiment can be explained as a sign of women's domesticity. Obviously, when a woman becomes overweight, this will limit her public mobility.

Thus, through the internalization of feminine ideals, women react passively toward patriarchal gender attitudes. This is because rejecting the cultural feminine characteristics is rejecting one's own identity. Social recognition has a significant role in subjectivity construction;

therefore, for an individual to be recognized as a subject, he or she must conform to cultural norms. Moreover, Taylor clarifies that “norms encourage subjects to become highly efficient at performing a narrowly defined range of practices” (2009: 47).

Considering female conformance with patriarchal mechanisms (the inner mechanisms of construction), Blood (2005) argues that when Foucault explains that individuals constitute themselves, he does not mean that the mechanisms by which these individuals are constructed are invented by them, but rather that these practices are proposed, suggested and imposed on them by their society and culture. Put another way, the internalization of the mechanisms of construction makes individuals themselves participate in a process of self-constitution in which power is exchanged and thus they are not passive agents. This is that the patriarchal power is built on a dichotomous relationship between the female individual and the social world.

As there are socio-cultural mechanisms of patriarchal construction of the feminine subject, there are also religious mechanisms. The religious mechanisms do not only serve the continuity of male supremacy but also shape the passive feminine identity.

## **1.2 Religious Mechanisms of Construction**

*Man enjoys the great advantage of having a God endorse the codes he writes; and since man exercise a sovereign authority over women, it is especially fortunate that this authority has been vested in him by the Supreme Being. For the Jews, Mohammedans, [Muslims] and Christians, among others, man is master, by divine right; the fear of God, therefore will repress any impulse towards revolt in the downtrodden female. One can bank on her credulity. [...] But if woman quite willingly embraces religion, it is above all because it fills a profound need. (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1983: 632)*

In the same way as the aforementioned socio-cultural mechanisms of patriarchal construction function to produce unbalanced social system, religious andocentric interpretations

shape the feminine silent subject, the passive subject that goes along with the mainstream ('malestream'). Religion, as Beauvoir explains in the above quote, does not only provide man with absolute authority but also pushes women to respond positively to these religious norms that construct their inferiority. Beauvoir claims that it is through religion that patriarchy teaches women to believe that their subordination is the God's way of equality. They then happily accept their social status. Any one thus who dares to question the male religious authority will be labeled as being against God's will and thus goes into her religious identity disorder. Based on the same vision, Lisbeth Mikaelsson, professor of the History of Religions argues that:

Religion supports gender inequality through the mystification of male power as a divine arrangement proclaimed with sublime authority by male elites. Patriarchal rule may therefore be conceived as the normal and inevitable order of things, the way of the world as God made it and therefore beyond criticism. (2016: 765)

However, both Beauvoir and Mikaelsson overgeneralize in their critical account of women's depiction in religion. It is not religion that enforces female inferiority, but rather the male misogynistic interpretations of the sacred texts. This is to say that it is not religion that oppresses women but the misleading use of religion is that through which patriarchy naturalizes male superiority. As a result, women internalize male authority as the divine way of being and thus unthinkably accept their subordinate position. Consequently, patriarchal values, as Klingorova and Havlicek (2015) discuss, are reflected through religious norms.

Basing her claim on the results of a study conducted on world religions, Seguino concludes that "Islam has been identified as significantly more patriarchal than other dominant religions" (2011: 1309). However, going back into history, so many scholars discuss that there has been a great shift in the teachings of Islam; meaning that the patriarchal principles that are maintained today in the name of Islam have nothing to do with the authentic revolutionary Islam



that came to free the human race from all sorts of discrimination and show them the right path for living. Supporting his argumentation through a historical overview of the status of women in pre-Islamic Arabia, *Al Jahilia* (period of ignorance), Syed (2004) argues that women were treated as chattel. They were sold and inherited like any piece of men's property. Nevertheless, with the emergence of Islam, women gained their rights. "In fact," he adds, "Muslim women enjoy more rights than women in any other society" (p. 1).

Despite the fact that Islam through its rules and regulations guarantees equal status for women, since the eighth century all sorts of pre-Islamic and non-Islamic practices that are based on cultural view have influenced the Islamic law (*Shariah*) (Syed, 2004). In his book *Social Justice in Islam*, Seyyid Qutb, a leading intellectual of the Muslim Brotherhood and one of the great theoreticians of his time, argues that women's liberation in the West is nothing more than using woman and exploiting her abilities. He states that Islam was the first to call for women spiritual, economic and political freedom (cited in Lewis, 2007).

Believing that Muslim women's inferior status in modern societies is not that which Islam guarantees for them but rather the cultural misinterpretation of Islamic principles, Islamic feminists approach women's position through providing a critical historical background not only of Muslim women during the prophetic time but also their status in different historical settings.

Examining traditionalist Muslim men's depiction of women's status in Islam, it is clear that their texts are an andocentric version of Islam that maintains male supremacy. For example, theorizing for patriarchal division of public/private, the Egyptian misogynist thinker Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad claims that "women have never been a source of ethics or good conduct and men are the sole source of these things" and thus he denies women any right apart from that of family responsibilities (quoted in Syed, 2004: 2). In his book *Woman in the Qur'an* (1967), al-

Aqqad argues that male supremacy and dominance over woman is established and maintained through the Qur'an. Approaching the topic of gender equality in Islam from a conservative point of view, al-Aqqad, like many other Muslim conservatives, believes that women are biologically inferior to men. He claims that women do not possess any talent even in the works that have been associated with them centuries ago and this is because of their lack of intellectual abilities.

Trying to deconstruct the religious mechanisms of construction and return to an 'authentic' Islamic society, feminists have directed their attention toward the interpretation of the religious texts. Islamic feminists such as Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Leila Ahmed and others criticize the patriarchal commentary on Qur'an and *Hadith* (the teachings of the prophet Mohammed peace be upon him). These feminists believe that the misogynist conservative interpretations of religious texts, which are culturally bound, are the main reason behind female exclusion from public life in Muslim communities. In this respect, Mikaelsson argues that religion serves power through the interpretations of myths and symbols in a misogynist way that "legitimizes gender hierarchies in society and influence personal gender identity" (2004: 295). This is that the formation of religious knowledge through the interpretation of and commentaries on the sacred texts helps in excluding women from social, economic, and political issues.

Islam as stated above is a religion that delivers a message of gender equality. The Quran calls for equality between the sexes in different *Ayats* (verses). The verse, "*Whoever does good works, man or woman, and is a Believer—such shall enter into Paradise and shall not be wronged one jot.*" (4: 124) is an example. Other verses dealing with gender equality in Islam are (3:195, 33: 35, 40:40, 16: 97 ...).

In this respect, the majority of Islamic scholars commenting on the above quoted *Aya* argue that Allah has guaranteed men and women the same spiritual rights; meaning that men and

women are equal in the rewards and punishment on their deeds. However, there are some Qur'anic *Ayas* that are misogynistically used against women. This is of course through the conservative interpretations. The *Aya* 4:34 is precisely used to maintain women's inferiority.

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ۚ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَانِتَاتٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ ۗ وَاللَّاتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاصْرَبُوهُنَّ ۚ فَإِنِ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا

Men are in charge of (are guardians of/are superior to/have authority over] women because God has endowed one with more [because God has preferred some of them over others and because they spend of their means. Therefore the righteous women are obedient, guarding in secret that which God has guarded. As to those from whom you fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to separate beds, and beat them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. For God is Exalted, Great. (An-Nissa, 4:34)

This *Ayah* is interpreted by Abd Allah ibn Umar al-Baydawi from a conservative perspective. Explaining the verse, Al-Baydawi argues that:

God has favored men over women by endowing them with a perfect mind, good management skills, and superb strength with which to perform practical work and pious deeds. Hence, to men [alone] were allotted the prophethood, the imamate, government, performance of the religious ceremonies, witnessing in all (legal) matters, the duty to fight for the sake of God (*jihad*), attend Friday prayers, to wear the turban, receive the greater inheritance share, and the monopoly in the decision to divorce. (Cited in Stowasser, 1998: 33)

In the same respect, following the same interpretation al-Aqqad (1967) states commenting on the above *Aya* that Allah grants men the absolute authority over women not only because they are able to financially support women but also because they are by nature better than women.

When it comes to this *Aya*, it is of a great use to examine Tabari's interpretation. Despite the fact that Tabari interprets the above verse as being concerned with the domestic relationship which means that men are preferred over women because of their economic responsibilities to support their wives, a number of his interpretations of Qur'anic verses "indicate that men in general have precedence or excellence over women" (Stowasser, 1998: 33). Some other Muslim scholars read the *Aya* differently. Mohamoud Taha, the reformist Islamic thinker, emphasizes that since there is no need for women economic dependency on men with the emergence of the new state,

male guardianship over women should be terminated. Both men and women should now be equally free and equally responsible before the law, which guarantee economic opportunity and security for members of the communality. (Cited in Al- Labadi, 2014: 174)

Based on the above interpretation, male guardianship (*qawamma*) is explained as placing emphasis on men's physical abilities to support women and guarantee for them safe conditions for living. Moreover, interpreting the above *Ayah*, Muhammad Abduh's, another Islamic reformist, argues from this verse should not be taken to mean God's preference of men over women, but simply to mean that man is in charge to protect his family. This is that woman's biological and social function in the family makes man more appropriate to be in charge of leadership in the family; however, that does not mean that the wife cannot surpass her husband in "knowledge, work, bodily strength, and earning power." Male's guardianship thus does not mean that men are better than women (Stowasser, 1998: 35). This is to argue that the social conditions of societies in the time of revelation of the *Ayah*, the majority of the work done outside the house required physical force and that it was a time of wars in which women needed protection; therefore, guardianship came as a solution that was limited to its time and space.

The misogynistic interpretation of Qur'an does not only exclude women from the public domain, but it also pushes them to internalize their oppression. Women believe that their inferiority is God's will. *Aya* 33:33 is another example.

وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَىٰ وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا (33)

Abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance. And establish prayer and give zakat and obey Allah and *His* Messenger. Allah intends only to remove from you the impurity [of sin], O people of the [Prophet's] household, and to purify you with [extensive] purification. Surah Al-Ahzab 33:33

Commenting on the above *Ayah*, Abdulhamid al-Ansari in his book *The Political Rights of Women in Islam* (1982) identifies two Islamic views of women's participation in public sphere. The first stand is against women's involvement in public life. They support their view by interpreting this *Ayah* as being directed to women in general and not only the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Therefore, Allah orders women to stay in their houses and never go out unless for a purpose. On the other hand, those scholars who are against this interpretation believe that this *Ayah* is directed to (*Ahel al-beyt*) the Prophet's wives for it starts by the saying in *Ayah* 33:32, "O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any other woman." Consequently, such verse cannot be held to mean the exclusion of Muslim women or a general disapproval of a role for them in public affairs.

Definitely, conservative interpretations of Qur'an such as the above have been used against women as a means of excluding them from public sphere. This is explained by the American Islamic feminist Amina Wadud who states that

traditionnal *Tafsir* [Qur'an interpretations] were exclusively written by males. This means that men and men's experiences were included and women and women's experiences were either excluded or interpreted through the male vision, perspective, desire, or needs of woman. (1999: 2)

In other words, along the history of Islamic exegesis, women have been excluded from the formation of Islamic knowledge. Thus, women's absence from the realm of interpretation is the direct cause of the patriarchal religious construction of the misogynistic Islamic identity.

The intellectual debate over the patriarchal use of Islamic traditions to reinforce its ideology is very rich, but due to the scope of the study, only that which serves its goals was discussed. In accordance with the argument of this dissertation, religious mechanisms of constructing the patriarchal Muslim identity are examined. It is through conservative male interpretations of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah that men empowerment is constituted. Due to patriarchal power and the political influence, there is a separation between Muslim women and the intellectual legacy of the great early Muslim women such as the wives of the Prophet and his female companions. Women are enforced to believe that the divine duty of a 'good' female believer is to take care of the family responsibilities. This discourse is enforced in the religious books of Muslim scholars when praising great women of Islam as being good mothers who raised strong men. No importance is given to the political participation of women during the Prophet's time or after. Muslim historians ignore women's intellectual legacy. The construction of the androcentric tradition excludes women totally from the public sphere.

## **2. Gendered Spaces: Female Domesticity**

Spatial analysis has attracted a number of theorists and thinkers from different disciplines such as architectural studies, philosophy, geography, history, cultural studies, politics, and anthropology. Considering space a problematic issue, through which three important concepts

that explain human existence come into interaction, subjectivity, spatial behavior, and the physical space, provides social sciences with different theories of the relationship between people and how they perceive and negotiate space.

Theorizing space, great philosophers question the physical dimensions of space and the symbolic meanings it illustrated. Plato, for example thinks that despite its geometrical structure, space is not neutral; it should not be assumed as the container of human realities. In this sense Henri Lefebvre clarifies that “physical space has no reality without the energy that is deployed with it” (1991: 13). In other words, social activities that take place inside spaces give them meanings. Boundaries between spaces are culturally constructed in a way that each space defines those who can occupy it.

In the same view, for Kant space is pre-given. The physical space is separated from the metaphorical reality it stands for. He believes that the thing in itself is different from the thing for the person. To put it another way, Kant provides an account of space as being constructed by spatial performance. In other words, space is not what it seems because the acts that take place in space determine its socio-cultural meaning. For example, café spaces in certain Arab countries are presumed as being a masculine property because its dominant ‘actors’ are males. Thus, these spaces are given a gendered meaning depending on the spatial performance that is taking place inside the physical café space.

Kant’s idea of space as an appearance can be explained by Butler’s performativity. In the same way Kant explains how space takes its social meaning, Butler (1990), on the other hand, theorizes for the relation between space and identity formation. She argues that the surrounding environment influences the performance of the subject’s identity; space affects the spatial performance. This is to say that individuals are conscious of spatial division and thus they

perform the expected social acts in order to exist as social agents. Taking the same example, women in these societies where cafes are presumed as masculine space will avoid physical presence in such spaces or act invisibly confirming to their social expected feminine identity.

However, with global modernization space takes new forms and the organization of urban institutions raises the ground for social division negotiation. Theorizing space is, thus, of much importance for scholars in different fields. Karl Marx, for example, in his analysis of capitalism questions space. As being the mediator in which struggle for power takes place, owning space is an important aspect for social relations production. Cohen argues that “[o]wnership of space certainly confers a position in the economic structure. Even when a piece of space is contentless, its control may generate economic power, because it can be filled with something productive or because it may need to be traversed by producers” (cited in Zieleniec, 2007: 5). To illustrate, owning space is fundamental in organizing and constructing power means through which a certain social agent or a certain group can negotiate social means of productions contributing to their empowerment. Marx, then, argues that the division of labour in capital society is based on a spatial occupation. This is that the creation of new spaces that serve the needs of capitalism determines the mobilization of the power agents and restricts the spatial movement of the dominated.

Moreover, for the German sociologist Georg Simmel, space is “a crucial and fundamental element in human experience because social activities and interactions are and must be spatially contextualized” (cited in Zieleniec, 2007: 34). This is to say that since society for Simmel is a web of interactions, space is a pre-condition for these interactions. Thus, space influences the nature of these interactions and shapes the relations between social agents who are taking part in the interaction. Representing the importance of theorizing analysis, the aim of this section is,



then, to present a theoretical discussion of how social perceptions of space gendered spatial behavior. As it has been discussed in Chapter One, in the mind/body dichotomy and the philosophy of binary oppositions, women are presented as sexed bodies who are presumed to be domestic beings. Clarifying the relation between spatiality and subjectivity, this section will relate women's corporeal experience to the construction of their feminine identity as domestic subjects that are spatially segregated.

## **2.1 Gendering Space: Spatial Behavior**

*The man-made environments which surround us reinforce conventional patriarchal definitions of women's role in society and spatially imprint those sexist messages on our daughters and sons. They have conditioned us to an environmental myopia which limits our self-concepts... which limits our visions and choices for ways of living and working... which limits us by not providing the environments we need to support our autonomy or by barring our access to them. It is time to open our eyes and see the political nature of this environmental oppression! (Weisman, 2000: 1)*

Based on a binary vision of society, women have always been represented as domestic agents who construct their self-image as housekeepers and housewives. Interestingly, as Weisman argues in the above quote, everything surrounding us in the environments where we live is not neutral, but on the contrary it constructs gendered identities providing social subjects with their possibilities and limits.

Though the study of gendered space is interdisciplinary, "anthropology was one of the first disciplines to suggest that there was a relation between gender and space, and that it was defined through power relations" (Rendell, 2000: 102). In his influential works, the 1973 article, 'The Berber House', and his 1977 book, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, the anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu analyzes male and female occupation of areas and the relationship between the symbolic meaning of these areas and how this meaning constructs body representation in these

spaces. For Bourdieu, the division between male and female spaces constitutes gendered practices that are taken for granted as normal.

Space is not only socially produced but it also constructs social norms (Rendell, 2000). Weisman argues that public spaces reinforce women's second-class status; therefore, there is a need for architectural feminists to deconstruct the discourse surrounding this spatial division. Being associated with the domestic; women are represented with traits of nurturance, cooperation, subjectivity, emotionalism, and fantasy. On the contrary, men, the public actors, are associated with objectivity, impersonalization, competition, and rationality. Following the same idea, Elizabeth Grosz (2000) agrees that space is both real and metaphoric. It is real in an architectural or physical aspect, but it metaphoric in the political meaning it constructs.

This is to say that gender relations, in this case, change the way that individuals presume space. The feminist geographer Doreen Massey argues that spaces "are gendered in a myriad different ways, which vary between cultures and over time. And this gendering of space and place both reflects *and has affects back on* the way in which we live" (1994: 186).

However, this does not mean that space stands as a passive concept. Space is both constructed by social activities and constructs individuals' perception of the world. Supporting this view Flather states that

the organization of space is not just a reflection of society and its values, it is a medium through which society is produced, since it provides the context in which social and power relations are negotiated (2007: 2).

Interestingly, by being a context for power interactions and negotiation, Flather does not mean that space is a 'container', but on the contrary she argues that as a social context it takes part in the social interaction dilemma. Munt (2001: 2) discusses that "space is not passive, fixed, or absolute; it is a relational concept which depends on the position of objects contained within it".

Taking into consideration the role that spatial division plays in gendering social activities, it can be argued that it reduces women's access to knowledge. Consequently, women stereotypically are presumed to fit more into the private sphere. It is not only through cultural perception that this gendered assumption came into existence but also in religious societies such as in Muslim conservative societies, where religion is used to reinforce women's domesticity.

## **2.2 Women, Space, and Islam**

Investigating the Muslim environment, it is clear that it is based on a binary division of public and private. Space and gender in Muslim societies has always attracted Islamic feminists from Arab and Western countries. Muslim women's bodies, clothes, and activities construct their spatial identity placing them into dichotomous social structure that represented them in the name of religion as domestic bodies. Thus, the efforts of these feminists have been directed toward questioning the hegemonic religious discourse over Muslim women's spatial limitations.

Historically, it has been proved that during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) women had more spatial freedom than in Muslim societies today. In that time, the mosque was the most frequented public institution that stood both as a political and religious space. Despite this, there were no gender-based limits concerning women's occupation of the mosque as a public space. In the mosque, "there were not separated or marked spaces for worship" (Kahera, 2002: 130). The prominent women in the time of the Prophet used to pray behind men in the same mosque space without any physical division which is not the case in the architectural structure of the mosque in the present time, where it is spatially divided into main male side and secondary female side (usually located at the back of the mosque and smaller than the male side). Neglecting women's presence in the mosque reinforces their domesticity through shaping a private religious space for women in the public masculine one.

The mosque space was not the only evidence that the Muslim society in the time of the Prophet was not based on the dichotomous division between public and private. Examining the domestic space in the lifetime of the prophet, Islamic feminists, such as Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud, question the Muslim women's mobilization between private and public spaces in that time. Mernissi in her book *The Veil and the Male Elite* provides a historical reading of the construction of the private/public binary in early Islam. Studying the architectural structure of the Prophet's household and its relation to the mosque space, she concludes that

the Prophet's architecture created a space in which the distance between private life and public life was nullified, where physical thresholds did not constitute obstacle. It was an architecture in which the living quarters opened easily onto the mosque, and which thus played a decisive role in the lives of women and their relationship to politics. (1991: 114)

By historicizing the structure of the private sphere during the lifetime of the Prophet, Mernissi argues that the nine rooms (*hujorat*) of the Prophet's wives (mothers of believers) were located in the left side of the mosque in a way that guaranteed for women equal access to the political and religious space. Therefore, she concludes that "[t]his democratic (or idealized) model of the early Muslim community demands that Muslim men and women share space as well as political, economic, employment and reproductive power" (cited in Armajani, 2004: 29). This is to say that Mernissi, like many other Islamic feminists, believes that the seclusion of Muslim women is not based on the true Islam that was introduced by the Prophet (peace be upon him), but it is based on misogynist patriarchal interpretations of the texts.

Questioning the spatial seclusion of Muslim women, Islamic feminists go into serious debate over the concept of *hijab* and its relation to women's spatial experience. The term *hijab* is

derived from the Arabic “root *h-j-b*, which means to screen, to separate, to hide from sight, to make invisible” (Amer, 2014: 12). Examining the linguistic scope of *hijab*, Mernissi, states that

The first dimension [of the *hijab*] is a visual, one: to hide something from sight [...] The second dimension is spatial, to separate, to mark a border; to establish a threshold [...] And finally, the third dimension is ethical: it belongs to the realm of the forbidden. (Quoted in Hmzeh, 2012: 20)

There are various verses in Qur’an that mention *hijab*, but the following two verses talk about *hijab* in its two concepts, a physical barrier and *hijab* as a cloth, veiling:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَى أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ  
وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا (33: 59)

Q 33:59: Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and women believers to make their outer garments [jalabib, sg. jilbab] hang low over them so as to be recognized and not insulted: God is most forgiving, most merciful. (Cited in Amer, 2014: 25)

The majority of feminists who theorize for *hijab* as spatial excluding system clarify their anti-*hijab* vision arguing the relation between the spatial gender physical barrier and the ethical-corporeality of the Muslim woman. In this respect, Mernissi argues that the main intention behind veiling women in public sphere is spatial domination followed by Muslim males based on their concept of active female sexuality. According to Mernissi, women are presumed as a source of *fitna*, causing men to lose control over their sexual desires (cited in Armajani, 2004). Thus, in order to prevent this sexual disorder, women are excluded from the public space which is believed to be masculine. This exclusion results in the spatial concept of *hijab* as a clothing barrier. This debate has a long history; therefore, it is important to provide an overview of

different positions on the issue, namely those of most relevance to Muslim women's spatial presentation.

First, hijab has been mentioned in Quran as physical barrier in different verses such as the following:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتَ النَّبِيِّ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ إِلَى طَعَامٍ غَيْرٍ نَاظِرِينَ إِنَاهُ وَلَكِنْ إِذَا دُعِيتُمْ فَادْخُلُوا  
فَإِذَا طَعِمْتُمْ فَانْتَشِرُوا وَلَا مُسْتَأْنِسِينَ لِحَدِيثٍ إِنَّ ذَلِكُمْ كَانَ يُؤْذِي النَّبِيَّ فَيَسْتَحْيِي مِنْكُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي مِنَ  
الْحَقِّ وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ذَلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ ۗ (33:53)

O believers! Do not enter the houses of the Prophet without permission, nor stay waiting for meal time; but if you are invited to a meal, enter; and when you have eaten, disperse and do not seek long conversation. Such behavior annoys the Prophet, he feels shy in asking you to leave, but Allah does not feel shy in telling the truth. if you have to ask his wives for anything, speak to them from behind a curtain. This is more chaste for your hearts and for theirs. 33:53

A number of Islamic feminists, such as Fatima Mernissi, Amina Wadud, Leila Ahmed, Asma Barlas, Newal el Saadawi, and Azzizah al-Hibri, consider *hijab* (the veil) as a spatial barrier for women and do not believe that it is a religious requirement. These feminists argue that the Qur'anic verse concerning *hijab* was first meant as a physical spatial marker that was directed to the Prophet's companions that they should speak with the Prophet's wives from behind curtain (Amer, 2014).

Basing her theory of *hijab* on at-Tabari, Mernissi argues that the Qur'anic verse concerning *hijab* came as "a consequence of the Prophet's politeness" (Roald, 2003: 261). She thus argues that the public/private spatial division was not established during the Prophet time but on the contrary it was the second caliph Umar Ibn el-Khattab who introduced spatial binary. To illustrate, these feminists claim that since *hijab*, both as physical and as a concept, is directed

to specific women, women of the Prophet, it should not be generalized to prohibit mixed-gender interactions.

However, the majority of Islamic scholars (*ulema*) agree on the interpretation of Qur'an and the *sunna* that illustrate that *hijab* (the veil) is a religious obligation for adult Muslim women. They believe that the veil does not contribute to Muslim women's spatial oppression as has been argued by the aforementioned feminists. On the contrary, *hijab*, is for them a Muslim identity and a religious duty that all Muslim women should conform to. Thus, the Islamic secular feminist stand against *hijab* is explained as an orientalist account of self/Other difference in relation to Muslim women. Despite the importance of this debate around the veiling/unveiling literature on *hijab* and its relation to spatial occupation of women, delving deeper into this discussion may result in going beyond the scope of this dissertation. Going back to the main argument of the study, it is interesting to note that since Muslim women are spatially segregated, their exclusion from the public is reinforced through andocentric interpretation of the sacred texts. In the following subsection an overview of the reinforcement of women's domesticity through patriarchal discourse is provided.

### **2.3 Muslim Women's Domesticity: The Misogynistic Interpretations**

Traditionalist Muslims who are against public spatial occupation of women refer to Qur'anic verses supporting it and with Hadith forbidding women from the engagement into public affairs. Explaining how conservative Islamic scholars use the texts against women, Mernissi argues:

Not only have the sacred texts always been manipulated, but manipulation of them is a structural characteristic of the practice of power in Muslim societies. Since all power, from the seventh century on, was only legitimated by religion,

political forces and economic interests pushed for the fabrication of false traditions. (1991: 8-9)

Mernissi challenges the conservative interpretation of Hadith as well as a number of historical books written by Islamic scholars who provide misogynistic representation of women's public occupation in Islamic traditions. A book entitled *The Rights of Women in Islam* written by Muhammad Arafa is criticized by Mernissi for claiming that in the early years of Islam women were never involved in public affairs. She questions Arafa's avoidance to mention anything about Aisha who led an army against the fourth orthodox Caliph, Ali. Moreover, Mernissi addresses the very problematic issue behind the name of that historical incident itself, explaining that even male historians refused to name the battle after Aisha. Historian preferred to name the battle as The Battle of the Camel "referring to the camel ridden by Aisha, thereby avoiding linking in the memory of little Muslim girls name of a woman with the name of a battle" (1991: 5).

On the contrary, these scholars do not only ignore Aisha's spatial public presence but they also use it as a negative approval to draw a conclusion against women's involvement in public affairs in general. For example, Sa'id al-Afghani has devoted great efforts to the biography of Aisha. He wrote a book entitled *Aisha and Politics*. After all these years of search, al-Afghani concluded that "Aisha speaks against the participation of women in the exercise of power" (quoted in Mernissi, 1991: 6). Accordingly, for al-Afghani, like many other Islamic scholars, women should be kept out of public affairs. Al-Afghani comments that "Allah created women to reproduce the race, bring up future generations, and be in charge of households; He wanted to teach us a particular lesson that we cannot forget" (p. 8). Put another way, Al-Afghani blames Aisha for the *fitna* (civil war) that followed the Battle of the Camel. Thus, for him, Aisha's participation in political issues was nothing more than a lesson given by God to tell



Muslims that Public affairs are not a woman's business. Such misogynistic opinions shape the Muslim world perspectives toward women's engagement in the public domain.

Moreover, there is a famous Hadith which has always been used against women's political participation. The Hadith is as follows: "Those who entrust their affairs to women will never have prosperity" (Bukhari, 1973). This Hadith is used to exclude women from politics. It is famously used in the sense that it becomes impossible to talk about women's public rights without referring to this particular Hadith. Unfortunately, almost all male Muslims know about this Hadith as if it is the first thing to be taught in Islam. Abu Bakra told about the Hadith when Aisha, mother of believers, got involved in the Camel Battle. Aisha asked elites of Basra among whom Abu Bakra to join her position against Ali. Then, Abu Bakra refused claiming that he heard the Prophet peace be upon him forbidding women from leading a political affair.

This Hadith has been debated by Islamic scholars for they do not agree on the weight given to it. In this view, Syed says that despite the fact that Abu Bakra's Hadith is included in Sahih al-Bukhari, so many scholars debate its authenticity. Islamic feminists believe that the traditions of the Prophet (Hadith) have been manipulated to serve patriarchal power despite being included in the Sahih books such as Boukhari and Muslim. Tabari for example, Sayed adds, "did not consider this alleged Hadith as sufficient basis for denying women the right of decision making and the right of participating in politics" (2004: 125). Umar Ahmed Usmani, a traditional Islamic scholar, also considers this Hadith as forged "since Abu Bakra did not remember it until the time of the Battle of Camel" (p. 125).

There have been two groups of scholars, those who believe in the authenticity of Abu Bakra's Hadith and those who consider this Hadith a fabricated one. In this respect, scholars supporting the authenticity of this Hadith argue that when looking at the *isnad* (chain of

transmission) of the Hadith, one will see that it is narrated by one of the Prophet's companions. Therefore, it is an authentic Hadith. These scholars believe that the evaluation of the transmitters of the Hadith is the core criterion for testing its authenticity.

However, other Muslim scholars study the authenticity of Hadith adopting different approaches. Evaluating both the accuracy of the content of the Hadith and the reliability of its transmitter, scholars use a set of criteria. Hussein Abdul-Raof (2010) classifies some techniques that are used in the criticism of both the content and the *isnad* of the Hadith. Regarding the content, he states that there are four issues that should be examined to tell if a Hadith is authentic or not. First, there should be a comparison between the Hadiths of different students of the same school, then, a "comparison between oral and written forms of the same Hadith" is required. Moreover, the compatibility between Hadith and Qur'an should be examined. And last, the "comparison of the same hadith said by the same scholar at different times" (p. 47). On the other hand, concerning the reliability of a Hadith transmitter, Abdul-Raof argues that for a narrator of the Hadith to be described as *adl* (just), he or she should be "morally upright, pious and does not commit grave sins" (p. 47).

Concerning the comparison between different forms of the same Hadith narrated by different people, Abu Bakra's Hadith has never been reported by any other companion. It is an *Ahad* Hadith. The *Ahad* Hadith which is reported by one person is considered by many scholars to be a weak (*da'if*) so that they question its authenticity. Sadiq states that Muslim scholars qualified in Hadith "argue that if the Prophet had said it [the hadith], it should have been heard by more than one person, and that person would have told another person too" (2011: 163). In other words, based on this view since only one person narrates the Hadith, it will be difficult to decide

whether the Prophet said it or not. Engineer concludes that it “is a well-known principle that the *ahad* is not binding and that it is not necessary to act upon it” (2008: 91).

In his book *al-Huquq al-Siyasya li al-Mar'a*, Muhammad Anas Qasim Ja'far, as cited in Hasyim (2006), argues that since this Hadith is an *Ahad*, it cannot be used as convincing evidence in excluding women from leadership. However, there are other scholars who argue that the authenticity of *Ahad* Hadith depends on the reliability of its transmitter.

Consequently, adopting the same methods of evaluation of the reliability of the Hadith transmitter, Islamic feminists accuse Abu Bakra of lying about the aforementioned Hadith. Examining the biography of Abu Bakra, Mernissi (1991) argues that since he was flogged by Caliph Umar Ibn Al-Khattab for false testimony when he presented himself as one of the witnesses of al-Mugira Ibn Shu'ba's involvement in the act of fornication. Therefore, Abu Bakra cannot be described as *adil* because in the study of *al-tajrih wa al-ta'dil* (impugment and validation) when the transmitter is described as a liar, his or her reliability is questioned. However, Muslim scholars believing in the authenticity of Abu Bakra's Hadith argue that all companions of the Prophet are *udul* (just); therefore, labeling Abu Bakra as a liar is a sin and nonsense. The Sunni scholar, Muhammad al-Shawkani insists on the “probity (*adala*) of all the companions, who were the first transmitters of the hadiths of the Prophet” (cited in Haykel, 2003: 140). Thus, these scholars do not believe in the possibility of a companion of the Prophet fabricating a Hadith or lying about it.

Despite the fact that the early critics of Hadith have focused their attention on *isnad* as the most important method of testing the authenticity of prophetic sayings, this method has been questioned by the modernist critics who call for adopting content analysis of Hadith. Ignaz Goldziher criticizes Hadith critics for judging the authenticity of a hadith in terms of its *isnad*.

“Even if the text of a hadith,” argues Goldziher, “is replete with suspicious material, Nobody is allowed to say’ that they doubt the correctness of the hadith only because simply its *isnad* is justified (cited in Brown, 2008: 146). Guillaume supports the same idea stating that “Hadith was not criticized from the point of view of what was inherently reasonable” but from the evaluation of its transmitter (1924: 80).

Content analysis is not a new technique in the realm of studying Hadith. Aisha, mother of believers, adapted content criticism when she rejected certain Hadiths reported by companions of the Prophet. For example, as Brown (2008: 148) explains, Aisha reacted against a Hadith transmitted by Ibn Umar when he stated that the Prophet warned “that a dead relative would be punished for his family’s excessive mourning over him”. Aisha said that this Hadith violated Qur’an because no one is punished for the sins of another. Additionally, she rejected Abu Hureyra’s Hadith concerning the praying being invalidated if a woman, a black dog or a donkey passes saying that “you have compared us to donkeys and dogs.” It is in this sense that modern scholars call for the conformity of Hadith with Qur’an as a means of evaluating the former.

When applying content criticism on Abu Bakra’s Hadith, it can be argued that this Hadith fails this condition of authenticity which means that it contradicts Qur’an in different *Ayahs*. In this way, the verses 27:32-35 and 33:35 do not conform to this Hadith. Despite the fact that Qur’an does not explicitly or implicitly state whether a woman can or cannot become the head of a Muslim state, it stresses that women have absolute equality in the aforementioned verses. Building his opinion on the Quranic verses regarding the queen of Sheba, Syed (2004) argues that the Qur’an does not show any disapproval of her rule as head of the state. On the contrary, the holy verses talking about Belkis, queen of Sheba, praise her for her leadership skills and wise decisions.

Despite the fact that scholars who depend in their evaluation on the conformity of the Hadith content with Qur'an support their debate with the Hadith that says: "Compare what you are informed of as said by me to Allah's Book; if it is in conformity with it, it is said by me, and if it contradicts it, it should not be attributed to me" (Al-Mua'dh, 2002: 2009), the majority of Sunni scholars refuse this Hadith as an evidence for content analysis. Imam Al-Shafi'i rejects this Hadith and accuses its transmitter, Khalid Ibn Abi Krifa, of reporting an unauthentic Hadith. He says, "This who reported such a Hadith is unknown and we [the Sunni Scholars] will never accept such Hadith" (p. 36). Although, Al-Bayhaqi, as cited in Al-Mua'dh, comments on the Hadith saying that "it is null and void, and it contradicts itself, for there is no indication in the Qur'an to the effect that the Prophet's *hadiths* should be compared to the Qur'an" (cited in Al-Mua'dh, 2002: 209).

Actually, the majority of Sunni scholars refer to a Hadith that explains that there will come a time in which the Muslim community rejects the majority of the Prophet teachings as being contradictory to the Qur'an.

"I have been given the book (the Qur'an) and the like of it (the *Sunnah*) along with it. But some stomach-filled men will recline on their couches and say, 'you have to stick (only) to the Qur'an: take as lawful whatever it has declared as lawful and take as prohibited whatever it has declared as prohibited.' Behold! Whatever Allah's Messenger has declared as prohibited is (i.e., in conformity with) what Allah has declared as prohibited (in the Qur'an and in general). Reported by Ahmed and others (Al-Mua'dh, 2002: 208)

It is in the above sense that these Sunni scholars see that there is no need to compare Abu Bakra's Hadith with the Qur'an. They believe that this Hadith is authentic depending on the aforementioned methods of evaluating its *isnad*. In this context, it is important to note that the

debate over the *isnad* of this hadith is very rich. However, the overview provided in this section about the study of *isnad* and the debate over this particular hadith is limited by the scope and context of the thesis. The purpose behind discussing the study of Hadith is to clarify the misogynistic interpretations of the hadith that are used to exclude women from public affairs.

To conclude this section, it is important to point out that space organization and occupation in every society reflects gender relations and hierarchies. Thus, from the above sense individuals' perception of space is constructed. Being conscious of the dualist division between spaces that are public and those that are private and that this division influences gender identity performance, women, in general, tend to occupy what the postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha coined as a third space or hybrid space. For Bhabha the third space is metaphorical space that emerged as a result of power struggle over spatial representation. It is an in-between arena where subjects can negotiate, challenge, and resist the hegemonic spatial discourse (Lipis, 2008). However, despite the possibility of women's occupation of the third space, it does not mean that resisting the patriarchal constructed space provides better chances for women's safe mobilization from the domestic to the public or can fully challenge the dominant perception of space. This is to argue that spatial representation is hierarchal and problematic. It is constructed through different mechanisms of discursive formation, the most important of which are the male gaze and the power of naming that provides women with few possibilities for expressing the feminine identity beyond the domesticity.

### **3. The Power of Naming: Men and the Public Domain**

#### **3.1. Naming as a Social Recognition Strategy**

*Significantly, both Kripke and Lacan agree to hypostatize a pact, a social agreement that invests the name with its power to confer durability and recognizability on that which it names. And in both cases, it is always a social pact based on the Law of the Father, a patrilineal organization that implies that it is patronymic names that endure over time, as nominal zones of phallic control. (Butler, 1993: 153)*

The centrality of the male figure as the dominator of the public domain denied women any right of presence outside the boundaries of men's definitions. Women found themselves caught up in a male-dominated matrix of power relations that constitute the very conditions of their being. A woman is outside of the phallogocentric constructed world, the symbolic order. For her to be recognized as a social subject, she has to admit to the gendered dimensions of this symbolic order, to speak through the authoritative voice of the Father, and to define herself according to the Father's naming of her. Kristeva defines women in relation to language as that "which cannot be represented, that which is not spoken, that which remains outside naming and ideologies" (cited in Boutkhil, 2006: 56). This is that women find no place in the symbolic order in which the voice of the man is the only heard voice. It is a social phallogocentric structure in which women are constructed and represented in a male-made system that is constituted within language.

The name is one of the numerous mechanisms through which society constructs its subjects. The act of naming is a social system of signs that establish cultural norms. This is that the human subject comes into being through the recognition of the social name they hold. In

other words the cultural dimension of the name constitutes not only the identity of the subject but also defines the different possibilities available for the gendered subject.

Along with these arguments, Butler emphasizes the function of naming that is embedded in power relations. Referring both to Kripke's philosophy of naming and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Butler argues that it is through the power of naming that the phallogocentric society controls individuals constructing their social agency. In Kripke's philosophy, there are two dimensions of naming, description and construction. The name does not only function in describing or identifying a certain object but it also constructs its identity, its reality. In other words, the act of naming is not neutral. The hidden intention behind the name and the social effects that it causes is what Lacan refers to as a form of Symbolic construction of society. Lacan states that "naming constitutes a pact by which two subjects simultaneously come to an agreement to recognize the same object" (quote in Butler, 1993: 152).

### **3.2.Names from Butler's Performative View**

The social agreement over the name is the core of its power. This implies that the power of names lies in the agency agreement on the common use of the name. Without this agreement the name does not survive and as a result does not function in creating the reality of a certain object. Butler supports the idea of the social agreement by introducing her concept of the performative repetition of the name. She believes that language does not only describe, represent or state a fact but, rather, it performs an act. The performative repetition of the name, thus, operates in the subject constitution.

There can never be social existence without linguistic agency, without being constituted within language. The process of the social construction which happens through the power of naming occurs without the subject knowing. Youdell highlights that "when we name, or



interpellate, another we in fact do not describe that person but, rather, contribute to the making of them in the terms of the name we have used” (2006: 75). In other words, this can be explained by Butler’s famous saying “there is no doer behind the deed; rather, the doer is invariably constructed in and through the deed” (1990: 142), which means that despite the intention which may direct the action, it is through the action that it gains its meaning. Accordingly, to name is to act; naming presumes its power from the social effect it encourages. Thus, through naming, as it has been already discussed, agents are discursively constructed as cultural selves.

Drawing on her argumentation of the performative act of naming on Derrida’s notion of citationality, Butler writes:

And the "act" by which a name authorizes or deauthorizes a set of social or sexual relations is, of necessity, *a repetition*, "Could a performative succeed," asks Derrida, "if its formulation did not repeat a coded' or iterable utterance...if it were not identifiable in some way as a citation'?" If a performative provisionally succeeds (and I will suggest that "success" is always and only provisional), then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices*. (1993: 226-227)

Clearly the above view hits at the core of the cultural constitution of the subject which is achieved through citationality. Citational forces operate through the individual conformity with social norms. This illustrates that the intention of the subject when exercising the act of naming or internalizing a name as his or her reality, he or she is reciting the discursive norms of her/his society. Put another way, for the act of naming to have its effects, it should be repeated and cited throughout time and context.

Through the repetition of the name, subjects come to internalize the constructed reality as being their only truth. In this respect, Takamatsu (2006) takes into account Butler's example of a black person who is repeatedly directed by a white person as a 'negro'. This black person will automatically refer to him/herself as a 'negro'. On this basis, women also who hear all the time that a women who dares to trespass the boundaries into the public domain is stereotypically labeled as being, for example, a prostitute or a 'bad' woman may sometimes develop negative feeling about her public presence.

It is in the above sense that naming constructs self-perception. Being named is an essential condition by which a subject is socially constructed in language. Despite the fact that being called an injurious name, as Butler (1997) emphasizes, is being socially degraded, it paradoxically holds another possibility which is being socially recognized. Put another way, to explain the *contradictory* effect of the name, one can refer to Hegel's Master-Slave dialectical model in which the self and the Other are dependent on each other in their social becoming. This social being is constituted through the linguistic agency of the social subject despite the fact that this linguistic existence may be negatively interpellating. Butler explains that "one comes to 'exist' by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other" (1997: 5).

By being constituted in language, Butler does not mean that "a pre-existing subject is given a name, but rather that this naming is a prerequisite for being 'recognizable' as a subject" (cited in Youdell, 2006: 44). It is through social recognition that the person comes into being. This is that the self needs to be addressed by the Other. Youdell adds that it does not mean that the address conveys "a truth about the one addressed. Such interpellations are not understood as being descriptive; rather they are understood as being 'inaugurative'" which means that it is

introducing a reality rather than reporting. The discursive preformativity through the power of naming constructs individuals through this complex relation between the self and the Other.

By being interpellated, Butler (1997) explains, the body is socially defined. She uses the example of the social recognition of the biological sex of a new born child as being a girl or a boy. Such recognition will define the social existence of the body of the new born child. It is that through the power of naming that social definition through the recognition of the Other takes place.

Through the power of naming man is represented as being normative. It is the power to name which shaped the male experience and left the female's unnamed. Also, Olson (2002) states that 'Man' is used to represent a universal norm; standing for all human beings. Women in this hierarchal system is subordinated and denied the right to stand for herself as a separate human being.

### **3.3. The Masculine Divine Claim to Naming**

Naming has been claimed to be God's gift for man over women. As Isherwood and McEvan argue, feminists have been interested in the act of naming because it not only "expresses and shapes [women's] experience but also gives [them] power to transform [their] reality" (1993: 110). In other words, feminists believe that since the naming is done by men, it ignores the female experience and acknowledges the male identity. Thus, there was a need for deconstructing the cultural process of naming for women to reclaim their right to this social act. In her interesting book, *Beyond God the Father*, the radical feminist philosopher Mary Daly explains the right to name as the locus of power which women have always been denied. She stresses that:

Women have had the power of naming stolen from us. We have not been free to use our own power to name ourselves, the world, or God. The old naming was not the product of dialogue- a fact inadvertently admitted in the Genesis story of Adam's naming the animals and the woman. Women are now realizing that the universal imposing of names by me has been false because partial. (1973: 8)

According to Daly unless women gain back the power of naming they will always remain imprisoned inside their powerlessness.

Since the act of naming means that the namer has power over the named, conservatives claim that man has been given the power of naming since the creation of humanity. Men, thus, claim the power of naming, the right to create meaning, as being the divine will. They use the story of creation in the holy books, the Bible and the Qur'an as their proof. The creation story tells about granting Adam the power to name, to define and give identity. The exercise of naming given to Adam symbolizes the male supremacy over the female. This is what some anti-feminism conservative scholars refer to trying to explain that men's authority over women is a divine way of being.

However, Cochran (2005) states that Biblical feminists disagree with the conservative scholars who claim supremacy of Adam through the act of naming over Eve referring to the feminist theologian Phyllis Trible's explanations. Trible explains that the verb 'to call' indicates domination only when it is linked to the noun 'name'. Therefore, since the noun name does not appear in the Genesis 2:23 in which Adam states "She shall be called 'woman'", the verse shows equality between the sexes rather than supremacy of the male over the female. This means that through Adam recognition of Eve's humanity, what happened was not naming as the naming of the animals. (2005: 128).

These cultural-religious dimensions of the power of naming that construct subjects establishing the conditions for their social existence. For the purpose of this study, it is essential to raise the question: ‘How does the act of naming exclude women from the public domain?’ Answering this question, Barnett argues that it is through the power of naming that men define experiences “to articulate boundaries and values, to designate to each thing its realm and qualities, to determine what can and cannot be expressed, to control perceptions itself” (1998: 167). Barnett adds that through this power, as Barnett adds, that “men define (or name) women as sexual objects” who are considered as being most appropriately confined to the private sphere.

### **3.4. Public domain and the Male Gaze**

The male gaze transforms the women leader who is acting publicly into a sexual body. Barr argues that the male gaze turns the public presence of the women of power “into private sexual marking by blurring distinctions between the appropriately public and appropriately private” (2000, p. 77). She admits that “[t]he patriarchal gaze transforms every woman into the same entity: object” (p. 73). Women in the public domain are defined (named) as bodies that can never exceed their domesticity. The 2011 incident that was experienced by the Mauritanian Foreign Minister Naha Mint Mouknass can be an example of the masculine use of the power of naming through which they define the female presence in the public domain.

When the minister was in an official visit to Sudan, her beauty was the theme of poems written by the Sudanese diplomats. This poetry annoyed the Mauritanian street claiming that describing the Minister’s feminine appearance was an insult directed to the Mauritanian country as a whole. Some even asked the president to dismiss her by way of revenge to their honor. This became then the issue of the media. The website of Al-Arabia news Channel reported:

Rising voices from inside Mauritania have asked for the discharge of the “Mauritanian soft diplomacy pioneer” from her position, after the revealing of love poems by poets from Sudanese diplomatic sector praising the beauty of the minister who has just merely passed her 40 year of age. (Ould Ajdoud, 2011)

فقد ارتفعت أصوات داخل موريتانيا للمطالبة بإقالة "رائدة الدبلوماسية الموريتانية الناعمة"، بعد أن ديج شعراء من السلك الدبلوماسي السوداني قصائد غزل في جمال الوزيرة التي بالكاد تتجاوز الأربعين.

Admittedly, though the goal of this section is to highlight theoretically the masculine exclusion of women from the public sphere through the power of naming, still this example helps to clarify the issue at hand. The above quote clarifies different social aspects of the female public participation. First, it is the degrading of the female diplomat by her male colleagues. This is that the woman cannot exceed the name given to her as a feminine body despite the public titles she holds. Second, the reaction of Mauritanian intellectuals and social bloggers toward the incident indicates a gendered definition given to the publicly active female. In other words, the woman, no matter how educated and successful, will always be culturally defined in relation to a male dignity and honor. Finally, the language which the journalist used to report the incident can be classified as hate speech (hate speech will be discussed in details in the following chapter) that injures those against whom it is directed. Describing the minister’s approach as “Mauritanian soft diplomacy” is a way of constructing the cultural perceptions of women political participation through the power of naming. This naming devaluates women’s political involvement especially in an andocentric society like Mauritania, in which women are culturally separated from leadership and public affairs.

Highlighting physical attractiveness instead of focusing on the intellectual level imprisoned the woman inside the aspects of her femininity and keeps her attached to the domestic sphere despite being physically present in the public context. It is that women are

marked out by their gender. The constructed masculine nature of the public domain excludes women as public participants and represents them as bodies and sexual beings. In this respect, Lbroscheva states that media is “more likely to comment on women’s personal appearances, discussing their hairstyles, weight, clothes, shoes, or glasses, than on their stance on important issues” (2012: 35).

Focusing on the aspect of female body instead of the intellectual abilities is not only a matter of representation in the media but it also happens inside the circle of the public domain itself. Male intellectuals, generally speaking, treat women as sexual bodies. Again, taking the example of the Mauritanian foreign minister and focusing on the same article, it can be noticed at the end of the article that the journalist makes a declarative sentence in which he seems to express his own view on the incident. He states a fact according to his view:

The Mauritanian foreign minister has attracted attention in many international congregations by her tall stature and with her distinctive elegance. (Ould Ajdoud, 2011)

ولفتت وزيرة خارجية موريتانيا الانتباه إليها في المحافل الدولية بقامتها الفارعة وأناقته المميزة

Unfortunately, female leaders are not only named in the media as ‘*women*’ in the *stereotypical perception* but also culturally perceived as gendered bodies whose physical appearance is more noticeable than their public intellectual touch. Put another way, the feminization of the media language that marks different aspects of women leaders’ femininity, for example the description of their beauty, hairstyle and attractiveness, is a way of interpellating these women and injuring them through language. This hate speech that is used by the media represents women as objects and links them to the body, the domestic body. Llinares (2011) argues that the interpellative process through which female leaders are represented in the press is likened to Butler’s conceptualization of hate speech. He states, “In recognizing being called

offensive names, the subject marks out their own discursive position, despite their individual rejection of the term” (p. 68).

There are different dimensions of excluding women from the public domain through discourse. Through the construction of the public discourse, women issues, as Olson (2002) discusses, are treated either as exceptions to a masculine norm or ignored at all. This is that language constructs the public knowledge in which women are treated as trespassers into the “male” public domain. This is that through the power of naming men homogenize the public domain. Women in position in the public sphere are marked by stereotypical insults and humiliation based upon their gender. Olson states that:

Naming is the act of bestowing a name, of labelling, of creating an identity. It is a means of structuring reality. It imposes a pattern on the world that is meaningful to the namer. Each of us names reality according to our own vision of the world built on past meanings in our own experience. Each of us creates our own structure through naming. Naming is, therefore, not a random process even though it is varied. (2002: 4)

In the above quote, Olson illustrates that when we name, we impose our own perception of the world on the named. This is that through the process of naming public women are labeled stereotypically in male-dominated societies, where men have the power to evaluate the feminine public experience shaping it as subordinated to the masculine experience which is taken to be the norm. Thus, the cultural naming of these women represents them as a negative model for other women in the society. In Mauritania, for example, when a woman is labeled as an activist or a feminist, she takes it as an insult (This point is discussed in details in the second part of the thesis). In other words, women in the public eye are positioned into that which is culturally



believed to be their appropriate sphere, the private. This is achieved, of course, through the process of naming or to be more descriptive labeling.

The power of naming does not only function through the cultural dimensions but also through the religious perspectives. In conservative Muslim societies, women are excluded from the public domain because they are considered sexual objects that may encourage immorality within society. Thus, keeping women away from the public sphere is a factor for controlling their sexuality. Boutkhil states that “uncontrollable desire will lead to sin that will undoubtedly result in unauthorized sex *zina*” (2006: 56). Thus, the phallogentric gaze which is directed toward women’s body pushes women to feel uncomfortable in the public ‘*male*’ sphere. It is that when a body is named as a female, it attracts the male gaze that enforces it to fit into the domestic sphere and ignores any significant public participation of this female body. Moreover, in this conservative dominant perception of women’s presence in the public domain as being inappropriate encourages establishing new spaces inside the public Muslim space.

Paradoxically, when women move beyond the domestic cultural realm assigned to them, they are forced into a portrayal of the private sphere into the male public domain. This can be noticed in the gendered spaces of the mosque as it has been discussed in the spatial representation of Muslim women in the second section of this chapter. It can also be noticed in the activities of the Islamist political parties, where there is a gendered division between the spaces that males occupy which are always strategic and those of women which are always isolated at the back of the gathering. Rendell argues that “how people define their own spaces and experience them is important in constructing identities” (2000: 107).

To be socially named as modest and Islamic and as a result minimize the male gaze in male dominated public domain, Muslim women wear the veil. According to Nye, the veil is “a

means of protecting themselves [Muslim women] from the potential of male sexual harassment” (2008: 98). Mernissi (1987) has discussed this idea when she argues that for a woman to trespass into the public sphere, she is “bound by specific rituals, such as the wearing of the veil” (Boutkhil, 2006: 60). Mernissi explains that when a woman trespasses a male space, she is named as being an enemy who is a danger for the social order. She points out that “she is actually committing an act of aggression against him [the man] merely by being present where she should not be” (2015, p. 355). (For more details about the veil and spatial representation of women see page 61).

Therefore, based on the abovementioned theories about power of naming and the cultural-religious aspects that construct the domesticity of women, it can be argued that the binary division of public/private is a shared characteristic between patriarchal societies. It does not only define women’s relation to public power but it also constructs their perception of the feminine identity and its relevance or irrelevance to the public sphere. In brief, theoretical background of the different cultural and feminist theories contributing to the explanation of the construction of the feminine subject has been discussed so far. It is also important to present and discuss the feminist poststructural approach toward deconstructing the patriarchal dimensions of construction which constitutes one of the main approaches adopted in this study.

#### **4. The Feminist Deconstruction of the Patriarchal Discourse**

*[M]eaning cannot, as claimed by structuralism, be schematically understood in a binary A versus non-A model. Gender, for example, cannot simply be understood as the binary ‘man’ versus ‘non-man’ (= ‘woman’) as Lacan’s structuralist conceptualization of the symbolic order suggested. According to Derrida, there will always be excess meanings that disrupt the binary scheme and displace its fixed meanings. (Lykke, 2010: 100)*

*I have never said that the subject should be dispensed with. Only that it should be deconstructed. To deconstruct the subject does not mean to deny its existence. There are subjects, operations or effects of subjectivity. This is a incontrovertible fact. To acknowledge this does not mean, however, that the subject is what it says it is. The subject is not some meta-linguistic presence; it is always inscribed in language. My work does not, therefore destroy the subject; it simply tries to resituate it. (Derrida, 1984: 125)*

Undoubtedly, patriarchal discursive formation is constructed in terms of oppositions. As the feminist scholar Nina Lykke explains in the first quote above in the dichotomous logic, the dominant term defines itself as well as the other term. (More details about the construction of binary logic in the first chapter). Derrida criticizes this binary thinking in the Western intellectual tradition, in which meaning is constructed according to its relation to its opposition. This is that from structuralist point of view signifiers are interdependent on each other in their meaning. Since the basic tenet of structuralism is the difference and sameness between signifiers, deconstruction as a poststructural criticism aims at questioning this meaning dependency relation that creates social subordination which results from the value of presence and absence. In the second introductory quote, Derrida summarizes that the aim of deconstruction is not to abandon the concept of subjecthood all together but rather questioning the conditions of subject construction. Put another way, Derridian theory seeks to disrupt and displace hierarchical oppositions.

Based on the fundamental propositions of metaphysics, in meaning construction every concept is related in its existence to relations with other concepts. This means that nothing can exist without referring back to other things. One can never mention ‘outside’ without referring to ‘inside’, ‘public’ without ‘private’, ‘man’ without ‘woman’, etc. According to Lucy (2004: 270), this means “that what a thing ‘is’ must include its difference or differences from what it is not; its

difference belongs to 'it', inhabiting its identity". In these phallogocentric dichotomies, presence relies in its meaning on absence and identity comes into existence when constructed to difference. This implies that the dominant meaning, within this binary thinking, cannot come into being without referring back to the subordinate idea. In this view, Grosz admits that "If it is conceptually arbitrary which term has dominance, this is the effect of power relations, which entail that one set of terms always occupies the privileged position" (1989: 27).

Deconstruction is therefore of much use to Feminists in order for them to challenge patriarchal meaning construction. Adopting a deconstructive criticism makes it possible for feminists to theorize beyond masculine philosophy that is based on the binary logic. According to Papadelos, Derrida believes that "feminism is nothing but the operation of a woman who aspires to be like a man" (2007: 50). In other words, Derrida believes that when claiming women liberation through representing woman in a male framework or claiming woman to be in a masculine intersubjectivity, feminists do not provide an autonomous feminine subject, but rather a partial female subject that is hidden in the masculine. This entails that through deconstruction poststructural feminists seek to question the whole system providing new ways of expressions and representations for woman who has an existence beyond that of the phallogocentric tradition of construction. Irigaray, as Papadelos comments, believes that only "by challenging logocentrism can we radically decenter established meaning" (2007, p. 51). Notwithstanding that some feminists criticize Derridean deconstruction specially his use of 'woman' as an undecidable, in this section only the usefulness of deconstruction to feminism will be considered as a method for questioning patriarchal discourse.

Influenced by Derrida, poststructural feminists challenge the phallogocentric nature of the western metaphysics that produces the very conditions of knowledge through which women

come to experience meaning. Deconstruction, as Supski explains, “seeks to show the instability of language, specifically the capricious relationship between signifier (word) and signified (meaning). Derrida demonstrates that the meaning of words is not fixed and can point to other meanings or understandings than those in which they are implicated” (2007, p. 46).

Derrida’s deconstruction, as Papadelos admits, calls for breaking/disrupting binary logic. She comments on Derrida’s thought and states that “he refers to two aspects of deconstruction: reversal of binaries and the displacement of the need to think in a binary framework” (2007: 58). In the structuralist sense, signifiers have a functional meaning only in relation with each other. This metaphysics of thinking raises a network of binary oppositions which Derrida terms as logocentrism. Deconstruction, thus, aims at questioning this binary logic to break down the transcendent signifier. Papadelos writes that:

Feminism can use deconstruction as a strategy to reverse the binary man/woman, to investigate feminine alterity, and to unsettle ‘differance’ – to differ and defer. However, Derrida contends that the reversal of binaries is not enough. On the contrary, feminists should look for ways of displacing the need for a system that is based on binary logic. For radical change binary logic must be transformed. (2007: 57)

There is a need for problematizing patriarchal discourse that constructed the feminine subjectivity through different mechanisms as it has been discussed in the previous sections of this chapter. In this section, deconstruction is taken as a tool that feminists use to question the very conditions of the construction of the feminine subject. On this same line of argument, Grosz states that:

Derrida's reading strategies involve *both* reversal and displacement together: the dichotomy must be reversed (showing that the terms are not logically necessary or

unalterable in their hierarchical relation); and the repressed term must be displaced, not *out of the structure altogether* but by positioning it within the core of the dominant term, as its *logical condition*. This makes explicit the unacknowledged debt the dominant term owes to the secondary term; moreover, it makes clear the fact that the dichotomous structure could be replaced by other conceptual paradigms-for although they have been *historically* necessary they are not *logically* necessary. (1989: 30)

In the above sense, since the relationship between binary pairs is hierarchically interdependent, the subordinate concept becomes the definition of the dominated. Explaining the function of the cultural constructed dichotomy of meaning, Grosz (1989) argues that in this oppositional thinking one term occupies the dominant position while the other remains rapped in the role of reflecting the dominant term. The patriarchal discourse, for example produces binaries that place the male in the center defining everything that is not male with negation. Therefore, woman finds herself in this phallogocentric discourse associated with subordination and inferiority. Deconstructing these binaries means decentralizing the dominant masculine signifier to create new systematic functions in constructing the very conditions of meanings. In other words, reversing and displacing the binary oppositions shows that the relationship between the two is culturally constructed and not natural and opens the door for new possibilities for defining the feminine.

Drawing on this perspective, many feminists are categorized as being deconstructionist such as the French feminists, Luce Irigaray, Helene Cexous, and Julia Kristeva, among other feminists such as the American philosopher, Judith Butler and the Australian feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz to name but few. They use deconstruction to develop a new representation of the female subject that challenges the phallogocentric western metaphysics and its language. feminists owe great debt not only to Derrida but also to Lacanian psychoanalysis.

In order to deconstruct the cultural feminine subjectivity, Irigaray (1985) identifies that women have been trapped in a circle of sameness in which men are the norm, the center, and women are defined in accordance with this masculine norm. This is that female subjectivity is constituted in relation to the “universal” masculine subject. In her famous essay, “The Sex Which is not One,” Irigaray questions the female identity, which is presumed in a phallogocentric system of presence versus absence. Irigaray aims at deconstructing this philosophy of sameness which represents the phallus as the only signifier and instead providing a poststructuralist philosophy that does not construct or compare the female to the male but rather creates a new space and voice for women.

Questioning the sameness/difference dichotomy, in which the female self has relevance only for confirming the masculine subject, Irigaray articulates that for the phallus to remain the transcendent signifier, there is a need for the feminine in the dichotomous picture. From a psychoanalytic point of view, the individual experiences lack as he/she enters into the Symbolic order, in the Law of the Father. For the male to overcome his lack, he needs the feminine who symbolizes lack. Furthermore, Kristeva explains this in her semiotic phase of the sexual-psychological development of the child arguing that the mother is left behind in the imaginary for she has no right to enter into the Symbolic Order which she has taken no share in creating. The feminine, thus, is abjected and repressed in the unconscious.

The feminine is left outside the phallogocentric world; this is that for both Freud and Lacan, for the boy to enter into language and become a speaking subject, he must reject the mother and indicate her as an Other. Therefore, the feminine is represented as the Other who is defined only in terms of not being the self. In other words, the male is the transcendental self whose supremacy is justified by the biological determinist philosophy.

Explaining the psychoanalytic subjectivity formation, Kristeva argues that in the cultural construction of individuality, in order for the feminine to be a subject in the phallogocentric perspective, she has to repress the semiotic and enter into the patriarchal symbolic identity. This is that the subject comes into being by finding a place for the self into the binary oppositions separating itself from the mother. Kristeva identifies the abandoned (m)other as the abject or the *chora* in which every feminine experience is detached and located into the negative pair of the binary structure.

The structural psychoanalytic theory stereotypically represents the phallic signifier as the norm restructuring the meaning of the social identity. For example, Grosz argues that

Kristeva asserts that the phallus is the crucial signifier in the subject's acquisition of an enunciative position. The phallus 'always refers outside itself', not only to another, but also to the Other, the locus from which language emanates. The law represented by the phallus requires the child's renunciation of the mother and its submission to an authority greater than itself or the (m)other-in other words, the symbolic father, the phallic law-giver. (1989: 46)

The phallus is represented as the transcendental signifier that meaning is constructed in relation to. Simply put, the phallus is both the signifier and the signified. It is the locus which creates the speaking subject through manipulating the conditions of the social existence. The phallus as the signifier of presence and power indicates women's lack and thus subordination.

Paradoxically, depending on the subordinating positioning of the feminine inside andocentric interrelated significations, the deconstructionist feminists, unlike the equality feminists, emphasize the otherness of women. Irigaray criticizes the feminists who demand women equality with men arguing that "such a demand is the equivalent of demanding that women become as men; that the differences between women and men remain masked. This



women cannot do, it is argued, for their identity would then be subsumed within the patriarchal order” (cited in Barnett, 2013: 150). Adapting a deconstructive approach, Irigaray rather seeks for women a unique identity for their own that gives them the chance to step out of the difference/sameness dichotomies in which woman remains veiled and invisible.

Influenced by the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, Irigaray seeks to question sexual difference in terms of absolute alterity. She challenges the sameness/difference dichotomies for women “to step outside of the role left to them by a system that does not recognize ‘woman’. “Woman” only has currency in this system because of her ability to reflect man” (quoted in Papadelos, 2007: 52). The core of Irigaray argument is to develop a feminine framework in which woman’s difference from man does not signify her inferiority. This is that woman should opt for her own voice and values from which she can construct a subjectivity in relation to herself and stop taking the man as the ideal she is different from or similar to. In other words, going beyond the dilemma of male supremacy, Irigaray, thus, aims to deconstruct the psychic formation of the subject creating for the feminine a possibility of existence in which she can take a step outside the language of the father and thus can be heard as a woman (Barnett, 2013).

Drawing on this line of thought and argument, language is male-made and, therefore, women cannot exist in the way that the above feminists aimed for them. This is to say that within the Symbolic language for them to be subjects, they have either to be silent or to adapt a male voice. (The adapting of a male voice will be discussed in more details in the following chapter in terms of female political imitations of male politicians in order for them to be heard in the male political domain). As a result, seeking a feminine voice form women, Irigaray explains that “before women can move beyond being the Other, women must find a voice: ‘speaking (as)

woman', *parler femme*, rather than 'speaking of woman' (cited in Barnett, 2013: 153). In other words, for women to gain independent subjectivity, they must unveil the hidden maternal, the unconscious, starting from the pre-Symbolic Order, the Imaginary.

Irigaray's aim of celebrating femininity via the foundation of a female language has been criticized by some equality feminists who argue that since the female voice is culturally stereotyped, it will disempower women. Irigaray, however, does not seek a feminism of difference; she believes that since the Symbolic Order is male order in which the female identity and sexuality is repressed, women's only way for subjectivity is developing a language for their own. Explaining Irigaray's *parler femme*, Barnett states that "women would no longer be the "Other of the same", but would be truly the "other" of the "other", as would men to women: equal in their difference, with neither excluded" (2013: 155). Also, Campbell summarizes Irigaray deconstructive philosophy as follows:

Irigaray proposes two key strategies for a rewriting of the socio-symbolic order. The first is a deconstruction of masculinist philosophical discourse as the master discourse of modern Western culture, a strategy exemplified by *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974). The second is a reconstructive project that calls for the creation of a female imaginary and symbolic. One important example of this constructive project in Irigaray's work is her creation of different representations of the female body, such as the 'two-lips' metaphor of *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977). A second important example is the creation of a maternal genealogy for women through the figure of a female divine in order to ensure adequate female sublimation, as can be seen in *Je, tu, nous: Towards a Culture of Difference* (1990). (2004: 173)

Following the same line of thought, Cixous draws upon Derridians deconstructive approach calling for a female voice that deconstructs the patriarchal discourse and unveils the

feminine unconscious which is repressed as a condition for entering into the Symbolic Order. This assumed meaning, which constructed the phallogocentrism logic, comes into existence through the naturalizing process (discussed in the previous sections). In other words, through this phallogocentrism woman, as Cixous discusses, comes to experience her own identity as “invisible, foreign, secret, hidden, mysterious, black and forbidden, woman has been imagined as the “dark continent”” (Puri, 2013: 272).

Lykke (2010) argues that despite the fact that both Irigaray and Cixous are part of the sexual difference school, they differ from biological determinists and gender conservative feminists for they call for a ‘difference that is different’. In other words, when claiming that women’s liberation cannot be achieved unless women develop a language of their own, a language that expresses their bodies and desires, expresses the imaginary, Irigaray and Cixous propose a feminine difference that is not dependent on the other/sameness but instead on the other/other logic. To speak in the female voice is “according to Cixous and Irigaray, a way to disrupt the phallogocentrism of existing language; that is, to break down the way in which language has constructed the phallus and logos as the pivots of its meaning-making machine” (Lykke, 2010: 103).

Drawing on the assumption that in order for the individual to occupy a position within the Symbolic, she must repress the semiotic (the real), Kristeva (1982) argues that the silence of the feminine is the condition of the symbolic stability. In this context Grosz explains that this means that “civilization, the symbolic order, and the coherent text are possible only at the cost of the silencing of the feminine, the phallicisation of the maternal *chora*” (1989: 49). In other words, subject formation circulates around the symbolic metaphor of the Father’s marginalization of the feminine identity. Thus, based on poststructural feminist perspective, Kristeva, like the other

deconstructionist feminists, requests for the movement beyond the centrality of the male figure and formulates a feminine subject that challenges the patriarchal discourses. Through acknowledging the repressed semiotic, Kristeva seeks to “uncover women’s (repressed) masculinity and men’s (disavowed) femininity” (cited in Grosz, 1989: 100). This is that Kristeva deconstructs the sexual identity that either represses the feminine features or disvalues them associating the feminine subject with lack.

Notwithstanding that the three French feminists are theoretically different in the frameworks they adapt in the development of their theories; their differences are not taken into consideration because the dissertation is interested more in their common concerns with the deconstruction of the patriarch discourse as a feminist critical method. Thus, the *écriture féminine* (the feminine imaginary or the feminine language) is used as an umbrella term that includes the philosophy of the three feminists. According to Lykke, these feminists agree that

[R]epresentation has to do with the imaginary and that by changing our imaginary we can change the symbolic order. Such conceptions of Irigaray’s imaginary feminine space, of Cixous’s idea of femininity as heterogenous and Kristeva’s semiotic throw up issues which cannot be controlled or defined within the patriarchal symbolic construct and are open to alternative discourses. (2010: 79)

In the same sense, Butler shares with Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous the focus on language in the process of constructing the ‘autonomous’ feminine subject. Butler (1992) admits that becoming a subject in the sameness/difference model is not the goal that feminism should seek because women will be always invisible in this patriarchal dichotomy. On the contrary, she calls for deconstructing the subject. Butler claims that the speaking subject comes into existence through repression insisting that for the subject to be liberated and to construct a new identity

outside the influence of power relations, it should be deconstructed. However, responding to the critics that attacked her for the deconstruction of the subject, Butler draws on Derrida's remark that "the deconstruction of the subject is not synonymous with its destruction, but involves enquiring into the processes of its construction, along with the political consequences of assuming that the subject is a prerequisite of theory" (quoted in Salih, 2002: 143).

To conclude, patriarchal discourse is structured on a dichotomous philosophy between men and women; a gendered division that imprisoned women inside passivity. Deconstructing the patriarchal discourse, thus, calls for women's need for developing a discourse for their own in which the feminine is freed from the cultural influences that associate women with the private space and exclude them from political life. Thus, since the main aim of this study is to analyze the feminine political position within the masculine political sphere, it can be argued that applying the deconstructionist feminist theory to the political sphere is essential in deconstructing masculine political discourse which is hypothetically taken as the norm. However, practically speaking, taking into consideration the cultural perceptions of the world raises the critical question; is it possible for women politicians to create a voice for their own while at the same time be described as successful politicians?

As this chapter presents a theoretical discussion of the mechanisms according to which the individual is constructed to be social agent and the poststructural approach that feminists develop to challenge the constructionist discourse, the following chapter presents and discusses a theoretical background for the relation between language, politics, and gender.

### **Chapter Three:**

## **Language and Ideological Discourse**

As it has been discussed in the previous chapters, individuals are linguistic beings, which mean that they are constituted through language. In this chapter, a linguistic approach will be adopted in analyzing ideological discourse.

Drawing on Butler (1990), individuals are cultural beings, which means that they use language from a social position that indicates their gendered identities. In this line of thought, language is not only used in a neutral way to accomplish communicative goals, but also it constructs the social definitions and possibilities of beings. Ideological discourse serves the maintenance of power and guarantees its continuity. Therefore, the public discourse is a matrix of interaction between power and resistance.

In this introduction to the present chapter, an overview of language, gender, power/ideology is provided. Analyzing gender and language has been an attractive field of study that feminists theorize applying different approaches. The issue of gender and language has attracted various feminists from different schools, but in this chapter two feminist schools of thought will be discussed namely the Anglo-American and the French feminist thought. This chapter is more linguistic-oriented because the poststructural account of language has already been discussed, there will be a reference to the French feminist theories to place the discussion in the context of the project.

Feminist linguists have a long history of theoretical debate over language, gender, and power; thus, they approach language and gender from different perspectives. In the 1970s, feminists focused their attention on the debate on male dominance. This phase is characterized by the pioneer work of the American linguist Robin Lakoff (1975) in which she stresses the cultural interpretations of gender and the influence of male social position on the empowerment

of the '*masculine*' language. According to Lakoff and other feminists adopting the dominance theory, men's language is indicating their power whereas women's language is a sign of their powerlessness. Lakoff describes women's language as "talking like a lady" which makes their speech socially evaluated in relation to the social expectation and the subordinated status that women occupy in society.

In the dominance theory, feminists concentrate on the socialization of women as a factor of women's adopting a feminine linguistic behavior that always associates her with powerlessness. Therefore, women's language, for these feminists, is characterized by the use of linguistic features that indicate subordination such as tag questions, indirectness, hesitation, tentativeness and so on. Moreover, men's frequent interrupting of women is used in this theory as an argument of men's dominance over conversation.

Notwithstanding, some other feminists believe that the dominance feminists' debate of difference between the language of men and the language of women as indicating dominance is oversimplified. This feminist linguistic phase of the 1980s and the 1990s is characterized by the work of Deborah Tannen's book *You Just Don't Understand* (1990) and Maltz and Broker's influential article "A Cultural Approach to Male-Female Miscommunication" (1982). The feminists of the difference theory believe that the different linguistic behavior between women and men is not an indicator of dominance but rather of the difference between the two groups. Thus, communication between men and women is a cross-cultural communication. The Moroccan linguist Fatima Sadiqi explains that "[i]n the difference theory, women's language was not a defective copy of men's; it was simply different from it" (2003: 9).

The difference theory assumes that since men and women are socialized differently, they belong consequently to two different sociolinguistic subcultures. As a result, feminists of this

thought believe that women's linguistic style is developed on the cooperative style and its difference from the male should be celebrated as a cultural difference. As a result this theory aims at evaluating female difference in conversation as equivalent with men's linguistic style.

As a way of evaluating women's communicative style, the difference feminists argue that women are better 'conversationists' than men because depending on their socialization, they show support as a strategy, express more politeness in conversation, and they seem more cooperative than men. All these linguistic qualities, according to the difference theory, do not express women's subordination but on the contrary they are feminine styles that mark the female difference in language.

However, the difference theory was criticized for overgeneralization for its use of the idea of different subcultures. This theory was criticized by a number of feminist linguists including the British language scholar Deborah Cameron, the German linguist Senta Troemel-Ploetz, and the American linguist Alice F. Freed to name but a few. Generally, the difference theory is classified as being similar to the dominance theory, which means that both are based on a dichotomous thinking in which difference and sameness are the main issue. Thus, both theories unconsciously take the male linguistic style as the ideal and the norm.

Such criticism opens the door for a third phase in language and gender which is the reformist theory. Cameron argues that instead of focusing on the difference/dominance debate as a factor of women's linguistic status, the issue in gender and language is an issue of "conflicts of interest, conflict over increasingly diminishing resources and power, or conflict over perceptions of the position from which the speaker is/or should be speaking" (Mills, 2003: 137). This is a call for moving beyond the binary thinking, for gender is but a factor that determines the linguistic behavior of individuals. It has been observed in different studies that men sometimes use the



linguistic style which has been described as feminine in some contexts and women as well use that which is characterized as masculine. In O’Barr and Atkins study (1998), for example, they conclude that the power relation and the context of the speech indicate the linguistic style of the speaker. They report that in a courtroom setting, some men depending on their position use the linguistic style which has been discussed in Lakoff’s work as feminine.

To state it another way, there are other factors that influence the way the speaker linguistically behave other than gender such as power of the speaker, access to information, the context of the conversation and so on. Moreover, as it has been discussed, subjectivity is constructed through a number of mechanisms, which means that despite the general categories of male and female, still there is no hegemonic femininity or masculinity. The gender identity is not isolated or dependent in its construction on the cultural-biological determinism; it rather depends on different socio-political factors such as race, class, etc. Thus, when analyzing the linguistic behavior of women and men, all these factors play an important role in the linguistic style.

The reformist theories focus on power relations as the major factor that influences the linguistic behavior of women and men. Inspired by the work of Foucault, feminist linguists of this phase argue that when interacting in a mixed-sex context, the speaker is assuming a position of power through language. Mills (2003) labels this interaction as “interactional power” which can be achieved only through using masculinist linguistic strategies for the masculine is correlated with power. Thus, for women to be recognized in a leadership position they have to adopt a masculine style which is dominating the public sphere.

It is important to note that the French feminists discussed in the second chapter have a significant mark in the study of language and gender despite, of course, the fact that they approach language from a different theoretical framework influenced by psychoanalysis and

poststructuralism. French feminists criticizing the Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical transcendent figure of the male, argue that because the female lacks the phallus which symbolizes authority, she occupies a negative position in language. French feminists “consider that this negative position in language can be celebrated. They term this position *écriture féminine*” (as cited in Mills, 1998: 68). The contribution of the French feminists in the feminization of the political discourse will be discussed in details in the third subsection of this chapter. Though Kristeva’s semiotic has a different reference to the concept of *écriture féminine*, it is still arguing that since women have no place into the male language, they should develop a better relation with the semiotic as it has been discussed in details in Chapter Two.

When these feminists admit that power relations are the main factors that shape women’s position in language; for example, Kristeva explains that “[i]n a culture where the speaking subjects are conceived of as masters of their speech, they have what is called a “phallic” position” (1981: 166). In other words, men who are identified as being the phallus are the ones who control discourse. Thus, for women to occupy the position of the phallic subject, the position of power, they have to identify with the masculine linguistic behavior. Unlike the reformist linguist theorists who only provide a contextual description of power influence on the femininity or masculinity of language, French feminists deconstruct woman’s identification with the masculine linguistic behavior and, instead, call for the celebration of the feminization of language.

The subsections of this chapter are devoted to reviewing and assessing the intellectual debate over language as well as the construction of ideological discourse and the different ways through which it serves the patriarchal society. The feminization of political discourse will also be included in the discussion as a way of resisting the masculine discourse of power.

## 1. Gendered Political Discourse

### 1.1. Political Discourse

Despite the social division of the public and private spheres that disadvantages women keeping them attached to the private circle, women trespass the cultural borders seeking for themselves a place in that which has always been considered a masculine space. Since the beginning of the twenty first century, women's appeal to freedom of speech and public participation has increased. The quota system has been widely adopted to guarantee women an increasing number of seats in political positions around the world. However, is women's physical presence in the political domain enough for feminine representations both in the qualitative and quantitative sense? Taking into consideration the above mentioned linguistic differences between men and women, in what sense does language stand as a cultural barrier hindering women's political success?

Language is an important factor in the construction of social reality. In this respect, Fairclough and Wodak argue that "discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between [...] social classes, *women and men* and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people" (cited in Radic-Bojanic, 2010: 20). This quote entails that access to language is a significant factor for political life. Ofer Fledman, the professor of political psychology, admits that "the essence of politics is talk" (2005: 195). Put another way, one cannot talk about doing politics without talking about language. Chilton, also, explains that language is important for politicians because it "can produce the effects of authority, legitimacy,

consensus, and so forth that are recognized as being intrinsic to politics” (2004: 4). It is through language that the goal behind the political activity can be achieved.

Following the same line of thought, Aristotle, explaining the relationship between language and politics, states that

[O]bviously man [*sic*] is a political animal in a sense in which a bee is not, or any other gregarious animal. Nature, as we say, does nothing without some purpose; and she has endowed man alone among the animals with the power of speech.  
(cited in Chilton & Schaffner, 2002: 1)

Aristotle uses the word ‘man’ referring to human beings, but metaphorically his use of ‘man’ can be taken critically as it appears. The power of language has given *man* the authority to control and dominate. As it has been discussed in the previous chapter, to construct a position within the Symbolic Order and become a speaking subject, one has to fit into the principles and structures of the language of the Father. Therefore, public discourse has been male dominated. This is that political discourse, traditionally, has been presumed as being masculine oriented.

At this point of the discussion of the gendered nature of political discourse, there is a need to identify what is political discourse and which discourse is adapted as political in this study. To distinguish political from non-political, one needs first to have a clear notion about the definition of politics.

Politics is a broad concept that has been granted various definitions by different political scientists. The majority of them agree that politics is the struggle for power (Mosca 1939, Lasswell 1950, Catlin 1964, Morgenthau 1967, Vincent 1992, Baldwin 2002). This general definition implies that politics is built on the influence of power relations where those who obtain political power use this power to manipulate the society in order both to keep their power and to “get the most of what there is to get” (Harrison & Dye, 2007: 198). Chilton and Schaffner

(2002) discuss that defining what is considered political depends on the definition of politics which varies according to one's situation and purposes. However, drawing on the traditional study of politics, it is viewed as being about both the struggle for power and the cooperation between those who share the same interests. Chilton, for example, defines politics as the "struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it" (2004: 3). On the other hand, Lewis identifies it as "conflict of cooperation by powerful actors over the allocation of scarce public resources" (1988: 29).

In other words, since politics is considered as the manipulation of power, politics, as the feminist political philosopher Judith Squires argues, "is everywhere. This is so because no realm of life is immune to relations of conflict and power" (2004: 119). This makes it hard to find a clear-cut definition for politics, but generally the concept 'politics' is used to refer to different ways of government and the institutions that facilitate the goals upon which the government and the state is constructed.

Despite the various definitions of politics, researchers mainly share the concept that politics is a matrix of power relations in which efforts are made to dominate the other. This is to say that there is no shared definition of politics. Its definition varies from one discipline to another. However, the only agreed upon fact is that politics is about the struggle for power and social conflict and that language is very essential for carrying the political ideology.

Obeng argues that "any text uttered or written that may have political implications or that may influence the outcome of a communicative procedure politically can be regarded as political discourse" (2002: 20). Trying to define political discourse, scholars identify three important aspects that determine the political discourse which are participants, content, and context. Though the definitions of 'politics' and 'political' are fuzzy, in this thesis and despite the fact

that there will be reference to ‘political discourse’ as both the linguistic behavior of the political actors and the public evaluation of their political action, the political discourse which will be concentrated on in the main analytical chapter of this project, Chapter Four of Part Two, is spoken political discourse performed by Mauritanian politicians, both males and females.

## **1.2. Gendered Political Discourse**

Undoubtedly, social prospection of that which is feminine and that which is masculine engenders political participation. Therefore, masculine discursive behavior metaphorically describes ‘ideal’ approaching of politics. Cameron stresses that “judgments about the public female voice as immodest, indecent, unfeminine and so forth can only have resonance for women if they are in some way consequential in the real social world” (2006: 16). Moreover, Lakoff (2003) notes that culturally men have been associated with power whereas women have been denied any access to power. She argues that when women hold power this makes them presumed as being un-feminine and dangerous. The gendered cultural perception of what is appropriate to each sex excludes women from political life. Lakoff adds that:

Language reflects and contributes to the survival of the stereotype. To cite just a few examples, there are lexical differences in the way we talk about men with power, versus women with power. For example, we use different words to describe similar or identical behavior by men and by women. English (like other languages) has many words describing women who are interested in power, presupposing the inappropriateness of that attitude. *Shrew* and *bitch* are among the more polite. There are no equivalents for men. There are words presupposing negative connotations for men who do not dominate "their" women, *henpecked* and *pussywhipped* among them. There is no female equivalent. (2003:162)

In this perspective, feminist research concerning gendered language has moved away from dealing with males and females as two biological different categories and oriented its

attention on gender as performative. This is that individuals in context influence subjects' performance of their gender identities. Thus it is through the different presumptions of the 'appropriate' and the social expectations that individuals engender discourse. Lakoff argues that men and women have different discursive styles "but that most importantly it [is] the 'male' style that [is] associated with 'status' and 'power' while the female style denoted hesitation and diffidence" (cited in Wilson & Boxer, 2015: 3).

As it has been argued in the introductory section to this chapter based on the binary division of public/private language has been culturally categorized into feminine discursive style and masculine linguistic behavior. Accordingly, drawing on the hierarchal linguistic division, women have been excluded from public discourse in general and political discourse in particular. This means that women's discursive style is culturally associated more with the private domain. In other words, since politics is supposedly a masculine domain, women are expected to avoid expressing themselves using the feminine linguistic style because it does not culturally match with the characteristic of *authoritative public discourse*.

There are different dimensions of silencing women in the public sphere. The religious discourse is used interchangeably with political discourse to silence women in conservative societies. In Muslim societies, for instance, misogynist interpretations of the sacred texts are used to silence women in the public sphere. In this respect, Kammoun argues that "from an Islamic perspective, a woman's voice is *awra*, 'sexually arousing,' the men hearing of which can cause *fitna* 'sedition,' with men losing control of their senses" (2015: 122). Kammon questions the linguistic barrier standing in women politicians' involvement arguing that "when the simple act of using one's voice is capable of causing social upheaval, how can Arab and Muslim women develop a discourse of participation in the political sphere?" (p. 122).

Silencing women in the political domain is also achieved by a number of other linguistic strategies among which interruptions and not taking women seriously when discussing public issues. Frequent interruptions of women speakers, which have been considered by a number of feminists such as Lakoff as a gender marker of weakness, contribute to the silencing of women in the public sphere. Men dominate political discourse in a way that they attract public attention. Wilson and Boxer argue that “just as in private life, women are the targets of interruptions by both leaders and media representatives” (2015: 8). They add that interruptions “are attempts to seize the floor, silencing can be taken as extreme”. Admittedly, these strategies of silencing are masculine discursive techniques used by male politicians to discourage women’s political communication.

Moreover, silencing the feminine is not the only factor that engendered political discourse, but also the evaluation of linguistic features that are culturally associated as masculine maintains the gendered image of the political leader as masculine. Political actors use a number of discursive strategies that serve in conveying the political message among which political pronouns, analogy euphemism, metaphor, evasion, and the like.

One important aspect of political discourse is rhetoric which is the ability to pass one’s ideology through language. Metaphors are an important strategy used by politicians to accomplish their rhetoric purposes. For example, Koller and Semino argue that “metaphors are a way of representing the world from a particular viewpoint, used in discourse with the aim of persuading, if not manipulating, audiences to accept the speaker’s position” (2009: 13). Metaphor is, thus, an important rhetoric strategy used to force ideas and change people’s perceptions. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980: 156) state that “metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action”. Put



another way, metaphors are used to pass ideology in political discourse; therefore, gendered metaphors have been adopted as a discursive strategy followed by politicians to maintain patriarchal ideology. Male politicians are used to play with conceptual metaphors that disadvantage women or represent a stereotypical gendered identity of women. Charteris-Black states that research on gendered metaphors in political discourse indicate that these metaphors contribute “to social constructions in which one gender is conceptualized as having power over the other” (2009: 144). This is that metaphors reinforce and maintain gendered stereotypes that exclude women from political life.

Investigating the dominant political discourse both in media portraits and in politicians’ rhetorical competence, researchers in the field (Nelson 1986, Howe 1988, Blankenship & Kang 1991, Anderson & Sheeler 2005, Lim 2009, among others) have found that the metaphors indicated in such discourses are used against women in different ways. On the one hand, the war and sport metaphors, for example, exclude women from the political sphere representing it as a masculine domain that reflects the masculine experience. On the other hand, gendered stereotypical metaphors influence women’s political participation.

When women politicians adopt feminist political rhetorical strategies stressing the feminist issues in their political discourse, they will negatively be accused of ideological use of the ‘play-gender-card’ metaphor. An example of this is the gendered discourse used against Hillary Clinton during the two presidential campaigns of 2008 and 2016. Such metaphor had a potential impact on the public image of Clinton. When Donald Trump used the gender card metaphor accusing Clinton of bringing women’s issues to the political only in order for her to gain women by her side, his discourse conveyed much about the real masculine face of politics. Falk finds that the public attention paid to women politicians’ feminist oriented political

discourse indicates that “women mention gender on the campaign trail [give women] a strategic (but unethical) advantage in the race and that metaphor enables users to voice ideas that would be socially unacceptable if made explicit” (2013: 196).

When criticizing women candidates for playing the gender card metaphor, women politicians are forced to be silent toward women’s issues serving the patriarchal ideological discourse. This is that being afraid of the public eye; the majority of women politicians in patriarchal societies pretend that there is no sexism in the political domain. Such usage of gendered metaphors reinforces the masculinized nature of politics.

Also, lexical choice plays an important role in engendering political discourse. For example, traditionally, politicians when addressing the public use adjectives, nouns and verbs indicating the “public man” directing the political audience, both men and women. Woman is embodied in the male figure through language which is a misogynistic linguistic strategy that excludes women from the political message. Supporting this idea, Carver states that the “human ‘subject’ is identified as man, and more specifically as ‘public man’” (1996: 671). Another aspect of the gendered political discourse is the patriarchal construction of the political titles. For example, in the Arabic language, the word representative (*nā’ib*) is a masculine term that is used to describe parliamentarians, both men and women; because when feminizing *nā’ib*, it becomes *nā’iba* which obtains another totally different meaning which is disaster. Therefore, the masculine nature of the political discourse refers to women with masculine titles which indicate the gendered nature of the political sphere. Thus, blocking attempts for the feminization of the political discourse is a way of representing the masculine face of politics.

Moreover, gendered hate speech is one of the linguistic features used by male politicians against women in political discourse. This gendered aspect of discourse is maintained and

reinforced through the media discourse. Media helps in gendering the political discourse; thus, when analyzing political discourse, one cannot ignore the powerful contribution of media.

Wilson and Boxer argue that:

Media continued to contribute significantly more so than any other factor to the sustained institution of dominant masculine political identities, identities which women political leaders either have to relegate, replicate or trump in public perception in order to be viewed as equally credible and legitimate holders of leadership positions. (2015: 345)

In other words, media play that important role in gendering the political sphere through reinforcing gender stereotypes that portray women politicians in a cultural view of femininity no matter how hard they tried to fit into the public perception of political leaders. Female political actors' gender will always be used against them in the public eye. Deborah Cameron explains that media has a long history of excluding women politicians denying them the right to be heard via the media and second when they were represented as 'women' and not as political leaders. (cited in Vasvari, 2013).

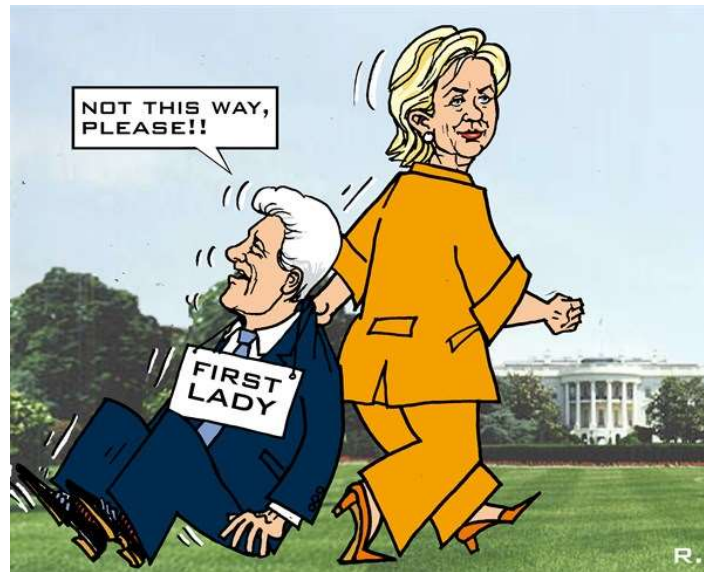
Because women appeal for political leading position is considered a threat to the masculine hegemony, stereotypical depiction of women is portrayed both in the masculine oriented discourse of media commentators and through media concentration on the gendered aspects of male politicians' discourse. Again, during the 2016 United States presidential campaign, a gendered representation of Hillary Rodham Clinton can be noticed not only through Donald Trump's misogynistic discourse but also in the media discourse. Vasvari argues that "the "bitch" narrative used against [Clinton] in the media turned her political identity into a sexist caricature and overshadowed her substantive discourse and circumscribed her political agency" (2013: 7)

Vasvari adds that the stereotypical representation of Clinton as well as other women candidates in the media discourse using terms such as “bitch” is a gendered political discursive strategy that “governs popular understanding of women leaders” (2013: 9). Explaining the “bitch discourse”, Kate Figes states that:

When it's being used as an insult, bitch is an epithet hurled at women who speak their minds, who have opinions and do not shy away from expressing themselves and who do not sit by and smile uncomfortably if they are bothered and offended. If being an outspoken woman means being a bitch, we will take that as a compliment, thanks. (Quoted in Vasvari, 2013: 8)

In the above quote feminists criticizing the hate gendered speech used against women in political domain highlight the cultural circumstances behind this phenomenon. It is that when women show political interest, they will be socially labeled as performing the wrong gender.

Templin states that what Clinton “has been subjected to by cartoonists is not just criticism but sexism” (1999: 21). Influenced by Butler, Templin argues that Clinton was culturally considered as not “doing gender right” (p. 22). Put another way, Clinton’s competition for being the first U.S. female president was a threat for gender norms. Therefore, again taking Clinton as an example, a number of cartoonists portrayed her in a gendered way linking her political situation to her feminine gender role.



**Figure 1: Example of gendered political cartoons**

The above political cartoon reinforces the ‘*global*’ public opinion about gender roles and explains the threat of Clinton’s successes on reversing these traditional roles. Such political comic discourse is engendering the public perception of women being head of the state as going against the cultural definition of femininity. Throughout the history of politics, the wives of presidents have always been represented as first ladies who support their husbands in their political career; therefore, having a man as the first gentleman is, as Butler (1990) notes, a failure or disruption in the conformity with the norms of cultural intelligibility. The shared knowledge about women’s presence in the White House is that of being the first lady; as a result, having a woman as the president is a kind of confusing the public. This confusion was represented in the gendered political discourse of media.

Along with this argument, gendered hate speech constructs the public image of women politicians. Commenting on Donald Trump’s misogynist description of Hillary Clinton saying that “I just don’t think she has a *presidential look*”, (italics added) Jasanoff (2016) points out that this style of gendered linguistic behavior reinforces the social perception that the president has to

look like a man. Thus, the gendered construction of the masculine identity of the president is, according to feminist political analysts, the main factor behind Clinton's defeat by Trump. Consequently, gendered political discourse does not only shape women political experience but it also stands in their way to success.

Men and women are raised differently and as a result develop different linguistic styles. However, since the political domain has been traditionally male-dominated, the social expectation at large position women political discourse against that of their male counterpart. Analyzing the political discourse of the first female prime minister of the UK, Margaret Thatcher, Wilson and Irwin (2015) argue that despite the fact that in political discourse, the outcome should be the most important, women's political language is assessed against male standards. They conclude that the fact that social expectation excludes the female voice from politics was what pushed Thatcher to separate her feminine identity from her position as a prime minister. She did not act like a woman in her political career because of this gendered fact. This is to say that the masculine nature of the political domain constructs female politicians' linguistic behavior.

The following section will be an overview of the literature on female adaptation of the linguistic behavior which is considered to be masculine.

## **2. The Politics of Assertiveness**

*There are linguistic norms for women and men, maintained by linguistic and cultural ideological expectations about femininity (and masculinity) which influence our language preferences when interacting. These indexicalized norms also crucially influence expectations of speech, and thus affect the manner in which interactants are assessed and evaluated. (Mullany, 2007: 32)*

Interestingly, as the sociolinguist Louise Mullany explains in the quote above, social expectations influence individual's language performance. Occupying different social roles, women are expected to communicate using different strategies than that of males. Presuming the world from a classical dualism, women are anticipated to speak using a powerless form of language that reflects their femininity. Women's presence in political sphere is influenced by the femininity/competence binary. As has been discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, women have been culturally associated with the body while men with mind. In this dichotomous thinking, women are not taken seriously when they try to perform a role showing linguistic traits that indicate their appeal for a status of power that is located in the 'mind' side of this binary. Consequently, the division between public and private appropriate communicative behavior comes into existence associating women with certain discourse that is totally considered inappropriate for public interaction.

Men's authority over the public space does not only construct the image of the public figure but also shapes the social expectation of women when they are politically active. With the fact that language is patriarchal made (as the French feminists indicate when analyzing the construction of the speaking subject) which means that it has been constructed to serve authority and hierarchy, women face difficulties in coping with the balance between the feminine and masculine rhetoric. As the main object of this study is analyzing the gendered political discourse, investigating rhetoric strategies followed by women politicians is of great importance. In this section an overview of women politicians' use of masculine discursive strategy will be provided.

However, it is important to note that despite the fact that in the literature on gender and language, there has been a strong reference to two linguistic styles labeled as feminine

communicative style and masculine communicative style. In this respect, it can be argued that these linguistic styles are cultural and not naturally inherent male or female behavior. Drawing on the cultural construction of the two different linguistic strategies (feminine and masculine) on Butler's performativity, it is important to note that individuals become subjects in accordance with the act they perform. This is to say that that which is known as 'feminine discourse' and masculine discourse are produced and reinforced through a set of historical practices. Borrowing Derrida's notion of citationality, Butler explains the process through which gender comes into existence through the repetition of the discourse of femininity and masculinity. In other words, the feminine and masculine communicative styles do not exist naturally but are socially performed. Thus, when a woman in a political leading position performs a powerful discourse, she will be paradoxically assumed as doing wrong gender role because an important aspect of the citational practices that constitute her as a feminine subject is the feminine discursive features.

In this respect, in spite of the widespread academic reference to the different type of language produced by men and women using the problematic adjectives 'masculine' and 'feminine', in these dissertation the approach adapted in analyzing women politicians discursive behavior will be more into Butler's notion of preformativity and the French feminists theory of feminine language. This point will be further discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

## **2.1. The Assertive Woman**

In the political context women unlike their male colleagues have to work hard on their public image and performance through the use of rhetoric strategies that indicate not only their willingness but also their competency which is in conflict with their gender identity. This is due to the social belief that women's communicative style indicates a feature of powerless language that gives the assumptions that women lack assertiveness and competitiveness. Conforming to



social expectations which presume that politics is a masculine domain investigating social political expectations Wilson concludes that it seems that “men and women both preferred female candidates with “masculine voices”; it seems in looking for leaders we do ask ‘why can’t a woman be (sound) more like a man?’” (2015: 24). In other words, voters believe that men are better than women in terms of their leadership skills in general and linguistic competency in particular.

Drawing on different studies conducted on voters’ expectations of the ideal political leader, Lee states that:

Across many different types of public offices, the so-called masculine (instrumental) traits are considered more important than the so-called feminine (expressiveness) traits, and voters expect their leaders to possess masculine traits rather than feminine ones – particularly for highest offices. (2013: 301)

Lee stresses that “as women are assumed to be feminine rather than masculine, they are perceived as lacking competence which is the most crucially regarded trait for a leader” (2013: 302). This is to say that gendered stereotypical assumptions disadvantage female politicians and catch them into a social dilemma in which their gender identity is socially devalued in the political domain. Assuming that politics is culturally a male status, some women politicians, as Wilson and Boxer explain, “abandon styles of collaboration and cooperation to take on a persona of toughness” (2015: 7). This is that when adopting a feminine discursive style in politics, women in social positions seem to be more domestic oriented. Thus, for women to be taken seriously in politics, they attach themselves to a more assertive political discourse. In other words, the ‘masculine’ linguistic features are deeply woven into the effective political discursive style.

Margaret Thatcher, the first woman to become Prime Minister of the United Kingdom can be a good example of following the assertive political discourse. Taking into consideration the social assumptions of occupying an authoritative position like the Prime Minister, Thatcher adopted a masculine feature in her speeches hiding her feminine identity and separating it from her professional identity, interested more in her being a politician than being a woman. It is observed that female political actors who attempt to build a strong public character frequently use the masculine metaphors in their political discourse. In this regard, Thatcher repeatedly used conceptual metaphors that are associated with the masculine experience such as the “political is a battle” and other war metaphors (Molek-Kozakowska, 2016). Not only in her lexical choices and rhetorical strategies that Thatcher adopted an assertive rhetoric behavior, but even in her vocal performance.

In order for her to sound more authoritative, Margaret Thatcher disciplined her voice in an attempt to lower her pitch. Disciplining their voices to match a lower pitch, can be explained as a strategy that some women follow to avoid the negative attitude toward female high pitched voice, Cameron states that:

Thatcher’s most celebrated transformation, enacted with the help of those modern analogues of Henry Higgins, image consultants, was to change not her accent (she had done that already) but her overall vocal delivery, making it lower in pitch, less ‘swoopy’ in range and slower in rate. This collection of deliberate modifications can best be understood as a response to the perceived disadvantages suffered by the unreconstructed female speaker, who is stigmatized as ‘shrill’ (high pitch), ‘emotional’(broad intonational range) and ‘lacking in authority’.  
(1995: 170)

This is to say that in politics women politicians do not only find themselves obliged to imitate male political discourse but also try to sound more like men in order for them to be more persuasive.

Moreover, female political leaders looking for more effective political discourse, unlike men, concentrate more on certain linguistic strategies such as the formal language that is characterized by the extensive use of politeness markers. This point has been explained by Lakoff (1975) as an indicator of female anxiety of being presumed less educated. Also, the use of strong vocabulary that indicates power is a feature of the assertive communicative style. In a study conducted on congresswomen and congressmen language use in self-representation, Lee (2013) finds that women tend to use more masculine words and expressions than their male colleagues. She argues that this masculinization of the political discourse followed by these women can be explained as the fact that women are more gender conscious when publically engaged.

Linguistic features associated with the feminine are placed in a hierarchal dichotomy in which they are valued less compared to the masculine linguistic features. Undertaking a linguistic analysis of word choice in the Presidential Debate of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, it can be noticed that Hillary uses more masculine words than Trump. In other words, women being aware of the social evaluation of their language as being powerless, stress on strong words that show them more assertive and competent when appealing for the male dominated positions.

For women politicians to be taken seriously in the male-dominated public sphere, they have “to shed their feminine traits to become Unruly Women, the modal type of metaphor used to describe tough woman political leaders”. On the other hand, if a woman keeps into her

feminine discursive style and does not effort to negotiate the masculine political norms, she “is likely to be perceived as vulnerable, week and out of her league” (Lim, 2009: 255). However, does woman’s use of that which is indicated as the male linguistic style help her to be more accepted as an effective political leader? Actually, Wilson and Boxer answer this question admitting that “women who take on male attributes in political life, just as in ordinary life, become viewed as weird, even ‘bitches’” (2015: 7).

When politically engaged, women, as Lim argues, often “have to negotiate the disjunction between social definitions of femininity and leadership in what Anderson and Sheeler (2005) have termed a ‘double bind’” (2009: 255). There is a double bind traced between femininity and competence. For one to be presumed as showing political competency, she has to abandon the style which is considered ‘feminine’ discursive style and instead be more attached to the ‘masculine’ rhetoric speaking style; however, she still has to intelligently negotiate the balance between her gender identity and linguistic competency. Lim states that “when it comes to embracing ‘masculinity’ as a survival tactic in the public sphere, women are damned if they do, doomed if they do not” (2009: 56).

## **2.2. Femininity and the Double Bind**

Paradoxically, women’s linguistic behavior no matter how powerfully assertive and no matter how persuasive its functions will always be placed in the double bind. Oxymoronicly, women face a big challenge when adopting a rhetorical political discourse that does not reflect their femininity. In other words, the female political leader’s performance will always be politically judged according to her gender identity. Falk (2013) states that “[m]en who run [running for political office] are simply candidates; the culture does not talk about how their gender affects them. In contrast, women who run are “women candidates.” Their gender is

always an inherent part of their character” (p. 204). Put another way, when politically active, women’s gender is more obvious than any other characteristics. Therefore, they will be evaluated on the basis of their gender and not their political competences.

Consciously, women politicians in the post-feminist era try to adapt a more neutral discursive style when approaching public interaction. According to Molek-Kozakowska, it has been argued that the feminine rhetoric style is marked by self-disclosure, intimacy, domesticity, and personal orientation. These will include features indicating “anecdotal evidence, domestic metaphors and emotional-laden expressivity”. However, she concludes that female politicians influenced by the requirements of political sphere mix the masculine and the feminine rhetoric styles creating a hybrid communicative style (2016: 17). The hybrid political discourse can be noticed in Hillary Clinton 2016 campaign despite her more emphasis on the masculine. In certain political events, Hillary’s discourse was more a mixture of feminine and masculine markers. She, for example, uses ‘personal stories’ which is considered to be feminine style but assertive pronouns such as the first singular pronoun ‘I’. This means that in certain political events, the speaker emphasizes her or his political identity mixing different discursive strategies to pass over the political message.

### **3. The Feminization of Political Discourse**

*[Discourse] plays a major role for women in accessing and maintaining power, particularly as they adapt their public discourse to the status quo style of political leaders, a style which has largely and traditionally been established by men. (Wilson & Boxer, 2015: 345)*

As stated in the above quote, it is through discourse that women can challenge the masculine nature of politics establishing a feminine discourse that expresses the feminine identity and describes the female experience. As discussed in the previous subsection, successful

political discourse is culturally presumed as a synonym for that which has been culturally labeled as masculine language. The feminine has been buried into the private and thus denied any public discursive participation. However, the academic use of the terms ‘feminine language’, ‘women’s discourse’ or ‘feminine linguistic behavior’ is problematic in itself. What type of language can be described as feminine or belonging to women?

Influenced by structuralism, a number of Anglo-American linguist feminists argue that the classification of language into masculine and feminine styles is an outcome of the different living experiences of males and females. Bem, for example, argues that belonging to different subcultures, “men and women with daily social experiences give rise to drastically different ways of construing reality” (1993: 152). According to Coates, “we speak from our embodied experience, and our bodies are discursively reproduced according to a two-sex model” (2015, p. 220).

Based on the above claim that women and men belong to different subcultures so do the linguistic styles they speak, the feminine style is stereotypically represented as domestic oriented. Therefore, discursive traits such as lexical choice that reflects emotions, building solidarity with the audience, and sharing experience with them, have been portrayed as powerless discursive style that is more appropriate to the private (Parry-Giles & Parry, 1996). Defending women’s need to adopt a masculine discourse in the public sphere, it is believed that since traditionally the masculine discourse is the linguistic style appropriate in the public context – a domain that is historically male oriented— using feminine style contributes to women’s lack of access to power.

Paradoxically, according to feminists supporting the above view, since women language is domestic and powerless, in their struggle for power they should use less of this discursive

style. Lakoff suggests that women cannot claim position in power until they abandon the lady-like speech in public interaction. Women, in Lakoff's model, should be bilingual, which means that they should be able to switch to the language of power (which she admitted as being masculine) when necessary. Unfortunately, despite the essential influence of Lakoff (1975) in the field of language and gender, her approach is male-centered. She does not only describe the differences between men and women's linguistic behavior but rather she centralizes the male linguistic experience assessing the female discursive style against it.

Stereotypically, Lakoff's model of feminine language reinforces women's domesticity. The argument here is that such linguistic classification is based on patriarchal binary thought that brings the male into the center defining the female as that which is not male. Approaching public discourse from the difference/sameness binary, women's language is thus presumed as a powerless subordinated variety of language. Being assessed against the phallogocentric language, women's communicative behavior has been evaluated as being inappropriate for the political sphere. Spender, criticizing Lakoff's (1975) model and defending the difference position, argues:

She [Lakoff] takes male language as the norm and measures women against it, and one outcome of this procedure is to classify any difference on the part of women as "deviation." Given these practices, it is unlikely that Lakoff could have arrived at positive findings for women, for any differences revealed, whether a product of language or of sex, which would be predisposed to interpretation as yet more evidence of female deficiency. (1980: 8)

This is that in the social construction, the male subject has been presumed as being dominant. An important characteristic of the 'Dominant' is power. In so doing, the masculine language is described as being powerful containing the linguistic features that guarantees it this

essential feature. On the contrary, because the female has always been hidden behind the shadow of homorganic masculinity, her language is measured against a cultural norm that associated effective and authoritative discourse with masculinity. Thus, the opposite linguistic features are advanced as being appropriate for females.

On the contrary, the French feminists (Cixious, Irigaray, and Kristeva) provide a different version of women's language philosophy. They believe that the communicative style Lakoff describes is not a true feminine speech style but rather a cultural description and evaluation of the linguistic behavior associated with the private space. Influenced by psychoanalysis and meaning construction, French feminists explain the linguistic differences between men and women. However, French feminists in particular and poststructural feminists in general believe that the female in her construction as feminine lost her uniqueness as an independent subject and was placed into dualism of either/or: either to accept her subordinate position through speaking the language the Father decides for her or imitate the Father himself. In this view, Ann Wilson explains that:

The symbolic order, as is conventionally understood, only allows woman to speak in discourse which is overdetermined by The Father. If woman employs phallogentric language, then she employs the language of her subjugation because this is the language which can only represent her as other, as the complementary opposite of man. If woman speaks through this language, then she places herself in an irresolvable contradiction because the speech-act, which seems to evince her subjectivity, simultaneously denies it. (Cited in Biesecker, 1992: 90-91)

Referring back to Butler's performativity, it can be argued that the feminine discourse operates in accordance with the ideal perception of femininity. As linguistic beings, women are expected to speak a variety of language that is considered to belong to their subordinate gender



identity. Therefore, when women politicians use a form of language that grammatically and syntactically indicates words, verbs and structure that is socially associated with the private or when they refer to women and family issues, they will be considered to be using feminine discourse in politics.

Consequently, the current use of the term feminine discourse is, according to the French feminist model, a cultural perception of the appropriate linguistic behavior for women. Biesecker questions the social dilemma that women are traced in, arguing that since the phallogocentric language is the only language available to women which constitutes them as “that which must be excluded as the other in order to conserve the identity of the same” which language are they going to use then? (1992: 91).

Based on the above discussion of the stereotypical assumption of the feminine discourse as that which indicates women’s powerlessness through language, the French feminists suggest an alternative to the phallogocentric language. Though the French feminists differ in their models with Irigaray, focusing on the speaking woman, Cixous on writing the body and Kristiva on the prelinguistic individual, the three of them agree that women should use their own language that challenges the patriarchal construction of subjectivity. This feminine language is known as *écriture féminine*. Christine Makward describes the French feminist linguistic model as “open, nonlinear, unfinished, fluid, exploded, fragmented, polysemic, attempting to speak the body i.e., the unconscious, involving silence, incorporating the simultaneity of life as opposed to clearly different from pre-conceived, oriented, mastery or ‘didactic’ language” (1980: 96).

In this same line of thought, Cixous explains the feminine discourse and states:

If woman has always functioned "in" the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate the

within, to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of. And you'll see with what ease she will spring forth from that "within"—where once she so drowsily crouched—at the lips she will overflow with foam. (Cixous, 1981: 257)

In this sense women enacting the feminine discourse should go beyond the cultural definition of the naturalized discourse. Drawing on Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Dale Spender (1980) argues that since language controls the perception of reality and is man-made, it is that patriarchy constructs the sexist meaning through which individuals perceive the world. This is to say that women's linguistic behavior is constructed as being inferior to men's and thus inappropriate for public negotiation of power. Thus, Spender suggests that for women to perceive the world from their own eyes and in their unique way they have to reflect their own experience through the language they speak. This is a call for non-dualistic language which is challenging Lakoff's bilingual model.

Undoubtedly, "women must either submit to the patriarchal symbolic order or refuse it and speak hysterically instead" (Hendricks & Oliver, 1999: 10). This implies that to gain a feminine subjective representation that is beyond the patriarchal definition of femininity, women are advised to engage in a linguistic revolution against the masculine means of communication both in the sense of imitation and in the sense of conforming to the linguistic behavior associated with femininity. However, when speaking through that which has been described as a 'feminine domestic discursive style' in politics, women politicians then do not conform to patriarchal norms of communication because despite the fact that they take over the linguistic identity provided by the Father, bringing the private to the public is discursive resistance.

Generally speaking, despite the significant discursive model that the poststructural feminists offer, women politicians under the pressure of the patriarchal definitions of ideality represent themselves through the masculine voice. Clare Walsh (2001) in her influential book, *Gender and Discourse: Language and Power in Politics, the Church and Organization*, identifies three discursive styles through which women approach politics. First, the imitation style is explained as the female adaptation of a masculine linguistic behavior (discussed in the previous subsection). The second model is what Walsh (2001) labels as the critical difference model. Rojo (2009: 2018) describes this model as that “which could be characterized as the search” for a public feminine cooperative identity that challenges the patriarchal norm. Despite the usefulness of this model in resisting the existing hegemonic political discourse, it is socially devalued and women who adopt it may be judged as being ineffective as leaders. The third model is what Walsh calls the performative model through which women can switch between feminine and masculine styles which is the most used by female politicians.

However, when adopting a feminine discursive style, women politicians have to be conscious about their rhetorical use because it is very easy for a woman to stereotypically represent her feminine identity negatively instead of resisting patriarchal dichotomous construction of reality. For example, though stressing the maternal political metaphor has been praised by some scholars for building a better relationship with the audience, it can reinforce traditional gender roles. These roles can end up transforming women to domestic beings connecting them to their traditional roles as mothers, wives and daughters. Undertaking a discursive analysis of the first female Republican vice-presidential candidate in 2008 American campaign Sarah Palin’s feminine communicative style, Gibson and Heyse (2010) argue that Palin’s reference to her husband in an attempt to represent McCain as being a ‘real’ man who has

a strong masculine characteristic that makes him the right one for American presidency is a negative use of the feminine political discourse. They explain that Palin's use of feminine adjectives associating her with the maternal role while using strong adjectives describing McCain as the powerful politician shows the problematic gender binary that embodied the public discourse. Ironically, the feminine discourse can be used to devalue women's political participation and reinforce the patriarchal nature of the political sphere.

Lim (2010) explains that such negative adaptation of the feminine political style is what makes Clinton compared to Palin seems to be unlikeable but competent whereas Palin likeable but incompetent. On the contrary, when Hillary Clinton opens her speech at the national convention 2016 by saying that she is proud of being her daughter's mother is an example of motherhood discourse, bringing the personal to the political. Referring to her maternal experience is a feminine discursive strategy of celebrating the feminine maternal body in language without degrading it. When analyzing women politicians' discursive style, an important question arises: In order for the feminine political discourse to be effective is it necessary for the speaker to be feminist oriented?

#### **4. Challenging Linguistic Sexism in Politics**

*To be injured by speech is to suffer a loss of context, that is, not to know where you are. Indeed, it may be that what is unanticipated about the injurious speech act is what constitutes its injury, the sense of putting its addressee out of control. (Judith Butler, 1997: 4)*

Interestingly, in this quote, Butler explains linguistic sexism as the interpellation where the individual depends in his or her existence on the way that the Other addresses them. The social definition places the individual in a position where social recognition is playing a significant role in self-construction. This is to say that people are constituted into language and

depend on language in the construction of their identity. The place that the speaking subject gains in language depends on how she or he is defined by the Other via language. Thus, being aware of the interrelationship between language and subjectivity, linguistic sexism has gained feminist interest.

#### **4.1. Sexism in Language**

Linguistic sexism has been maintained and institutionalized through academic history. For example through the use of the masculine pronoun as a generic reference and the use of certain adjectives and nouns to describe women, sexism has been embodied into the history of knowledge. In this context, Foucault's critical theory of power/knowledge can explain the impact of linguistic sexism on women. Accordingly, sexist language is constructed to serve the patriarchal institution and represent women in a secondary status that goes with the phallogocentric purposes and aims. For example, when using the pronoun 'he' and the noun 'man' standing for human beings in general, women take for granted the self-knowledge that is constructed by the patriarchal power that man occupies a dominant social position.

Drawing on Butler, Mills explains institutional linguistic sexism as that which is maintained and reinforced stereotypical and commonsense beliefs that are based on the institutional power. In other words, when the speaker utters statements that do not necessarily mean that she or he meant what she or he said but rather that the power of the society constructs the statements individuals utter. However, Mills argues that despite the fact that though Butler's explanation of the function of power to reinforce and naturalize linguistic sexism is useful, she does not talk about the resistance of this sexist language. As Foucault argues "where there is power there is resistance" (1978: 95), feminist discourse challenges patriarchal efforts to construct sexist discourse. Mills, therefore, states that "rather than seeing sexism as something

which is imposed on women by men, I prefer to see sexism as a site of struggle over access to resources and positions of power” (2008: 43).

Feminist linguists vary in their research aims for challenging the patriarchal language. On the one hand, Anglo-American feminists propose a lexical change in the linguistic system suggesting the replacement of certain terms that discriminate against women or define the feminine experience in a subordinate hierarchy. On the other hand, the French feminist call for creating a woman centered language arguing that the whole linguistic system is patriarchal and is incapable of expressing women’s point of view.

Documenting sexist practices in language especially lexical sexism has been the first step followed by feminist linguists. As Anne Pauwels states, the works of Lakoff (1975) and Spender (1980) are the main reference “points for elaborate descriptions of linguistic sexism as it affected the English language” (2003: 553). Starting with the Anglo-American feminists’ efforts, sexist representation of the sexes in language was emphasized reclaiming linguistic existence for the feminine subject. Later on, feminists around the world developed an interest in linguistic sexism.

Feminists have found that reforming linguistic the lexical system is not the best way for challenging sexism in language. For example, Henley (1995) argues that since language change occurs slowly and it cannot be forced, feminist efforts to challenge lexical sexism is naïve. Similarly, Lakoff and Nilsen find that focusing on lexical system is a waste of time for language will not change unless the public opinion changes. It is true that we are constructed by language but it is also a fact that language is constructed by us. This is to stay that there is an interrelationship between language and society, in which each side affects the other in the same degree. Thus, feminists suggest that instead of developing a free gender language, feminist awareness should be raised first. As Nilsen (1973: 9) writes “educating children and the general

public to the way language is rather than by trying to change the language” is the direction that feminists should concentrate on. However, this claim that society changes language is challenged by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which assumes that language shapes social reality. Thus, some other feminists believe that changing sexist practices in language is necessary for reflecting new social meanings and creating new definitions for women that reflect the feminine perception of the world.

Though the 1970s and the 1980s feminist efforts against linguistic inequality contributed positively to the decrease of sexist practices in the public sphere, new turn in the study of linguistic sexism, linguists such as Michael Toolan (1996) and Sara Mills (2008) move beyond the descriptive study of lexical sexism to a deeper analysis of the construction of such manipulative language. As Mills puts it, “we need to look above the level of the sentence to the level of discourse” (2008: 7). Influenced by Foucault, Mills does not analyze discourse as an isolated entity but rather as “something which produces something else” (2004: 14). Based on the same notion that sexism in language should not be studied only as a matter of the implicit analysis of sexist words and utterances but rather it should be taken as a discursive analysis of sexism as a constructed phenomenon, Cameron argues that:

Sexist language cannot be regarded as simply the ‘naming’ of the world from one, masculinist perspective; it is better conceptualized as a multifaceted phenomenon occurring in a number of quite complex systems of representation, all with their places in historical traditions (1990: 14)

In this sense, Mills (2008) distinguishes two types of linguistic sexism, overt sexism and indirect sexism. Overt or direct sexism is the type of sexism that can be identified by linguistic markers. This type has been the focus of feminist linguists of the 1970s and 1980s. Despite the fact that this type of sexism still exists, feminists succeed in raising awareness against it

providing non-sexist or gender neutral language. Mills discusses that in the 1970s and 1980s sexism was thought of as “language which discriminated against women by representing them negatively or which seemed to implicitly assume that activities primarily associated with women were necessarily trivial” (p. 38). Thus, feminists developed a lexicographical framework to deal with such linguistic sexism.

The other type of sexism is indirect sexism or sexism on the discursive level. This is that with the feminist awareness of direct sexism, the indirect sexism is expressing stereotypical and discriminatory sexism but denying responsibility for it. “For example, sexist terms are now often used in newspapers, and on certain radio and television programs, whilst at the same time being undercut by humour or irony, signaled by, for example, exaggerated or marked intonation or stress” (Mills, 2008: 12). This type of indirect sexism is mostly noticed in political discourse especially in media coverage of women politicians. Comic stereotypical comments on women political actors are examples of such linguistic sexism which is directed against women as being only for entertainment but it actually constructs the public view of women political leaders.

One of the most significant benefits gained from feminist reform to the lexical sexist system is the replacement of the generic pronoun ‘he’ by s/he or they and also some other nouns such as chairman, policeman by neutral ones such as chairperson and policeperson. Actually, despite the fact that linguistic sexism is still noticed especially the indirect type, feminist efforts succeed at least at the level of sexist language awareness. Now, people are more aware of their word choice especially when addressing the public. However, despite Western feminists’ efforts to create a discursive space for women, Arab women are still denied any existence outside the masculine voice which is deeply interwoven in the Arabic language.



## 4.2. Sexism in the Arabic Language

Arabic has been associated with the holiness of the Qur'an; therefore, androcentricity in Arabic has generally been ignored by Arab women. As the language of the Qur'an, Arabic has gained a holy status. Decoding Arabic discourse, secular scholars tried to materialize the Qur'anic discourse.

Influenced by Russian Formalism, the Egyptian Islamic and liberal scholar Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd claims that the Qur'an is a literary text and as a result it should be dealt with as so. Abu Zayd and the other Mu'tazilites (belonging to Mutazilah, a dialectical theologian school that believes that the Qur'an is created and thus denies its divine status) supports their notion of the literariness of the Qur'an by claiming that it contains foregrounding of language and figures of speech which are according to Russian formalists the main factors that distinguished the literariness of a text. In this sense, the secular scholars refuse the holiness of Arabic language and even the Qur'anic text arguing that modern critical discourse can be applied to the Qur'an. Thus, they deconstruct Islamic discourse basing their ideas on different theories such as that of feminism, Marxism, and postcolonial theories. In his book *The Concept of the Text (Ma'fhum al-Nass)*, Abu Zayd (1998) claims that Qur'an is a socio-linguistic text as any other text.

However, the majority of Muslim scholars believe that approaching the Qur'anic text as a literary text is a sin that questions the Qur'an which is God's words. Scholars, such as Muhammad Abduh, argue applying philosophical criticism to the interpretation of the Qur'an will result in deriving new meanings from the Qur'anic text that are beyond its main context. Abduh argues that since the main reason behind God's addressing humanity is guidance (*al-ihitida*), the Quranic text should be interpreted in light of the meaning intended by the speaker,

Allah. Thus, the secular notion of separating the Qur'an from its divinity was greatly refused by the majority of Muslim scholars.

The debate between secularists and conservatives over the creation of the Qur'an has a long history; thus, since going deeper into it will take us beyond the core argument of this study, it is important to clarify that the overview of this debate is provided so far only to argue that women's inferior status is reinforced through sexism in Arabic language, which has been backed by traditionalists through their direct link between Arabic as a language and the Qur'an. As a result, anybody who dares to question the sexist linguistic nature of Arabic will be accused of questioning the Qur'an for Arabic gains a holiness status as the language of the Qur'an. In spite of the partial agreement that Arabic has a high status among Muslims as the language of the Qur'an, it is important to state that the grammatical structure of Arabic, as that of any other language, is not beyond criticism. Thus, this study holds that Arabic is a manmade language which reflects and constructs the patriarchal culture of Arabs. As being directed to a certain sociolinguistic community, the Qur'an uses the same standard version of Arabic spoken by the community. If it had used another version, it would not have gained Arabs' attention. Nevertheless, there are few researches done on the androcentric nature of Arabic and the embodiment of the feminine into the masculine in the Arabic grammatical structure. Evidently, in this research paper sexism in Arabic will be analyzed without linking it to the Qur'an.

Arabic is a male-centered language par excellence. Its lexical items are classified into a two gender grammatical system, feminine and masculine. Arab grammarians agree that the masculine is the origin of Arabic; therefore, unlike the feminine, it does not need a linguistic marker to indicate it. To create the feminine form of a word, suffixes need to be added. Arabic suffix-ending forming the feminine can be both a suffix sound such as *ah*, *ha* or *ya* or a letter

suffix such as the attached 't'. Put another way, though there are some irregular feminine words in Arabic, the general rule is that all nouns are masculine unless they have a feminine suffix. In this sense, in her interesting article "Gender in Arabic", the Moroccan feminist linguist Fatima Sadiqi argues that such hierarchization maintains the masculine category to be taken as to "be bigger, unmarked, and higher than the feminine category because the 'male' has bigger and higher status in Arab-Muslim societies and cultures than the 'female' category" (2006: 6). Thus, masculine forms of Arabic including nouns, verbs, adjectives and pronouns are unmarked and used to stand for generic reference while the feminine is marked, distinguished and not allowed to be used in the general sense. When considering the gender marker that divides the feminine from the 'general' which is taken to be in the masculine form, Freud's definition of a woman as castrated man comes to mind. Thus, Arab women are castrated through language.

Despite Arabic grammatical structure which emphasizes the importance of gender agreement in the sentence, this rule is broken in the case of phrases about women's professional titles. It is observed that usually there is a gender disagreement between professional adjectives and the feminine pronouns. For example, it is common in Arabic political discourse to hear *maili elwazir Fatima*: your Excellency minister Fatima (in the masculine form). In Mauritanian parliament, for example, expressions such *fel tafdal an'ib elmuwaqar Zainab*: giving the floor to the distinguished representative Zainab (but in the masculine form) are frequently used (more discussion of this will be provided in the practical part of the thesis). In this case the sentence does not indicate any gender agreement between the subject and other lexical elements; it is masculinizing the feminine.

The gender gap in languages forces women to accept masculine adjectives and nouns. That is because either the feminine form of the term does not exist or when feminized, it takes

another meaning different from that of the masculine one. For example, in Moroccan Arabic, the word '*Cheikh*' or '*Chaykh*' is a masculine noun that means a religious leader; however, when feminized, it becomes '*Cheikha*' which means a female singer or even a prostitute. There are other words in Arabic that indicate the gender gap such as the word '*hay*' meaning alive in the masculine sense which becomes '*haya*' when feminized meaning snake. Such structural androcentricity in Arabic is a cultural construction which formulates the lack of the feminine counterparts of some masculine words.

The absence of lexical items that describe women power occupations is a lexical gap that explains the patriarchal ideological nature of Arabic. A consequence of taking man as the norm, women who seek a public representation find themselves embodied into the masculine description. This is to say that Arabic, through this lexical gap, forces the idea that certain power occupations are masculine and even if the female tries to force her physical presence, language will always include her in the masculine description denying her any effective existence.

To fill the lexical gap, feminists bring up the need for creating new meanings that challenge sexism in language. They change some words and bring others to go beyond masculine/feminine dichotomy. The word mothering in English is, for example, replaced by the term parenting to bring the father into the process of childrearing. When using mothering, it naturalizes the concept that childrearing is a woman's responsibility and thus promotes the traditional gender roles. This is to argue that language is not only about communicating, but it is also constructing reality. However, Arab feminists almost fail to find a linguistic solution for the lexical gap in Arabic. Though, it is frequently noticed to feminize terms such as *dectorah*, *ustadhah*, *tabiba* and *muhami'ah*, there are grammarians who insist that such grammatical structure is incorrect in Arabic.

In his book, *Woman and Language (El-mara w elouqa)*, the Saudi traditional scholar Abdul-lah Muhammad El-ghadhami (1996) argues that when woman enters public space she will be addressed in the masculine form which is the way that Arabs tend to speak. He quotes Ibn al-Sakit who mentions that such professional positions are masculinized because they are culturally associated with men and not women. He adds that despite the fact that the majority of Arab women feminists seek to stress the feminine trying to reform Arabic, still they reinforce the masculine sexist language in their feminist discourse. He gives examples from texts written by the Egyptian radical feminist Nawal el-Saadawi and the Syrian writer Ghadah Al-Samman in which they use the masculine pronoun in a feminine context. El-ghadhami states that Al-Samman's famous saying "ما اروع وما اسوأ ان تكون امرأة" meaning how it is both wonderful and worst to be a woman is an example of the grammatical gender disagreement that women unconsciously use to maintain the patriarchal discourse which according to him is a proof that women have no way to avoid the masculine in language. He argues that instead of using the phrase ان تكون /an takuny/ meaning 'to be' in the masculine form, she should have used أن تكوني /an takuny/ adding the suffix *y* to feminize the sentence. This is that despite the efforts to stress the feminine issue, the patriarchal language stands against women burying them in masculinity. Thus, for women to step outside the masculine nature of language, French feminists, as it has been aforementioned call for abandoning the patriarchal language all together and creating a new one, a language in which the feminine experience can be talked about without ending up with the capitalization of the masculine. However, it seems that the French feminists' dream of a feminine voice is just theoretical.

Arguing against the grammatical principle raised by traditional Arab grammarians, Sadiqi discusses that since language is influenced by power, "it is more logical to assume that the

original form in Arabic is the feminine, and that the masculine is obtained by the ‘shrinking’ process which language undergo” (2006: 6). Put another way, Sadiqi aims to show the relationship between power and language and the way through which the patriarchal power constructs the feminine secondary status in language to control and reinforce its cultural position.

Linguistic patriarchal ideology has been maintained in Arabic grammar books. Sadiqi states that women are excluded in grammatical texts. This is that traditional Arab grammarians use sexist examples in their books capitalizing the masculine form and stressing the secondary status of women in language. She quotes Ibn Al-Anbaari who states that:

The proof that the masculine precedes the feminine is that when you say: “qaa?im” (standing-3MS) and “qaa?imah” (standing-3FS) and “qaaçid” (sitting-3MS) and “qaaçidah” (sitting-3FS) and “jaalis” (sitting-3MS) and “jaalisah” (sitting-3FS), you find that the feminine contains additional material and what is added to the root is “secondary”. And when you see something from a distance and you do not know what it is you say: *a woman, an animal or something like that* [italics added]. (2006: 4)

Commenting on the above misogynistic quote, Sadiqi argues that Arab grammarians associate women with animals and unknown entities which goes beyond just being a grammatical example to being a factor that reinforces patriarchal ideologies. She notes that such sexist association of women with animals is still noticeable in Arab-Islamic contexts providing an example from Moroccan Arabic: “*lemra u lehmara ma Kay Dayfu*]: a woman and a donkey should not be treated as guests, meaning should not be served lest they would be spoilt” (p. 5).

The same sexist proverbs are used in Hassaniya such as: *la dawyna lma ebra hata el-kalib u lemra*: May we be able to cure everyone including dogs and women, meaning that women are looked at as being in the same status as animals. This overt sexism is still used in

Arab androcentric societies to the extent that women internalize it as self-reference. Concerning the internalization of sexism, women use the sexist language in the same way that men do. Paradoxically, stressing words and phrases that are sexist and excluding women is noticed in the discourse of intellectual and political women.

Moreover, the masculine in Arabic noun phrases takes precedence over the feminine emphasizing the masculine power over the feminine. Sadiqi (2006) argues that the masculine precedence is not natural in Arabic but it is cultural. She gives the example of *rajulun wa imra'a* (man and woman). While it is grammatically correct to say, *imra'atun wa rajulun* but such reverse expression cannot exist in the standard Arabic sentence structure.

In her interesting book *Women, Gender and Language in Morocco*, Sadiqi (2003) mentions that sexism in Arabic is not only a matter of form or structure but it exists also in the sociolinguistic sense. She states that women are referred to using a lexical system that describes them in relation to men in their lives, such as wife, daughter, mother, or sister. This is that women are linguistically represented in relation to men and not as independent agents. Also, associating women with emotional adjectives because culturally women are portrayed as being sensitive is another feature of sexism in Arabic. In this respect, Sadiqi states that “being timid and over-emotional is considered a positive trait in Moroccan culture”. Thus, “names and voices often represent women as silly and stupid in contrast with men who are usually depicted in more favorable terms” (p. 142).

In the above sense, when talking about sexism in Arabic, one discovers how it is hard or even impossible for women to find a female representation and a feminine voice in such masculine-oriented language. Despite the few feminist efforts to feminize Arabic, especially the

feminization of lexical items describing professional occupations, the grammatical structure remains masculine par excellence.

This chapter introduced the theoretical discussion about the different linguistic forms that political discourse takes as well as sexism in language in general and Arabic in particular. The next chapter presents and discusses the feminist theory of the state and women's relations to political change and democracy in the world in general and in the Arabic world in particular.



## **Chapter Four:**

### **Gender and Political Change**

The present chapter aims at questioning the relation between women and the state as power institute and mediator for socio-political mobilization. In so doing it is necessary to examine if women's presence in this power institute, the state, is a precondition for empowering women and creating a gender neutral public space where women can freely exercise power or it is enough for women to work through feminist organizations on the level of society.

Additionally, this chapter is meant to provide a feminist discussion of women political participation elaborating the feminist activists' claim for feminist state. However, it is necessary in this introduction of the chapter to first define what the feminist insight of politics is and second discuss what the importance of theorizing politics for feminism is.

For a better understanding of the feminist concept of politics, it is important to clarify that following the same line of thought underpinning the definitions discussed in page 102, politics is a broad concept; therefore, one should be aware and admit that just like the fact that there is no one single Feminism but different feminisms depending on the socio-cultural variation of women's backgrounds, there is no single Politics. Politics varies depending on the socio-historical contexts of each nation or group of people. Even if this group or nation is living beyond any sense of the modern state, still they are not beyond the definition of politics. Nevertheless, it is not the aim of this thesis to analyze the political variation, but rather to introduce the general feminist theorizing of politics.

Assuming that politics is about power struggle, a feminist account of politics will be emphasizing the masculine manipulation of public institutions to exclude women and to expand the public/private division. For example, Squires states that due to this division, "the institutions

of the state and government excludes [*sic*] the ‘private’ sphere of domesticity and sexuality from political sight” (2004: 120). This is to argue that since one of the main basic values of feminism is developing a theory that is based on gender justice, the feminist criticism of politics is that inequality of power distribution reinforces politics as a male domain providing women with few chances for political participation. In other words, having already looked at the socio-cultural construction of the feminine, it is obvious that being excluded from the public sphere is a gender characteristic of being a woman. Though the world has undergone political change that has paved the way for women to take part in political affairs, one would argue if this political presence is just physically while actually they are still invisible or if women succeed at invading the ‘masculine’ political domain.

### **1. Feminist Theory of the State**

Finding an agreed upon definition for the state as a concept has not been an easy task for political philosophers. Different philosophers have defined the concept from their perspective. Some treated it as a subject while others dealt with it as a thing, an object. In his inspiring article, “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State”, Philip Abrams (1988) argues that in order to study the state, one should distinguish between the state as a constitutional system and the state as a concept. Mitchell (1999) criticizes Abrams’ separation of the institutional structure, the real state, from the state-idea, the symbolic, arguing that such separation will not serve in theorizing the state. He claims that “any attempts to distinguish the abstract or ideal appearance of the state from its material reality, in taking for granted this distinction, will fail to understand it” (p. 77).

Peterson (1992) argues that the state continues to “monopolize our understanding of how we organize ourselves politically, how political identity is constituted, and where the boundaries

of political community are drawn” (cited in Pttman, 1996: 2). In this sense, individuals come to identify themselves as belonging to a certain geographic place in which they organize themselves in a way that guarantees their interests as a group and respects their interests as diverse individuals. The famous political theorist, Max Weber defines the state as “a corporate group that has compulsory jurisdiction, exercises continuous organization, and claims a monopoly of force over a territory and its population, including all action taking place in the area of its jurisdiction” (quoted in Jackson & Rosberg, 1994: 268).

Moreover, Marx and Engels define the state as “a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” (cited in Elster, 1985: 409). Clearly, in the Marxist definition of the state, two class groups are divided in relation to the functioning of the state, the bourgeoisie and the poor, the workers. Marxist theory of the state depicts it as a power institute that works for and by the upper class against the lower class. This is to say that Marxist oriented political philosophers develop a conceptual state based on state vs. society relation. Despite the various definitions that political philosophers provided for the state, it remains a concept that feminists believe they need to theorize.

Drawing on this line of thought, it can be argued that feminists need a theory of the state in order for them to create a position for women in this realm of power. Once feminism emerged as a political movement demanding equality for women, Helga Hynes, in her prominent book *Welfare States and Woman Power: Essays in State Feminism*, clarifies the relation between feminism and the state elaborating that women do not only need policies that improve their living socio-economic conditions, but they need to take share in the creation of these policies. This is to say that women have to be included in the state bodies, be part of its decision making process. Hynes’ vision is described by Siim as “feminism from above, a term that meant no only

favorable policies but also the presence of feminist women in government offices” (Mcbride & Mazur, 2013: 660). Theorizing the feminist state and the need for feminist policy that integrates women into governmental bodies leads to an important question which this study addresses: is it necessary for a woman politician to be feminist in order for her to be effective political actor that brings benefit for the women of her country? Based on this feminist liberal view advocated by Hernes, this study hypothesizes that adding *unfeminist* women into politics will be just as adding more patriarchal men to power institutions.

Describing the feminist state, Hernes writes:

A woman-friendly state would not force harder choices on women than on men, or permit unjust treatment on the basis of sex. In a woman-friendly state, women will continue to have children, yet there will also be other roads to self-realization open to them. In such a state, women will not have to choose futures that demand greater sacrifices from them than are expected from men. It would be, in short, a state where injustice on the basis of gender would be largely eliminated without an increase in other forms of inequality, such as among groups of women. (1987: 15)

From the above quote, it is clear that feminists, despite their different approaches, believe that women’s demand for gender equality in Modern time cannot be achieved outside of state power. This view implies the need for constructing a feminist theory of the state.

### **1.1. Liberal Feminist vs. Radical Feminist State**

*‘Our country’ ... throughout the greater part of its history has treated me as a slave; it has denied me education or any share in its possessions. ‘Our’ country still ceases to be mine if I marry a foreigner. ‘Our’ country denies me the means of protecting myself, forces me to pay others a very large sum annually to protect me... Therefore if you insist upon fighting to protect me, or ‘our’ country, let it be*

*understood soberly and rationally between us, that you are fighting to gratify a sex instinct which I cannot share; to procure benefits which I have not shared and probably will not share; but not to gratify my instincts, or to protect either myself or my country. For ... in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world* (Virginia Woolf, as cited in Pettman, 1996: 111)

In this quote, Virginia Woolf defines the patriarchal state in which women are denied their rights. She believes that metaphorically for a woman there is no particular country; she belongs to the patriarchal world. Radical feminists focus their theorizing on the relation between society and the state institutions arguing that the state is a modern synonym for patriarchy. The radical feminist Catharine Mackinnon argues that:

The state is male in the feminist sense: the law sees and treats women the way men see and treat women. The liberal state coercively and authoritatively constitutes the social order in the interest of men as a gender – through its legitimating norms, forms, relations to society, and substantive policies. (Cited in Kantola, 2006: 6)

Not only is the above view of Mackinnon a clear description of the state as reinforcing patriarchal power, but it also shows that the masculine constructed state cannot be an instrument through which women can gain gender equality. In this respect, “radical feminists, thus, have seen the state as inherently patriarchal, simply reflecting the male dominated nature of society, and therefore the state acts to uphold and defend male interests at the expense of women” (Waylen, 2002: 5). As a result, radical feminists think that instead of claiming political access, feminists should direct their efforts toward social concerns in order to provide solutions for women’s social oppression. In this sense, radical feminists approach the state from Abrams’ view should be based on distinguishing between the state as a system and the state as an idea.

For them, based on this division, there is a dichotomy between the state and society in a sense that the state serves patriarchal power while neglects women's need for gender equality which is a social affair.

Though they separate the state as an institution from society, radical feminists do not ignore the interrelation between society and the state in which society has more influence on the state than the other way around. As a result, the state is not a neutral or autonomous institution, but, on the contrary, it is used to serve the benefits of the male community since those responsible for the state have, metaphorically speaking, graduated from the school of society. This idea is a very useful contribution that radical feminists brought to the socio-political analysis of the state. Consequently, radical feminists believe that in order for the state to effectively function as a power instrument that maintains social equality in general and gender based equality in particular, the patriarchal social structure must be challenged.

Critics of radical feminists' state analysis build their criticism on their overgeneralization of oppression. Radical feminists deal with the state as patriarchal power that internationally oppresses women. Therefore, they generalize that women everywhere are subjected to the same patriarchal oppression and have the same relation to the State.

However, by the late 1970s, women started to reach high political office such as the prime minister post (when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1979). This shift in women's positions in public service within the state gave rise to a new form of feminist theorizing with the birth of liberal feminist movement. Drued Dahlerup (1987) claims that the emergence of the state "improved women's general position and has given women new resources for mobilization, protest and political influence" (cited in Waylen, 2002: 4).

Despite the liberal feminist consideration of the state as a neutral public space in which women are given the chance to voice themselves, some feminists, such as Kate Millett and Mary Daly, consider it a romantic unrealistic view. According to Kantola (2006), though liberal feminists recognize that the state institutions are male dominated; this does not affect their theorizing of the state as a neutral arbiter that organizes social groups' interests. On the contrary, they believe that bringing more women to political institutions will help in feminizing the state and thus meeting women's interests. The liberal feminist account of the state was criticized by other feminists arguing that liberal feminists construct a very narrow theory of the state that does not pay attention to social power relations which manipulate the state making it a new strong form of patriarchy through which men exercise their power in a more formal way (Kantola, 2006, & Ferguson, 1984).

### **1.2. Marxist-Socialist vs. PostStructuralist State**

Socialist and Marxist feminists theorize that the state is constructed in favor of capitalism and thus it just constitutionlizes gender oppression through class domination. To illustrate, Barrett and Phillips (1992) point out that theorizing the state became a serious feminist concern when Marxist feminists tried to apply Marxist theories of capitalism on women's oppression. They develop a view of the capital state that maintains economic injustice and social class division which reinforces masculine supremacy and women's dependence on men. Marxist feminist theorists argue that due to the distinction between public sphere and private sphere, there are social issues such as gender inequality where the state has no legitimate authority. However, if the state approaches its power beyond masculine capitalism, women will gain economic independence and thus the gender inequality issues will be resolved.

In this perspective, Marxist feminist theorizing of the state provides a gender neutral socialist idea of the state instead of the masculine capitalist state. Marxist feminists believe that the socialist state would

be more genuinely democratic than the capitalist state, which represents primarily the interests of the relatively minuscule capitalist class. This increase in democracy would mean that the socialist state would need to be far less repressive than the capitalist state, which must enforce the interests of the ruling majority [men, in this case]. (Jaggar, 1983: 61)

In such socialist state, women will have equal access to means of production and thus will enjoy economic power.

The poststructural feminists' account of the state, on the other hand, is based on the Foucauldian notion that power is considered as being relational and exercised rather than repressing or possessed. Poststructural feminists theorized the state as a political area in which interest is constructed through political struggle. They provide a different theorizing of the state. Explaining the poststructural feminist view, Kantola states:

The state is a differentiated set of institutions, agencies and discourses and has to be studied as such. The approaches shift the emphasis to state practices and discourses rather than to state institutions. The state is depicted as a discursive process, and politics and the state are conceptualized in broad terms. The state is not inherently patriarchal but was historically constructed as patriarchal in a political process whose outcome is open. The patriarchal state can be seen, then, not as the manifestation of patriarchal essence, but as the centre of a reverberating set of power relations and political processes in which patriarchy is both constructed and contested. Particular discourse and histories construct state boundaries, identities and agency. (2006: 12)



In the above quote, Kantola explains the shift that poststructural feminists make when they question the discourses according to which the state functions. In other words, women's position in the state is constructed and as a result they can be empowered through the deconstruction of the same discourse that constructed their agency as inferior to men. That is to say that the poststructural perspective on the state is built on the notion that the state can be in support of women while it can also be against women's benefit. It is only when deconstructing the dominant patriarchal discourse that results in women's subordination and exclusion that the state can be beneficial to women.

Despite various analyses to construct a feminist theory of the state, this study inclines a fifth position that adopts a mixture of all the four aforementioned feminist theories of the state. In the analytical part as will be discussed, this study draws on the radical feminist perspective, which holds that the state is patriarchally dominated in such a way that the state and society cannot be separated. Patriarchy influences state institutions so that women occupy a dominated position in relation to the state. Also, the study draws on a liberal feminist and poststructural feminist perspective, which holds that the state as an idea is neutral. However, the way that individuals exercise power through the state is gendered. This means that when depatriarchalizing the state, deconstructing discourses of power, the liberal feminist view of the state as a means of empowering women could be then achieved. Moreover, when considering women's access to state institutions from a Marxist feminist point of view, it becomes clear that unless women have equal access to economic-political power, they will not gain gender equality.

## **2. Democratization of the Political Sphere**

In the late 1980s the world has undergone dramatic political change since the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Different countries have been able to get rid of authoritarian regimes leading to

the emergence of democratic governance. Though there is a vast literature on democracy and democratization, political scientists do not agree on a standard definition for democracy. However, many of them were influenced by Joseph Schumpeter's definition of democracy as "that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" (cited in Wilkins, 2003: 46). This is the representative democracy that is adopted by the majority of Western countries in which people have the chance to choose the one that governs them.

In the same line of thought, Diamond, Linz and Lipset define democracy as

a system of government that meets three essential conditions: meaningful *competition* for political power amongst *individuals* [italics added] and organized groups; inclusive *participation* in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through free and fair elections; and a level of *civil* and *political liberties* sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation. (cited in Reily, 2001: 3)

According to this definition, all individuals have the right to run for political posts and have the absolute right to participate in the voting process. When talking about individuals, women and men have the same right according to the democratic thought. However, in conservative societies such as in some Arab countries, which is the context of this study, patriarchal authoritarianism stands against women's participation in the political sphere. Therefore, the patriarchal implementation of democracy in traditionalist societies is problematic for feminists who claim political equality for women. This section is, thus, an attempt to theorize democratization from a feminist perspective.

## **2.1. Patriarchal Authoritarianism**

When distinguishing between democracy as a theoretical framework and democracy as a practical method, it can be argued that when implemented in patriarchal traditional societies, democracy did not achieve the gender parity goal. For example, from a radical feminist point of view about the state, Richards argues that there is tension between democracy and patriarchy since democracy is “based on constitutional guarantees of free and equal voice [while] patriarchy [requires] the repression of any voice that resists its authority” (2014: 85). This is to say that despite the need for the democratization of the governing system, patriarchy maintains its power through its socio-cultural and religious mechanisms that have been previously discussed in Chapter Two.

In this view, the British political and feminist philosopher Carole Pateman admits that “democracy has never existed; women have never been and still are not admitted as full and equal members and citizens in any country known as a ‘democracy’” (1989: 210). Notwithstanding, there has lately been an increase in women’s access to political power. Though women in many countries are politically active and have the chance to run for electoral positions, political participation of women in some Arab-Islamic countries, such as Mauritania, is still under patriarchal authoritarianism. Here, it is important to quote the American political professor, David A. J. Richards (2014), who argues that patriarchy is hiding in democracy.

Richards explains that women are assigned inferior political positions compared to those of men and that they face more difficulties in their political career. Also, as he clarifies, the evaluation of women’s political participation shows that they rank at the bottom compared to their male counterparts. Patriarchy as a power institution finds in democracy a modern way of controlling its people and maintaining its ideology.

## **2.2. Political Pluralism from a Feminist Perspective**

Though theatrically speaking, political pluralism or multipartism increases political chances not only for women but also for minority groups, political pluralism, as Kpundeh (1992) explains, can be manipulated by authoritarian regimes to serve the continuation of their political power instead of creating participatory democratic governance. Practically speaking, the feminist view holds that democracy is a new form of patriarchal authoritarianism and that political pluralism has, therefore, added nothing to women's underrepresentation in the political sector. On the contrary, as Skard argues, "political parties constitute a major obstacles to women's participation in politics on an equal footing with men" (2015: 70). Due to the fact that in patriarchal societies the majority of political parties are male dominated, women do not have chance for holding leading positions inside these parties.

Moreover, the voting population is an important aspect that parties take into account when exercising 'their democracy'. This constitutes a strong argument for the radical feminist view of the state as discussed so far, which holds that since the civil society in general is patriarchal, the state cannot apply democracy. In other words, even if political parties allow women access to voting lists, the voting population will deny them this chance. Thus, political pluralism places women into a dilemma of sexism where both political parties and the voting population generally allow women few chances for political participation.

## **3. Arab Women, Democracy, and Political Resistance**

This section provides a discussion of Arab women's experience with democracy, but before moving to presenting women political resistance and democratic change, it is important to define what political resistance means in this study. As Lilja discusses, resistance takes different forms such as revolutions, strikes and boycotts. These forms can be "actions that are violent or

non-violent, confrontational or circumventing, rejecting or hindering” (2008: 3). Thus, Lilja defines resistance as “women’s attempts to handle different forms of domination” (p. 7).

Commenting on Robert Dahl’s definition of power as being “the capacity that makes it possible for one actor to have his/her interests realized against the will of others” (2008: 23), Lilja criticizes this vision of power. She argues that the concept of power is more problematic. She supports her criticism of Dahl’s view of power with Foucauldian theory of power. Foucault is more interested in the exercise of power rather than finding a definition for it. He argues that since the individual is both subjugated and constituted through power, one cannot talk about absolute power but rather about a process in which all participants have a role to play in the exercise of power. This is to say that resistance is embedded in the discourse of power.

Since discourse normalizes power through the construction of truth, feminist philosophers such as Cameron, Mills, and Mullany to name few argue that language is important in the process of resisting power not only because it contributes in deconstructing the constructed meaning, but also because of its ability to define what is said and what ‘unsayable’. In this regard, Arab women got engaged into political resistance both discursively and physically with the emergence of new voices claiming democracy in what is known as the Arab Spring. Before discussing the different forms of Arab women’s political resistance, it is important to provide an overview of democracy in the Arab world. Thus, this section includes two subsections; the first subsection presents an overview of Arab democracy while the second discusses women’s political resistance and the post Arab Spring regimes.

### **3.1. Arab Democracy**

In the postcolonial world in general and the Arab world in particular there have been growing and striking contradictions when it comes to the implementation of democracy.

Democracy has become an issue for the Arab world in the late 1980s after “the global trend of democratization known as the third wave” (Olimat, 2014: 11). However, democracy for the Arab world remained a general and vague political slogan or propaganda that certain republicans and sovereign regimes have played on to maintain their dominance. The Arab myth of democracy started years after independence of the Arab states when the process of democratization emerged in the majority of Arab countries due to international political change. Therefore, by the beginning of the 1990s, most of these countries started adopting political pluralism at least in theory. However, as Yafi (2012: 122) points out, the Arab nations were not ready for democracy since these nations have not developed clear visions on issues “as identity, political, institutional, and educational maturity”. This gap between theory and reality in the implementation of democracy in the Arab world has led a number of researchers in the field of political science to explain this failure of democratization and democracy with reference to lack of political awareness and maturity, poverty, negative impact of cultural factors, which are generally characterizing the Arab nations.

In the same line of argument, Yafi argues that despite the implementation of democracy in the Arab world, “the elected regime is bound to be unstable” (2012: 125). Explaining the difficulties that face the implementation of democracy, the political scientist Nancy Bermeo points out that “the primary reason the likelihood of democratic breakdown was overstated was that no one considered the other half of the regime-change dilemma. New democracies are indeed very difficult to create and maintain but successfully assaulting a democracy is very difficult as well” (quoted in Tismaneqnu, 1998: 160). Actually, in this statement, Bermeo argues that despite the difficulties that adopting democratic government faces, it is uneasy to replace it by dictatorship. However, this only happens when there are certain conditions; first when the

community understands their need for democracy and second when the international world takes share in observation of the implementation of this democracy.

Unfortunately, this is not the case in the Arab world because it is obvious that the Western world has never provided great support for the implementation of democracy in the Arab countries. For example, the United States intervention in Algeria's 1992 elections declaring that implementing democratic governance in the country would result in bringing Islamist party to power which was a threat to USA interests (Joffe, 2013). Another example is France's support for President Zein El Abidin Bin Ali during the Tunisian 2010 revolution (Boubakri, 2015). These two examples demonstrate that instead of helping Arab countries in developing a democratic representative approach of governance, western countries in general worked for the continuation of long-reigning autocracies in the Arab world.

Democratic breakdown resulted in suppressing different groups in the Arab communities such as women. Since democracy in the Arab region has been hindered by tribal and patriarchal culture, women were the most affected group. Despite the emergence of Arab women's movement that called for women's political organization in order to find a voice for their own in the masculine society, Arab women were misrepresented in government positions. Yafi (2012) points out that in 2001 UNDP report there was less than 3% and 1.5%, respectively of Arab women holding political positions. (2012). This is due to the suppressive power of the state that maintains all forms of dominance, patriarchy and capitalism. However, in the beginning of 2010, the Arab community developed political awareness and started demanding real implementation of democracy.

The Arab uprisings or what is known as the Arab Spring started in Tunisia in late 2010 and quickly spread to Egypt in 2011 and later on reached other countries such as Syria, Libya,

Yemen, and Morocco. These uprisings were described as youth revolution for dignity and were considered as a light of democratic hope for the Arab world. It is interesting to note that Arab Spring led to the withdraw of some dictator regimes such as that in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. Also, it brought political democratic reform such as the case of Morocco. However, in some Arab countries it turned “into armed conflicts, with confessional and/or ethnic overtones, that are yet to be resolved” such as in Syria and Yemen (Elbadawi & Mkdisi, 2017: 14).

In fact, the crisis of democracy in the Arab world raises many controversial and interrelated questions, the most important of which are: is the Western version of democracy the only effective one? Has the Western democracy, which portrays itself as the only possibility for good governance, succeeded in solving the Western world political issues? What is the kind of relationship that should exist between Islam and democracy in general and Western democracy in particular? Which form of democracy would work for Arab countries? Which form of democracy would better contribute to enhance women’s political participation? Which would work for gender political parity, the Islamist state or the secular one? These questions have been cited to demonstrate that the issue of democracy in the Arab world is controversial and complicated. So, the aim is to overview this kind of questions that have underpinned the debate in the Arab world over the issue of democracy and their reaction to the democratic change in the world in general and the Western world in particular. It is meant to set the context for the issue of political change in the Arab world and the opportunities and challenges defining the context of post Arab Spring countries and its impact on Arab women in particular.

### **3.2. Post Arab Spring Regimes and Women’s Representation**

*Women made the stories of the revolution but did not own them. (Fatima Sadiqi, 2016: 2)*



Drawing on the overview of democracy previously presented, it can be argued that democracies in the world in general and in the Arab-African countries in particular reflect the gender inequality in their societies. However, the world has undergone political changes especially the Arab world with the emergence of the Arab revolutions. The gender issue was very much present during the Arab uprisings. Women participated in the protests claiming for their rights both as a dominated group and as citizens who hope for better democratic life. It is noticed that despite the patriarchal nature of Arab societies in general, since the beginning of new millennia, women have gained more chances for education. Moreover, with the emergence of the virtual public space, the Internet, they have had more chances to participate in the public discourse, at least virtually. These emerging factors have helped in raising feminist awareness among young Arab women, which has allowed them to challenge against the patriarchal society and the capitalist state calling for gender equality.



**Figure 2: Gender issues in Arab Spring. . *The picture is taken from the blog website of Protection Gateway. <https://protectiongateway.com/2012/12/04/women-and-the-arab-spring/>***

Clearly, this picture shows that women have taken part in the Arab revolutions calling for establishing a democratic institutional and social practice that can lead to an anti-patriarchal

state. During the revolutionary momentum, women protested alongside men. In this respect, Olimat writes that:

Within the context of the Arab Spring, Arab women actively participated in anti-regime protests. They took to the streets simultaneously with their male counterparts everywhere [...] – even in the most conservative and rural parts of these countries. [...] During the revolution, women took up arms, served as nurses, passed information and cared for revolutionaries. (2014: 12)

In this quote, Olimat summarizes the role that women played in the Arab Spring. Trespassing the gendered social borders, women in different parts of the Arab world participated in the community's demand for dignity. The female voice was clearly heard during the revolutionary momentum. Johansson-Nogues (2013) argues that social taboos that forbid men and women mixing in public spaces were actually forgotten in the time of the revolution. This is to say that men and women stood as one person in gender neutral public space demanding their rights.

Despite the fact that women in some countries were treated as sexual bodies that were subjected to harassment and rape during the protests especially in Egypt, they refused to be excluded from participating in the making of historical trend in their countries. On the contrary, women in Egypt and in other Arab Spring countries, turned sexual harassment into a political slogan through which they ensured that they would not stay silenced in their private spaces and that they can defy the patriarchal authoritarian state. This feminist slogan was present in the graffiti street art which portrayed stories of female protesters who have been subjected to sexual harassment such as the young veiled Egyptian woman who was harassed by policemen in Tahrir Square.



**Figure 3: Feminist Arab Spring graffiti**

Such graffiti narrates the story of women struggle in the time of the revolution. It surprised people around the world that the Arab woman broke the social and religious chains and joined the protestors calling for changing her sociopolitical circumstances. However, the main question at the time was would the Arab Spring bring gender equality for women or are women simply contributing to the creation of a Masculine Spring? Addressing this question, Olimat argues that

In return for such sacrifices and their active role in the Arab Spring, it has become clear that promises of more freedom and the granting of women's rights have not yet materialized. Instead, what we see are demands for a return of women to their homes and calls to exclude women from employment under the premise that the limited job opportunities should be given to men. (2014: 12)

After the fall of the authoritarian regimes for example Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the political representation of women in Arab Spring countries was surprisingly low. Analyzing women's parliamentary participation in Egypt demonstrates that the number of women seats declined in the post-revolutionary regime. While women constituted 12.7 in the 2010 election

under Mubark's rule, this number surprisingly decreased to 2% (12 seats for women out of the total 498) in the Islamist regime that followed the revolution. In 2016 elections during El-Sissi's regime, women MPs occupied 14.9% (El-Behary, 2016). Explaining the setbacks of Egyptian women's political representation, Olimat (2014) argues that the demand for gender equality during the revolution was replaced by the concept of complementarity in which women are not expected to seek equality with men but instead it is enough for them to complete the role that men are playing in the Islamist regime in Egypt. However, women political representation improved during El-Sissi's regime, this inconsiderable political empowerment for women does not mirror their real participation during the revolution, nor does it reflect the Egyptian feminist demands for women's equal access to public sphere.

In Tunisia, on the other hand, even after putting the 2014 post-revolutionary constitution into practice, women gained more political rights provided by Article 46 of the constitution, which says that "the state commits to protect women's established rights and works to strengthen and develop those rights [and guarantees] equality of opportunities between women and men to have access to all levels of responsibility and in all domains" (Hamza, 2016: 2011).

Though the Tunisian Constitution promotes gender parity in electoral positions, "the parity law did not mandate that women candidates be placed on the top of the list, and to most Tunisians' surprise, only 128 out of 1518 lists [8.43%] were headed by female candidates" (Hamza, 2016: 216). This exclusion from the candidate lists came as a consequence of male resistance to the parity law. As a result, only 22.6% of the parliamentary seats were held by women. This was noticeable in a study conducted by the UNESCO on Tunisian women's political participation. This study shows that political parties did not "respect parity in this

election [the 2014 election] as required in the Constitution, especially when it came to putting women at the head of lists” (UNESCO, 2017: 25).

Ironically, 42 out of the 49 women MPs were from the Islamist party, al-Nahda, which is a fact that Tunisian feminists did not expect. They thought that Islamists would follow a policy of exclusion against women. Despite this noticeable representation of women, al-Nahda party was accused by Tunisian feminists, as Hamza (2016) argues, promoting women who do not have feminist orientation into political positions, thus playing on gender equality to democratize their party that is considered approaching politics from a conservative perspective. However, concerning gender equality, the Tunisian Islamist party was totally different from the Muslim Brotherhood party in Egypt. Though belonging to the same political ideology, Islamist parties who won elections in Post-Arab Spring countries, Tunisia and Egypt, approached politics differently in regard to women’s political participation

When analyzing the difference between these two Islamist parties, it is necessary to take into consideration the socio-political context of Tunisia. Unlike women in other parts of the Arab world, Tunisian women’s rights were promoted since the creation of the Tunisian Personal Status Code in 1956. In this respect Hamza points out that according to this Personal Status Code, Tunisian women were

able to vote, file for divorce, and pass down Tunisian citizenship to children born abroad or born to a foreign father. Polygamy has officially been banned since the era of Tunisia’s first president. [...] Further, both contraception and abortion are legal and accessible and have been for decades. (2016: 213)

Political reforms in regard to women’s rights continued with President Benali in 1993 reforms. As a result, Tunisian women were already enjoying advanced status compared to other Arab women in the MENA region in the pre-Arab Spring era. This is to say that due to the

feminist legacy in Tunisia that led to the establishment of strong women's organizations, the Islamist party al-Nahda approached politics from a more women-friendly perspective than the Islamists in Egypt.

However, Tunisian women's political participation declined compared to their political representation under Benali regime in which women occupied 27% of parliamentary seats in the 2009 election. In other words, throughout the transitional period after the revolution, women's political rights took a step backward not only in the Parliament, but also in the Cabinet. Out of the 31 ministerial portfolios, only two were assigned to women in the provisional government. (Hamza, 2016).

In the 2014 legislative elections, women placed on the head of lists increased from 3% in 2011 to 8%. In this respect, Hamza states that "While most Tunisian political parties like to claim that they support gender equality and women's rights in order to secure votes, no political party seems to be prepared to move beyond the slogans" (2016: 219). Despite the increase in female representation in parliament to 31.3% of the seats, it is important to emphasize that women received only 3 out of the 41 ministerial portfolios in the post-authoritarian regime (Moghadam, 2015). Moreover, a woman, Kalthoum Kennou, participated for the first time in Tunisian presidential elections, which was a gender phenomenon that Tunisia experienced for the first time.

In Morocco, women have witnessed a political change after the spirit of the Arab Spring found its way to the country and its constitution. Moroccan women have been caught within the dichotomy of the conservatives-Islamist and the modernists-secularists since the 1950s. However, despite this dichotomy, Moroccan feminists succeeded in achieving a very advanced Family Code, known as Moudawana, in 2004. Moudawana gave women "equal rights in various

areas, including the minimum age for marriage, free consent to marriage, management of property acquired during marriage where agreed in writing, divorce on various grounds, and child custody for children over 15” (Manuel, 2015: 149). Additionally, Morocco ratified CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in 2008. Despite all these efforts to adopt a semi-liberal policy toward gender issues, women have not been well represented in the public sphere.

Moroccan women’s political rights were further advanced in the post-Arab Spring constitution. In this new reformed constitution, article 19 enhances gender parity in political positions and guarantees social, economic and political equality between men and women (Manuel, 2015 & Ennaji, 2016). However despite gender parity, women faced difficulties in equal access to public institutions.

The number of women MPs increased from 30 out of 325 in 2007 to 60 out of the 395 seats in 2011 (15%). In the last legislative election in October 2016, the number of women MPs increased to 81 out of 395 (20.5%). Concerning ministerial posts, in the first government after the 2011 constitution there was only one female minister in 2012 to be increased in 2013 to five women ministers. In 2017, only one woman minister was appointed out of 39 ministerial portfolios whereas 8 women were appointed as Secretaries of State which are less important ministerial posts compared to that occupied by men (Gray & Sonneveld, 2018, Touaf & Boutkhili, 2017, & Moghadam, 2015). These slight improvements in the political status of Moroccan women do not reflect the hopes of feminists and those who support gender equality in the political landscape.

Libya, on the other hand, was not an exception in regard to the slight improvement of women’s political participation in post Arab Spring regimes. The National Congress which was

in charge of drafting the new constitution 2011 decided only a 10% quota for women, which was great exclusion of women in post Qaddafi Libya. In the Libyan 2012 election, women constituted 33 seats out of the total 200 (16%); nevertheless, there were only two women ministers out of the 40 ministerial posts.

However, as Johansson-Nogues (2013) illustrates, these substantial political gains, which were a “consequence of the parity safeguards provided in the electoral law”, the presence of women in parliament “has elicited concerns on the part of certain male parliamentarians about men and women ‘mixing’ in public” (p. 403). This is to say that this male misogynist concern is not an outcome of the implementation of Islamic law, Sharia, but rather a misinterpretation of this law to exclude women from the public sphere. Moreover, in the 2013 Paris meeting on state-building, which was attended by the international community, Libyan women were totally excluded (Langhi, 2015). This reality gives a clear picture of women’s political participation in the patriarchal pre-Arab Spring Libya.

In reaction to these changes, both negative and positive, Sadiqi argues that “women made the stories of the revolution but did not own them” (2016: 2). Though Arab women participated actively in the Arab Spring, they were denied full public participation in the aftermath of the revolution. Building on the Algerian 1954 revolution against the French colonization and the Palestinian revolution in the 1980s as examples, Cooke (2016) explains that the denial of political recognition for women is not a new experience to Arab women. They have gone through the same exclusion throughout the Arab history.

Actually, Arab women have had a negative experience with revolutions in general. In this respect, Johansson-Nogues states that in different parts of the Arab world, women struggled with men against colonization; “they fought and died beside men, only to find that afterwards their



'revolutionary brothers/ dismissively sent them back to the kitchens without any relevant improvements on women's right or conditions" (2013: 394). From a feminist perspective, Johansson-Nogues clarifies that "women's participation in regime change is rewarded only if the new men in power want to pacify them or the men belonging to their social class, as well as in cases when women are seen as necessary draftees into socioeconomic development" (2013: 395). Johansson-Nogues also argues that despite the downfall of the former authoritarian regimes in Arab countries, the hegemonic masculinity stayed as it was. Consequently, though they were strongly active during the revolution, women's issues were not solved due to the continuation of this hegemonic masculinity.

It is worth mentioning that generalization cannot be made concerning women's political achievements in post-revolution regimes. This is simply due to the fact that women in Arab countries do not have the same experience in relation to patriarchy and the state. Comparing Tunisia and Egypt, for example, the status of women in Tunisia is more advanced than that of Egyptian women. Though it is clear that Arab women generally speaking were disappointed by the disadvantaging regimes that came to power after the downfall of the authoritarian regimes, no one can deny that women's political participation took a step onward compared to their political situation in pre-Arab Spring. After the Arab 'revolutions', those in power have become aware of the consequences of social unrest and political uprising. As a result, different Arab countries introduced political reforms to meet the demands and needs of women and youth. For example, despite the fact that Algeria did not experience Arab Spring, it took a step toward political reform in 2012 elections adopting a gender quota allowing 31% of the parliamentary seats for women (Moghadam, 2015). The same reform happened in Mauritania in the 2014 elections (see Chapter Six for more details). In other words, the Arab Spring brought some

important changes for women the most important of which is the emergence of a new discourse for women's issues and a new concept for the public space.

#### **4. Arab Women New Political Discourses**

Generally speaking, political activism on the virtual public sphere via means of information and communication technologies was behind the political change that the Arab world witnessed 2010-2011 'revolutions'. The emergence of new Arab public sphere was not accident or sudden. It took decades for this new public sphere to come into being and to leave a real mark on politics in the region. The German philosopher Jurgen Hebermans defines public sphere stating that it "is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling" (quoted in Fraser, 1990: 57). This is to say that through providing new means for interaction and debating, the new Arab public space has given Arabs the opportunity to change their history.

Thus, the "concept of the public sphere in Western democracies," as Ayish explains, "refers to the capacity of civil society members to coordinate their common affairs through a collective discourse which transcends private and narrow individual interests" (2008: 34). From this perspective, individual access to the public discourse reflects the extent to which a country is democratic. In other words, the relation between the state and civil society defines the adopted political approach. In the authoritarian regimes in pre-Arab Spring area dominated the public sphere providing the civil society no other way to public knowledge beyond state institutions.

Though the public sphere underwent an important political transition during the Arab revolutions, this transition was by no means a sudden phenomenon. With media especially social media new public space emerged in the Arab world. It is true that media have been there years ago; however, as Hebermas argues, the role of the media can shift from providing new spaces for

exchange to manipulating civil society for maintaining the power of the state (1989). This is to say that the authoritarian regimes used media for the continuation of their governance through the creation of a passive civil society. Nevertheless, with the emergence of new means of information and communication technologies, especially social media, individuals have found ways to engage into public discourse; as a result, the Arab public sphere was redefined in a way that new civil political actors have had their share in creating the political action.

Generally speaking, from a feminist perspective the public sphere in patriarchal societies is based on a gender dichotomous understanding. In this respect, Arab women have been excluded from public discourse as being domestic subjects who do not belong to the public sphere. However, with the Arab Spring and despite the slight improvement in their political rights, Arab women have an opportunity to engage into the new public discourse.

Drawing on Hebermas' insightful conceptualization of the public sphere as a space for interaction between power relations, it can be argued that the Arab public sphere witnessed interference of a new gendered power relations interaction during the uprisings when women joined the male public domain. This is not to say that gender power was totally silent before the Arab Spring, but it is meant to admit that with the emergence of new public sphere, women negotiate gender power in new ways. An important factor in changing the way that Arab women negotiate their access to public discourse is the emergence of new forms of information and communication technologies. It is known that after the Arab Spring new media and communication technologies reconstructed the power/knowledge dilemma in the Arab world.

From a gender perspective, the concept referred to by Mernissi (1996) as the *Haram*, women's private space, where women cannot access public discourse or information outside their private, changed as a result of the emergence of new media. New media and

communication technologies have given women the opportunity for public mobilization. Despite the fact that this spatial freedom is virtual and that women are still treated as sexual bodies in the real public sphere, this virtual feminine discourse challenges the public-private dichotomy and gives Arab women the chance to claim public sphere and political participation.

This chapter presents women's political representation in Arab countries and the challenges of implementing democracy in the Arab world. The following chapter is an introduction for the second part of the study, includes the practical chapters as well as the methodology followed in the study.

**PART TWO: A PRACTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIO-POLITICAL DISCOURSE  
OF WOMEN IN MAURITANIA**

## **Chapter One:**

### **A Historical Overview of Mauritanian Politics**

This chapter aims to set the local ground for this study; therefore, it introduces the history of Mauritanian women's political participation. In this context, this chapter provides an overview of the most important historical events that characterize Mauritanian women's political participation. These events can be classified in five distinct periods: pre-colonization, years of colonization, the emergence of the state, the implementation of democracy, and post-Arab spring era. However, for better understanding of the context where these events and development have taken place, it is worthy to introduce the country itself, Mauritania.

Geographically, Mauritania is bordered by Morocco, Algeria, Mali, Senegal, and the Atlantic Ocean. Demographically, the country has always been a space for interaction between the Arabs, the Berbers, and Black Africans. Thus Mauritania is a multicultural country with different ethnic groups and different languages. This geographical location, sociocultural, and linguistic diversity have made Mauritania a crossroad and intersection between Black Africa and the Maghreb.

After years of French colonization, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania achieved its independence in November 28<sup>th</sup> 1960. As it was in most French colonies, during the phase of negotiations for the independence, the late 1940s and the 1950s were characterized by political pluralism. In the few years preceding Independent, a number of political parties came into conflict over the future of independent Mauritania. However, under the rule of Mauritania's first civilian president, Mokhtar Ould Daddah 1960, Mauritania became a one-party state in 1964. Though the 1964 new constitution set up as an authoritarian presidential regime, Ould Daddah claimed that due to its nomadic multicultural nature, Mauritania is unready for democracy (Syed

, Akhtar., & Usmani, 2011). Since the 1978 military coup that seized power from Mokhetar Ould Daddah, Mauritania has witnessed a series of military coups that shaped the political, economic, and social instability of the country. During the years of military regimes, Mauritania was a kind of dictatorship country till the creation of its 1991 constitution that raised hope among Mauritians for the implementation of democracy. In this respect, Souare (2011: 25) points out that

“it was under the longest serving leader of Mauritania (1984-2005) that some concrete attempts were made to democratize the country, with Ould Taya’s military regime transforming itself into a civilian one following multiparty election in 1992”.

In brief, Table 1 below summarizes the history of political regimes in Mauritania (1960-2018).

**Table 1: Mauritanian political regimes 1960-2018**

<b>Date</b>	<b>The leader</b>	<b>The way to power</b>
1960	Mokhtar Ould Dadda	Pre-independence election
1978	Moustapha ould Mohamed Salek	Military coup
1979	Mohamed Ould Louly	Replaced Ould Salk after his forced resignation
1980	Mohamed Khona Ould Haidallah	Military coup
1984	Mawiya Ould Sidi Ahmed Taya	Military coup
2005	Ely Ould Mohamed Vall	Military coup
2007	Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdellahi	Democratic election
2008	Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz	Military coup
2009	Mamadou M’Bara Ba	Transitional period when General Abdel Aziz designated to stand for civilian election (Ba, prident of the senate, was the first Afro-Mauritanian to be the head of the state even though it was a short period)

2009	Ould Abdel Aziz ‘	Election of July 2009
2014-2018	Ould Abdel Aziz	Reelected

Mauritania is a republican country based on authoritarian political system in which the president is the Chief of the State and the prime minister is Head of the Government. Its parliament was divided into two houses, National Assembly and Senate. However, with the 2017 constitutional changes the House of Senates was replaced by elected regional councils.

The country is divided into 13 regions (*willaya*) including the capital, Nouakchott, which was lately divided into three regions. Each one of the 15 regions is divided into provinces (*moughataas*). “The government bureaucracy is composed of traditional ministries and special agencies. The Ministry of Interior controls a system of regional governors” (U.S. Department of State, 2011: 54). This brief introduction is meant to introduce the following sub-sections on political disorder and tribal power in Pre-Independence Mauritania, and the 1960s and the emergence of the national state, military regimes and political pluralism, and the representation of the Arab revolution in Mauritania.

## **1. Pre-Independence Mauritania: Political Disorder and Tribal Power**

### **1.1. Mauritanian social structure**

For a better understanding of the different social issues in Mauritania such as gender inequality, racism, repercussions of slavery, and so on, it is worth discussing the social structure of the Mauritanian society. Tribe and ethnic group are two entities that shape the Mauritanian society. Tribe, as Barbara Abeille defines, is a political unit whose members belong to common ancestor and exercise power in a way that guarantees their interests. In this respect, the tribe has played and is still playing an important role in women’s political participation. An ethnic group,



on the other hand, is “based on a feeling of shared identity on the part of people who possess a common life style, language, religion, or other major cultural institution” (Abeille, 1979: 11).

In ancient times, Mauritania was a contact zone between black Africans and Berber, before the Arabs’ immigration to the region. However, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century with the coming of Arab migrants especially the Beni Hassan Black Africans and Berbers got engaged into a series of battles. The Beni Hassan dominated the land, which results in subordination of black Africans, absolute disappearance of the Berber identity, and the construction of a hierarchal social system (Taine-Cheikh, 2007, Diallo, 1993 & Ben Mehend, 2010).

Today, there are five main ethnic groups in Mauritania, Moors, Toucouleur or Pulaar, Wolof, Soninke, and Bambara. Moors, the Hassaniya speakers, occupy the majority of the country except along the Senegal River. They are divided into two main sub-groups, Bidan or white Moors and Hratin or black Moors. White Moors are a mixture of Arabs and Berbers. Bidan comprises different groups, the most important of which are Zwaya who are religious tribes, Hassan or Arab who are warrior groups, Zenaga tribes that are engaged in grazing, Mu’allamin (craftsmen) and Ighyuwn, the entertainers and singers.

Black Moors or Hratine, on the other hand, are the former black-skinned slaves, but due to being in contact with the white Moors, they share the same language, Hassaniya (a dialect derived from Arabic), and other cultural practices. So, they identify themselves as Moorish.

The Pulaar or Toucouleur community, which is the largest black African community, is divided into three main social classes. Unlike the Moorish society which is tribal, Pulaar hierarchal social division is based on capitalism. The torobe are the aristocratic class and they are religious nobles. Fishermen, traders, administrators, and craftsmen compose the middle class and

they are called rimbe while the lower class includes servants (Ben Mehend, 2010, Blauer & Laure, 2009, & Smale, 1980).

Soninke “are the indigenous people of Mauritania, who were the founders of the kingdom of Ghana in southeastern Mauritania in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D” (Diallo, 1993: 20). Their main activities are trade and agriculture. Wolof is the third black African ethnic group. They live on the borders of Senegal, where they practice activities such as fishing and trading. Bambara is the smallest black African ethnic group in Mauritania. They live on the borders with Mali mainly in Nema. There is also another ethnic group that is usually not mentioned as being a unique group because it shares with Moors most of their culture. It is called Imeraguen, the smallest ancient group who live on the Atlantic shore.

Moorish is demographically the dominant ethnic group in Mauritania. However, the issue of census in Mauritania is very problematic because there is no clear-cut accurate statistics of the numerical weight of ethnicities in Mauritania. Some of the Black African Mauritians accuse white Moorish elites of hiding and manipulating the population data in order to represent them as being minorities. However, as it is cited in different studies (e.g., Diallo (1993)), Moors (Bidan and Haratins) consist approximately 70 per cent of the population while it is claimed that black Mauritians constitute only 30 percent of the total population.

Mauritania witnessed different historical events that helped in shaping the social structure of the country. The first people who lived in Mauritania in its modern history are black Africans, but with the collapse of Mourabiton, Senhaja Berber tribes moved to Mauritania. The immigration of the later forced black African to move to the south of the country avoiding falling into slavery. However, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century Bani Hassan tribes moved to Mauritania coming from Arabia specifically Yemen. Maintaining their dominance, Beni Hassan fought Sanhaja Berber

tribes. After the Char Bouba war (it is known as the Mauritanian Thirty Years' War which took place between 1644-1674 in the areas of what is now known as the Moroccan Sahara and Mauritania. Berber tribes were led then by Imam Nasr Al-Din), Beni Hassan defeated Berber tribes and spread their political dominance over the area, which remarked the start of the Arabization of Mauritania (El Kettab, 2012). Pazzanita describes the social structure of the Mauritanian society that was an outcome of the Thirty Years War saying that:

The upshot of this violent and decisive period (1644-74) was the creation of the outlines of modern Mauritanian society, characterized by pronounced divisions between the Arabo-Berbers ("Moors," as they came to be known) and Black Africans, and by a rigidly hierarchical social order amongst the Moorish population, with the Hassan occupying the top position, the *zawaya* slightly below them, and the *Znaga* in decidedly underprivileged status, a station shared by assorted other occupational groups such as bards, musicians, storytellers, and the like, who helped to give Mauritanian Moorish society its complex, multivariate character. (2008: 3)

The above quote illustrates that the results of this war marked the hierarchy within tribes shaping the social structure of the Mauritanian society. So, the Arab-Berber community was divided into two main groups Hassan and Zawaya. Hassan, the warrior tribes, forced the Zwaya tribes to pay tribute, a tribal tax granted for protection. Other dominated groups (some Toucouleur tribes and Soninke) found no other way but to migrate to Sengal and Mali (see for example, Ben Mehend, 2010 & Mundy, 2007).

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, each group of Hassani tribes established its Imara in the region they dominate. This was the beginning of centralized authority in Mauritania. The following map shows the location of the four great Emarats in the pre-colonial Mauritania.

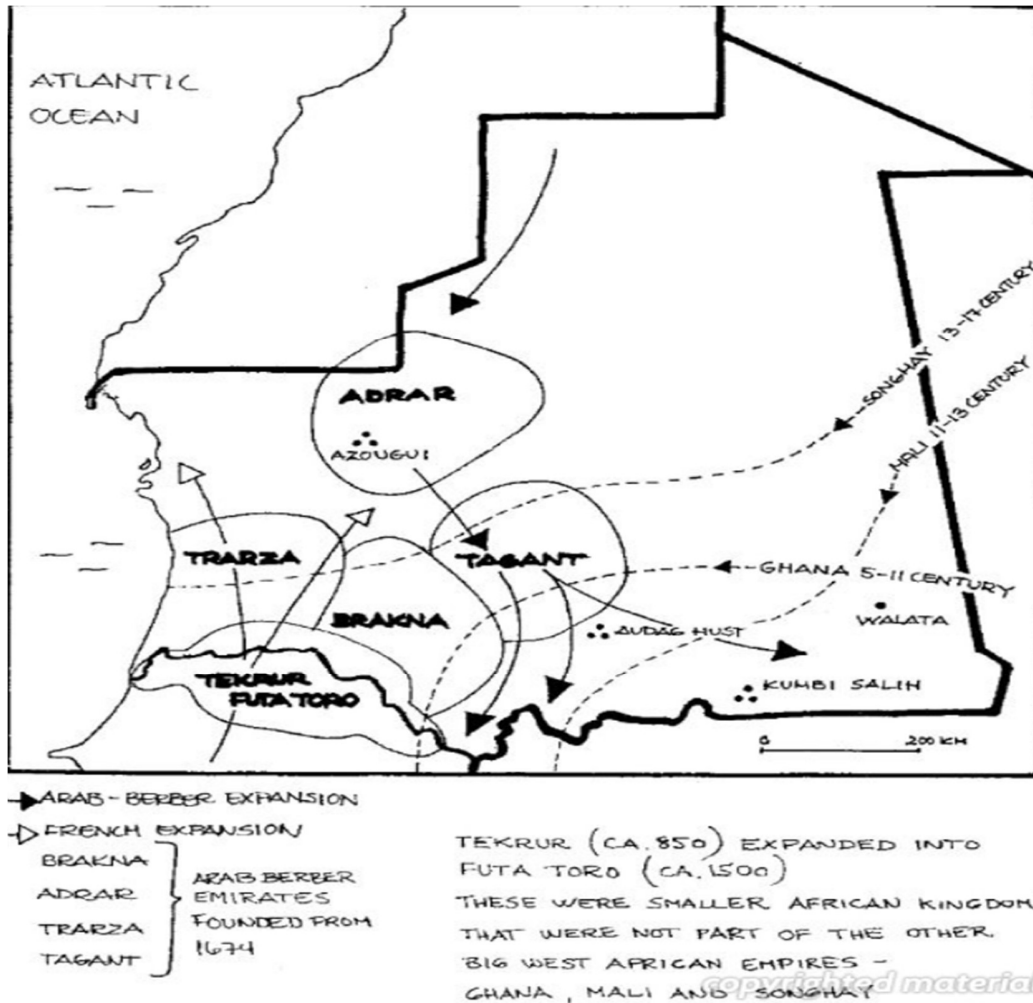


Figure 4: A historical map of Mauritania (Diallo, 1993, p. 16)(Diallo, 1993, p. 16)

### 1.2. Women Access to Power in Tribal Mauritania

In this sub-section, the focus will be on the issue of women’s socio-political position starting from women in the time of Imirates that spread in the country after the collapse of Imam Nasir al-Din’s state in Char Bouba War. It is helpful to clarify at this stage that since Mauritania is a multiethnic society and bearing in mind that the cultural concept is a significant element in the analysis presented in Chapters Seven and Eight, and also the fact that the language of the dominant political discourse is that of Arab-Berber Mauritians, Arabic and Hassaniya, this study focuses more on Moorish women.

Actually, when talking about Mauritanian women's status (especially Moorish women), one has to pay attention to the paradoxical nature of gender relation. Given that the social spaces are divided into public and private spheres in the Mauritanian society, gendered division is very problematic. Unlike the case of women in the majority of Arab-Muslim traditional societies, in which there is no negotiation between women's private space, the *haram*, and men's public space, Mauritanian women were physically free to trespass the public space. Women were able to move freely in male spaces without covering their faces (wearing *neqhab*) enjoying spatial freedom that surprised many Arab and Western researchers and explorers. For example, Skard points out that in Mauritania "a woman [could] travel alone, drink tea with men, and take part in male-dominated conversations" (2003: 236).

Commenting on Mauritanian women's social status in the fourteenth century when he visited Walata, a historical city located in the south-eastern part of Mauritania, the famous Moroccan historian and geographer Ibn Battuta states that "the condition of these people [people of Walata] is astonishing, and its manners are odd. As for the men, they are by no means jealous of their wives" (cited in Camara, 2010: 38). Coming from patriarchal background in which Islam is practiced as a means to oppress women, Ibn Battuta was surprised at the level of emancipation that women of the region enjoyed. However, as Mernissi argues, "space has a primarily social rather than physical quality. The notion of trespassing is related not so much to physical boundaries as to the identity of the person performing the act" (1987: 143). This means that despite the physical presence of Mauritanian women into the public, they were performing their inferior feminine identity. In other words, women were denied the right to participate in public affairs which are considered to be male concern.

Thus, paradoxically despite the disappearance of the physical barrier between public and private, patriarchal discourse reduced women's participation in tribal political system. This can be proved by the gendered stereotypical naming of women who aim public participation which is deeply woven into the Mauritanian cultural heritage. Salka Mint Essenid (2012), a Mauritanian journalist and writer, talks about the use of gendered comic names that negatively describe the wise women who shows interest in public affairs. She mentions different names among which *Shahra* and the alike. *Shahra* is a metaphoric name that is used to refer to any curious woman who tries to know that which is supposed to go beyond women's knowledge and interest. Such stereotypical idioms and names illustrate the patriarchal nature of the Mauritanian society that denied women access to public life.

More significantly, when examining the political structure of the tribe, it was impossible to find a woman appointed as princesses in the *imaretic* system. The Amiri Diwan, the administrative office of the ruler (the Emir), included administrators (the wise *men* of the Amir's tribe and the allied tribes), the religious scholar (*Vaqhih*), poets of the Amir, and musicians (Fridikia, 2016). Of course, there was a total absence of women from these political positions of the Imara. The political structure of the Imara as approximately as that of the tribe except the poet and musicians. On the head of the structure of the tribe was Cheikh - this position is inherited-, there were also his administrators who are the elders of the tribe. It is important to note that the only political role that women played in this political structure was that of elder women organization, which is a group of women in the tribe or Imara who speak on behalf of younger women when it came to marital rights. These women witnessed marriage contracts to listed their demands. These demands mainly revolved around forbidding polygamy, but only Moorish women enjoyed this significant social status (Essenid, 2012).

On the contrary, Hratin women, Black Moorish, faced multiple oppressions, that of slavery and that of their feminine identity in a patriarchal society. Consequently, women of noble Moorish tribes were supposed to engage in no physical activity except that of supervising slave women who did all the household work. This perhaps explains the famous phenomenon of force-feeding practices which are regarded as disciplining the female body which was a main characteristic of femininity and beauty among Mauritians at that time.

Explaining the reduced role that women played in Mauritanian traditional society, Sidi Amar Ould Cheikhna, a Mauritanian scholar specialized in political science and history, explains that in nomadic life that is characterized by extreme difficulties, the role that men played is usually of much importance compared to that of women (S. A. Ould Cheikhena, personal communication, October, 29, 2017). Moreover, Mekfoula Mint Brahim, a Mauritanian feminist and human right activist, explains that “it is true that women in pre-independence Mauritania played significant social roles such as that of giving advice in relation to marriage and divorce, but we have never heard of women participating in decision making of the tribe or Imara” (M. Mint Brahim, personal communication, October, 25, 2017).

However, it is worth mentioning that despite the political disorder during the time of imarates and tribes, women participated in war through reciting poetry and performing songs encouraging men of the tribe to win. Lesourd (2016: 79) confirms that “in tribal battles and other internal disputes, women encourage men in combat and participate in fighting through an exchange of poetry, including lullabies, in which they boast of the courage of their men the cowardice of their opponents”. Moreover, they play a significant role in promoting peace and solving conflicts.

Despite the patriarchal division of private and public, there are women who played important social and educational roles in the pre-colonial society. Women of Zewayya, for example, were engaged in teaching tasks. They taught Qur'an, Hadith and Arabic to children and women. However, despite the fact that historians admitted the existence of Mauritanian female religious scholars and poetesses, few are those who mention names. Throughout the history books I read, I found only three women scholars that were mentioned briefly without providing details about their contribution, Mariam Mint Hin, Khadija Mint al-Aqel, and Fatimetou Mint Abdel Fattah. Ould Cheikhna marks that "the weakness of history writing that ignored various aspects of the social life, including the role of women causes the absence of feminine touch from Mauritanian history". He adds that "if serious efforts were made in this regard, we would be able to paint a better picture of the distinguished presence of Mauritanian women in the making of the nation's history" (S. A. Ould Cheikhna, personal communication, October, 29, 2017).

Like the traditional political structure of the Moorish tribe, in African black communities, authoritative positions were reserved for men. Smale (1980) states that decision-making in traditional black African Mauritanian society was based on a rigid hierarchal system depending on the criteria of age and sex. This is to say that in these communities, women's role cannot be denied especially on the base of economic development (the fact that these women participated in agriculture and handcrafting), but they were excluded from decision-making positions because of their sex.

### **1.3. Women in the Late 1950s: Negotiation for the Independent**

After a long period of being administratively tied to the French general colonial government in Saint-Louis, the capital of Senegal at that time, Mauritania, for the first time, got a representative post in the French parliament and was administratively separated from Senegal



with the 1946 election of Horma Ould Babana as the President of the General Council of the Territory of Mauritania. After being separated from the administrative government in Senegal and gaining the right to elect its representatives in the French parliament, Mauritania entered in a new phase that led to autonomous governance and then to independence.

Preparing for the autonomous government 1958, Mauritians campaigned as those in support of the constitution and those who were against it. For instance, Lesourd (2016: 79) states that “many local figures entered the campaigning process; among them was a female trader and an activist of the Mauritanian Republican Party. [...] Mokeltoum traveled between Atar and Chingetti to campaign for Mokhtar Ould Daddah”. However, this woman was the only one mentioned as taking part in politics in this period. Sidi Ould Sidi Ahmed Elbekay, a Mauritanian researcher in the field of women studies, states that since the early political parties that emerged in Mauritania in the late 1940s and 1950s (the Progress Union Party 1947, the Understanding Party 1950, the Mauritanian Youth Association 1955, the Renaissance Party 1958, and the National Union Party 1959) were mainly regional and tribal parties, there was no chance for women to participate (2010). Obviously, the absence of women from the political scene was a result of the cultural perception that politics is a masculine domain as well as their total political absence from tribal political structure in pre-colonial period. Encouraging political parties through poetry and lullabies was the only role played by women.

Vivi Mint Feyji, a Mauritanian social and political activist, mentions in an interview with Chinguitti TV Channel that in the late 1950s women in Atar, a city in the northeast of the country, like so many other women in different parts of Mauritania played an important role in supporting Hizb Al-Nahda 1958, the Mauritanian National Renaissance Party, for its Arab nationalism goals. Explaining the nature of their political involvement, she adds “we used to call

them *El-Zouama* [Chiefs]. We created tebra [short poems that only women tend to say; it is considered feminine poetry] and lullabies praising and supporting them.” She recites a part of a song as an example:

لُومَاجَاوُ الزُّعَامِ ... تَخْلُكُ طِفْلَةً، تَنْتِنِ وَلاَ عَشْرَهُ كَاغْ أَثْوَامِ

If the Chiefs had not come, it would have just been like the birth of a baby girl, two or even ten. (Mint Feyji, 2017)

The meaning of the above song is that if *El-Zouama*, the leaders of the Al-Nahda Party had not been engaged into politics, it would have been a disaster on the Mauritanian society just like that of the birth of a baby-girl. Paradoxically, lullabies such as the above succeeded on the level of integrating women into public discourse which was forbidden for them, but at the same time they reinforced the very patriarchal system that silenced them. Mauritanian women’s public discourse then was far from being a feminist discourse; it echoed the patriarchal ideological norms. These women reflected the internalization of patriarchy through the use of gendered metaphors in their political discourse. This point will be discussed in more details in Chapter Four of this part when analyzing female politicians’ use of gendered metaphors in twenty-first century Mauritanian politics.

## **2. The 1960s and the Emergence of the National State**

### **2.1. Women’s Associations**

Being the president of a new born country that was still begging recognition from the international community and that which the majority of its population were nomadic tribes that have never experienced the concept of centralized authority (at least in their modern history),

Mokhtar Ould Daddah had to seriously face various challenges. Women's integration into public life was a main challenge that Daddah's regime included in its policy.

As it is aforementioned, Mauritanian society did not encourage women's participation in public affairs and this has been reflected in the Mauritanian reaction toward educational institutions offered by the colonizer. Some historians explain the refusal of Mauritians in general and Moorish in particular to the schooling of their children as being a cultural resistance to colonization. However, as Vivi Mint Feyji narrates, despite the fact that some families refused French education in general, the majority of them sent their sons and denied their daughters any chance of education. She adds that this phenomenon lasted until years after the independence. She states that even in the late 1960s and of 1970s there were few educated women (April 6<sup>th</sup> 2017). Moreover, in the 1995 edition of *Elboushera* newspaper, Houtotou Mint Abdelahi discusses that in pre-independence Mauritania, people in general refused the French schools, but in the 1950s and early 1960s, with the independence, families sent their male children to the modern schools. Unfortunately, girls were denied education at that time (1975).

Consequently, one of the main reasons behind women's absence from political positions in post-independent Mauritania is the socio-cultural perceptions that did not allow women to access education. On the other hand, Afro-Mauritanian women had more chances in education, which shaped their political participation in the years following the independence. The first female Mauritanian minister was an Afro-Mauritanian woman.

The first step toward women's integration into public life started a year after the independence when a group of women gathered in a political meeting 1961 to create Mauritanian women's first association *L'Union dest Femmes Mauritaniennes* (the Union of Mauritanian Women). This association was an effort of the President's French wife, Mariem Daddah and

other elite women as an attempt to promote socio-political change in Mauritania. In the 5<sup>th</sup> March 1962, these women sent a letter to the President Mokhtar Ould Daddah clarifying the demands of their association. Following are some points:

- Improving the cultural level of Mauritanian women without distinction based on race or religion
- The protection of women by the fight against anarchic divorce
- Defending the rights of Mauritanian women in all socio-political fields until their intellectual and material level allows them to be equal to women in the world
- Fighting Ignorance
- Educating children according to modern pedagogy without neglecting Islamic Education [Meaning without ignoring Mehdera, which is the traditional school of Mauritania even before colonization]
- Contributing to the development of a modern Muslim society (cited in L'espace de Pouvoir Sutil, n.d.)

Paradoxically, in the above activists of the Union of Mauritanian Women did not demand equality between the sexes. Though one can argue then that the exclusion of a significant demand such as equal access to power ended up in the movement losing its feminist identity, still it is possible that these women took into consideration the nature of the semi-nomadic Islamic patriarchal society. Mokhtar Ould Daddah commenting on the efforts of his wife, Mariem, explains that,

she began her social work early, first with the few female inhabitants of the capital, then with those of Ksar [the old urban center], who belonged to all social strata of the country. Then gradually this educational activity was extended to the entire country, especially since 1964, with the development of the Mauritanian People's Party. (cited in Lesourd, 2016: 80)

In 1964, a group of women who were against the involvement of Mariem Daddah in the country's issues created another women's union called Women's League (V. Mint Feyji, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017). Later on, with the creation of Mauritanian People's Party (PRM), the government party, the two women's associations integrated under the Superior Council of Women which was chaired by Mariem Daddah. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, women began to participate in international seminars and to invite women from other countries for symposia and meetings. Mint Feyji adds that in 1969, Mauritanian women celebrated Women's International Day, 8 March, for the first time in the country. They invited women from different places of the world, Europe, Arab world, Maghreb, and Africa. "Despite the fact that Mauritanian women participated in the event, not only women of Nouakchott, but other women came from different parts of Mauritania," she explains that the majority of Mauritanian participants did not have political awareness of the importance of such International Day for women (April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017). However, it is worth noting that despite inviting national female participants, the majority of them were unconscious of the significance of women's integration in public.

Although these associations flourished due to the nature of their members, who were mainly wives of wealthy men and political leaders, the pressure of religious conservatives, who did not favor women political demands, on the government party caused the movement to stay inside the walls of the capital. Thus, women of the countryside did not benefit from women's movement at that time. For instance, Lesourd states that "the discourse of these female activists did not echo outside the capital; in fact, it did not even reach the urban Haalpular and Soninke women, since these groups disagreed with the fight against polygamy, one of the movement's main demands" (2016: 80).

In his article ‘Set Back Women in Politics’, Mohamed Abd Rahman (2010) explains that despite the efforts that Mariam Dadah tried for the integration of women into power, Mauritanian women stayed in their traditional status. He believed that this is because of the refusal of anything that has relation to do with the colonizer. The failure of Mauritanian women’s movement can be explained with respect to the fact that the woman who was visibly active was Mariam Dadah, a French woman, whom the majority of people refused due to accusing her of western modernization that came into conflict with their Islamic identity. Second, the socio-cultural aspects of the society played an important role in this failure. As Mokhtar Ould Daddah explains in his 2003 biographical book,

Some of the assumed responsibilities of Mariem [or Marie-Thérèse, his wife] involved particularly sensitive areas for us: the evolution of women and ideology, domains that remain close enough when they are not intermingled with. Hence the reluctance—if not hostility—that she met with. So much so that in addressing these issues, she started with two specific handicaps: her origin and being a woman. But in our country, one hundred percent Muslim and conservative in its quasi-totality, a woman should not take an active interest in an area reserved for men: politics [...] In this context, what a “bombshell” it was when Mariem began to speak of the necessary evolution of women, promotion of women through labor, and generalized education for girls. (quoted in Lesourd 2016: 80)

Clearly, despite her avoidance of equality demands, the nature of the Islamic Mauritanian conservative society was against the integration of feminist ideology. Commenting on the Mauritanian society’s reaction toward her in an interview with al-Wasat newspaper, Mariem Daddah states that in the 1960s, Mauritanian thought that she was trying to westernize their women, but, she explains, “I was just helping the President who would have done it without me because this was his modern approach even before he became president” (2010).

Fatimatou Mint Mohamed El-Mustafa, a Mauritanian political activist and the coordinator of the Policy and Governance Committee of Women's Advocacy Initiative, clarifies that "it is true that Mauritians refused Mariem Daddah, which was normal for a nomadic society who was not open on the Other. But, Mariem Daddah was not the only women who took reaction to promote women's participation in public. There were other women such as Mariem Mint Hamidone who established a women's unions before that of Mariem Daddah's which was called the Union of Women of Nouakchott" (F. Mint Mohamed El-Mustafa, 13 October, 2017, personal communication).

Actually, despite the negative attitudes toward this movement, the 1960s and 1970s women movement in Mauritania succeeded on the level of integrating few women into politics, which was almost impossible the years after the independence. In the mid 1970s, women accessed government *portfolio*. In 1975, Aissata Toure Kan, the first female minister, was appointed as minister of Family and Social Affairs.

## **2.2. Women's Discourse in Elkadihin Era**

In December 1961 National Unity Conference was held with the participation of all political parties. Based on this conference the Mauritanian People's Party headed by President Mokhtar Ould Daddah was assigned as the only party in the country. This one-party policy adopted by Ould Daddah ensured the majority of Mauritians that Ould Daddah's rule was just another face of the French colonization.

Thus, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, on the base of ideological- political differences, Mauritania witnessed political uprisings. These uprisings were led by students and workers' movement or what is known in Mauritanian history as the movement of *Kadihi*, which resulted in creating the Party of Mauritanian Kaddihin 1973. Kadihin's movement forced Ould Daddah's

government to implement a series of political reforming projects such as the nationalization of MIFERMA, a mining company that was under the French control, and the creation of a national currency which marks the beginning of the economic independence of the country.

During the years of Kaddihin's political revolution, Mauritanian witnessed a series of imprisonments. Once again with this "backdrop of unrest and distrust, women invested in politics and expressed their political preferences, disapproval, and anger through chanting poetry and lullabies, in which they addressed social issues" (Lesourd, 2016: 81). Through this poetry, which was known as *tebraa*, a feminine discourse, women rose as genuine political agents and addressed pertinent political issues.

This feminine political discourse, lullabies, was produced mainly by Moorish women. These songs carried some serious messages such as exile, lack of freedom, denunciation, and military surveillance. In the 1970s and through the same discursive behavior, women expressed Kaddihin's ideas. Lesourd argues that some of the demands women stressed on using lullabies were met such as the revision of the economic agreement between France and Mauritanian with the creation of national currency and the nationalization of the mining company MIFARMA transforming into the Mauritanian's SNIM. This is to say that such songs helped in accomplishing the 1970s political demands. Ould Ahmed Salem (1995) provides a translation of one of these poems as an example of women's contribution:

My son of mine, this excellent boy  
He promotes dialogue here  
He boasts national unity  
In a national front  
Here is the program  
That he strongly advocates  
He calls for freedom of thought



And freedom of expression  
He also has a main claim  
That of freedom of association  
My son of mine, this valorous one  
He claims the nationalization of iron  
He also wants to quickly  
End our misery. (cited in Lesourd, 2016: 81)

Though the above song represents man as the actor, who brings change, and woman as the supporter, who follows and praise, women through poetry contributed to the public discourse. Women's political activism during the Kaddihin's period was not only through poetry, but they also got engaged into covert actions that led some of them even to prison. Lesourd interviewed one of these women. Explaining her experience, Aminetou said:

I hid leaflets under my veil, here on my stomach [...] I went from house to house: information and the leaflets had to circulate. Leaflets and newspapers had to move across Mauritania, and reach the prisoners [...] Even when I traveled to Laayoune, I carried them with me [...] We were many women to support kaddihin in Tidjikja [...] We were well organized but we had no means and we were watched very closely by the police [...] There were even kaddihin moms whose husbands were in the secret information service! Moms were muzzled, women were covered with gasoline; they wanted to scare them. Some suffered so much [...] Kaddihin was a personal choice; family had nothing to do with it, not like now. (2016: 82)

Moreover, In his book *Mudhakirat Sajin* [A Prisoner's Diary], Mamadou Tiyyib Saw narrates the political experience of Muhamed Elmoustefa Ould Bader Edin, a Mauritanian famous politician. In his narration, Ould Bader Edin reflected on the Mauritanian political situation during the late 1960s and the 1970s. Interestingly, he mentioned names of women who participated in the 1968 political events that led to large-scale of political imprisonment that

targeted a number of activists among which women such as Mariem Mint Lehweyj. Ould Bader Edin recalls the memory of his arrest saying “Maryam Bint Lehweyj’s arrest had a special impact on me, especially when I saw marks of torture on her body” (Saw, n.d.:10).

Mauritanian army’s participation in 1975 Sahara War increased internal political conflicts leading to the overthrow of Mokhtar Ould Daddah via military coup 1978. As the 28 November 1960 was a new phase in the history of Mauritanian women’s political achievements, 1978 was a turning point in the history of women’s political participation.

### **3. Military Regimes and Political Pluralism**

#### **3.1. The Decline of Women’s Political Achievements**

Since its independence, Mauritania has gone through major political transformations. Claiming that the country was in an urgent need for political reform, the Military Committee of National Recovery (CMRN) headed by Colonel Moustapha Ould Mohamed Salek seized power from the first civilian president, Mokhtar Ould Daddah on July 10, 1978. Disagreements started looming within members of CMRN, which resulted in forcing Ould Mohamed Salek to resign. Colonel Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Ahmed Louly succeeded Ould Mohamed Salek as the head of (MCNS) and president of the country. In January 1980, the prime minister, Col. Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidalla, replaced Ould Ahmed Louly to become the president.

During the first two years (1978 till 1980) of military regimes, Mauritania came through political disorder. Under the four years of Ould Haidalla’s rule, women’s organizations were dissolved and the discourse of women’s movement that was experienced during the eighteen years of Daddah’s regime faded away. This is to say that Mauritanian women’s movement witnessed stagnation after the coup against Ould Daddah. With the new military rule especially that of Ould Heidala, women political activities were limited. Sidi Ould Sidi Ahmed Elbekay, a

Mauritanian researcher in the field of women studies, argues that some social activists labeled Heidalala's rule as "women's marginalization period" (2010). Commenting on the political status of women in the early 1980s, Vivi Mint Feyji states that women had no voice in Haidalla's rule. She adds:

Before his withdraw, he made a little effort to include women, but practically it was no more than propaganda. They established women committees in order to raise political consciousness among women. We, women of the committees, were asked to deliver lectures on different issues of women concern, but they gave us what to say. Each one of us received a copy of the speech she was supposed to deliver. (Mint Feyji, April 27, 2017)

With the bloodless military coup of 12 December 1984, a new phase began in which women gained more political rights than before. With the democratization of the country introduced by the international conventions in favor of women, Maaouiya Ould Sid'ahmeed Taya paid more attention to the discourse revolving around the importance of women's political participation.

### **3.2. Democracy and Women's Presence in Political Parties**

The Mauritanian political experience has undergone three different periods. The First Republic or the civil era took place from 1960 to 1978. This period is marked by the one party system in which President Mokhtar Ould Daddah changed the political approach from the parliamentary system of 1959 to presidential system under the constitution of 1961. The second period is the military era starting from 1978 to 1991. This period was marked by political instability and the recurrence of military coups. The military regimes in this period resolved the country's experience with the one-party system imposing military dictatorship.

The third period is supposedly a period of pluralism, power circulation, and democratization. Despite the fact that the adoption of democratic constitutionalism was a presidential decision, the real intentions behind it was the survival of Ould Taya's regime and coping with international policy. In other words, the announcement of democratic pluralism came as a reaction toward the speech of the French president, Francois Mitterrand, when he called for the democratization of African countries saying: "it was time for these states [African countries] to embark on democratization, and that French aid to African countries would henceforth be given out on a scale commensurate with their efforts at democratization" (Gahima, 2013: 35).

Despite the fact that Mauritania entered the democratization process with the first multiparty election in 1992, the country lately witnessed two successful military coups. The first was when Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall took power from Ould Taya 2005 in bloodless coup while the second was led by General Mohamed Ould Abdel-Aziz on 6 August 2008 ending the civilian rule of Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdullah, the first Mauritanian elected president in the country's history. In spite of the democratic claim that the Constitution, which supports the distribution of power between different groups, military regimes used democracy only as a means to institutionalize its dominance over political life. Following the same strategy that Ould Taya followed in presidential election of 1992, Ould Abdel Azis ran for election in 2009 to democratize his regime.

Without doubt, the country's experience of democracy has never been a happy one. As it is aforementioned, Mauritanian knew eight presidents; six of them came to power through military coups. In the history of the country, there have been nine military coups; three of them failed.

However, despite the unstable politics, the process of democratization, which has been adopted since 1991, has brought some change to Mauritians in general and women in particular.

Undoubtedly, political parties are the most effective means through which women can access electoral offices and achieve political leadership. Theoretically speaking, political pluralism offers women different means for representation. Through parties, Mauritanian women gained the chance to be nominated as candidates where they reached parliamentary and municipal positions. This is to argue that conceptually parties stand as a political platform where women can express themselves and raise awareness among other women. Maimouna Mint El Taqi, the Minister of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family, ensures in a TV program on the Mauritanian national channel that in order for women to reach decision making positions, they have to integrate into political parties because this is the only way through which they can gain political representation (2014).

Coping with international policy, Mauritanian parties, both from the majority and from the opposition, worked toward including women for the democratization and modernization of their parties. It is also international political requirement to establishment the gender political quota. Through the inclusion of women, these parties build electoral base that guarantees for them better political chances. Paradoxically, despite these attempts to include women in political parties, their participation remained limited to the level of women's affairs on the sense that they created isolated women's organizations inside the structure of the party.

Despite the important role that they play in political parties especially on the base of campaigning, Mauritanian women have never held a leading position in these parties, except the few parties headed by women and which are mainly weak parties. Women are usually attached to the inferior positions within the party such as that of social work. This is to say that women's

presence in parties reinforces the patriarchal dominant structure. There will be more elaboration on the paradoxical presence of women in political parties in the chapters seven and eight.

Concerning the government policy toward the integration of women into the public sphere, many efforts were done starting from Ould Taya's rule. On March 5, 1986, Ould Taya delivered his famous speech in Nema, a city in south-eastern Mauritania, in which he stressed the inclusion of women in politics:

All citizens (male and female) became players in Mauritania's national future, especially women, given the impact they have on children as the ones primarily responsible for their education and as the guardians of social values. For this, and as prescribed by our Holy Religion Islam, women must assimilate and take on the demands of the new productive society and get rid of all social barriers that have hindered the progress of our people now free and egalitarian. Mauritanian women, just like Mauritanian men, have the right to education, work, responsibility [...] This is the political will of the national leadership. (Lesourd, 2016: 83)

Promoting gender equality and the need for women's development, Ould Taya shifted from speech to action in 1987 through appointing Khadigetou Mint Amed as minister of Mines and Industry. Year after year, the number of women in government increased. In 1989, a Ministry for the Promotion of the Status of Women was created which helped in promoting girls education, developing the economic status of poor women, and increasing women's political participation. However, with the absence of any protectionist law, women's access to decision-making positions remained low. In the late 1980s and 1990s women's appointed as ministers and other leadership positions remained around 7%. The beginning of 2000s, the number increased to reach 15.78% (Ould Sidi Ahmed Elbekay, 2010).

On May 10, 2001 Mauritania ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). To confirm the Islamic identity, Mauritania adopted

only the articles of the Conventions that do not go against *Sharia* (Islamic law) and principals of the Constitution. In the 2000s, women political status witnessed important changes at the quantitative base. In 2001, the government adopted the Code du Status Personnel (Family Code) for protecting women and ensuring women empowerment in society; however, still the majority of the amendments of this family code reflect the patriarchal nature of the society. In 2006, a quota of 20% of women on the list of candidates for municipal and parliamentary elections was established to help women access positions of decision-making. On the base of women presence in political parties, in 2000 Naha Mint Mouknass, daughter of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs in Ould Dadah's rule was elected as the president of the party of Union for Democracy and Progress. She was the first woman to lead a national political party in the history of the country. Later on, four political parties, which were under the presidency of women, emerged. Moreover, in the presidential elections of 2003 and 2014 two, women were nominated as presidential candidates; Aïchatou Mint Jiddan 2003 who obtained only 0.47% of the votes and Lalla Mariem Mint Mulay Idriss 2014 who obtained 0.49 of the votes. Nevertheless, the Mauritanian feminine experience with presidential election has never been taken seriously. Many Mauritians accused the political regimes of fabricating these feminine candidates in order to ensure foreign observers about the democratic face of Mauritania.

However, despite the adoption of policy for supporting women's participation in political landscape, there is a paradox that revolves around two contradictory points in Mauritanian women's political life. Lesourd summarizes the oxymoron surrounding Mauritanian women in politics stating that "two distinct realities characterize the equation between women and politics in Mauritania: the strength of women's commitment and their ability to have a voice versus the limited place and minor role they are actually granted within institutions of power" (Lesourd,

2016, p. 78). In this respect, she raises problematic question in her article “The Lipstick on the Edge of the Well: Mauritanian Women and Political Power (1960-2014)”. Is it that women have been imposed on politics or is it that politics have been imposed on women? This question will be tackled in Chapter Three of this part.

#### **4. The Repercussions of the Arab Revolutions in Mauritania**

Like many countries in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa), the Arab uprisings or that which is referred to as Arab Spring Revolution reached Mauritania. The Mauritanian story with the Arab Spring started when Yacoub Ould Dhoud, influenced by the Tunisian Mohamed Bouaziz, set himself on fire on 17 January 2011 in front of the Presidential Palace in the capital of the country, Nouakchott. Late on, organizing themselves under the Movement of 25<sup>th</sup> February, the Mauritanian youth organized protested on 25 February demanding democratic reform and the resignation of the military regime. Moreover, hoping that the Mauritanian version of the Arab Spring would withdraw Ould Abdel Aziz’s rule as in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, opposition parties participated in these protests along with Afro-Mauritanian movements such as Touche Pas a ma Nationalite (Do not Touch my Nationality, which is a movement that is calling for ethnic equality).

The protesters’ demands were revolving around reforms regarding educational system, economy, unemployment, health, poverty, and women’s equal access to power resources, but the main demand was that in order for the socio-political reform to take place, they should overthrow Ould Abdul Aziz first. Youth movements such as 25 February Movement collaborated with youth organization in political parties to continue their revolution till they succeed in establishing democratic Mauritania in which all Mauritians enjoy dignity and equality. Late on, disagreements found its way to members of the 25 February Movement creating two groups, one



keeping the main essential demand of the movement which is the overthrow of Ould Abdl Aziz's regime and the other calling for giving the current regime the chance to make serious political and social reforms.

Organizing and marching alongside men, Mauritanian women like women in Arab Spring countries participated in the 2011 protests. They played an important role both in the social media level in organizing and passing the revolution's messages and in the level of the real struggle in streets. Some of these women were seized by the soldiers; others were attacked and beaten. Ahmed Jedou, a Mauritanian activist and a member of the 25 February Movement, states that:

25 February included visible women who participated strongly. They have been arrested just as men. I think that it is normal for women to participate in the Mauritanian Arab Spring because like any Mauritanian citizen they were oppressed and denied their socio-political rights. Thus, women played a prominent role in the revolution (A. Jedou, November 11, 2017, personal communication).



**Figure 5: Mauritanian women's participation in the 2011 protests**

Despite the fact that Mauritanian youth, men and women share similar demands with other youth in the Arab Spring countries, they did not succeed in withdrawing Ould Abdel Aziz regime. Though there are equal similarities between the Mauritanian protests and that of other Arab countries, Mauritians could not achieve their demands due to different factors.

Actually, when analyzing the circumstances behind the failure of Mauritanian Arab Spring, one can classify them in three main factors. First, it is known that social media played an important role in Arab Spring in all countries, which was not the case in Mauritanian. Poor access to Internet was behind the unorganized strikes and thus poor participation. Second, the political differences between the participants themselves stood as an obstacle in face of unifying their efforts to stand against their common enemy, Aziz's regime. There were different groups from different ideological backgrounds, Afro-Mauritanian youth, Islamists, liberalists, leftists, *Heratin* radical activists and so on. These pulled the participants back and created disagreements between them. More importantly, the protesters did not succeed in convincing members of the Mauritanian military to stand with them which helped protesters in some Arab countries.

Though, as it is aforementioned, the Mauritanian version of Arab Spring did not meet its main demands, it seems that some positive impacts happened in the post-Arab Spring years. Generally speaking, the governing regime in Mauritania, like in other Arab countries, recognized the need for changing their authoritarian political systems. Ould Abdel Aziz opened the door to communicate with the Mauritanian youth. This communication resulted in creating High Council for Youth on April 28, 2015, which included female members. Moreover, Ould Abdel Aziz integrated more female ministers in the last years 2012-2017. The present government (following the last election in 2014) includes nine women ministers. Moreover, women representation on the base of parliamentary and municipal positions increased compared to the pre-Arab Spring

era. 33% of the parliamentary seats are women and there are six female mayors out of the total of 218.

However, the majority of Mauritians in general and activists in particular believe that these changes are metaphorically used just for silencing people. This is to say that they claim that neither the High Council for Youth nor women's representation is practically touchable. The majority of Mauritanian youth do not believe that the High Council for Youth represents them and the majority of women activists think that despite the efforts done by the President, women are still underrepresented and far away from decision-making positions. In this respect, Fatimatou Mint Mohamed Al-Mustafa, the coordinator of the Advocacy Team for the Political Participation of Women, argues that it is true that there have been efforts to include women, but these efforts are not granted for nothing. She states that:

Women fought for gaining equal political rights, and this is the result of their fight. I think that the Arab Spring along with women's movements around the world helped Mauritanian women to be conscious of their political and social rights. However, still we have not met political parity or the main demands that we hope for. (F. Mint Mohamed Al-Mustafa, October, 25, 2017, personal communication)

Additionally, commenting on the feminization of the Mauritanian government that was adopted in post-Arab Spring Mauritania, Ahmed Jedou argues that:

Including more women in the political landscape is just an illusion. Of course the uprising voices of women and the youth in general embarrass Aziz's regime and he is ready to do anything that can silence them, but I do not think this is the main reason behind the attempts of feminizing the government. I think that he is using women. He wants to show the international community that under his rule, Mauritania is more democratic and women have more access to power. Moreover,

through these women, for example women in the parliament, he can pass the laws he wants because the majority of them are under his control. (A. Jedou, November, 11, 2017, personal communication)

Despite the fact that Mauritanian government seemed to adopt a process toward the feminization of politics, women's participation is still circulating around the traditional image of the traditional woman politician. The sovereign ministries such as Interior, Defense, Finance, and Foreign Affairs are still under masculine control while women provided with ministries in relation to social and health affairs. It is true that, Mauritania gave once women the chance to rule Ministry of Foreign Affairs when appointed Naha Mint Mouknass, but this feminine experience did not last long. The division of masculine and feminine ministries will be analyzed in Chapter Three of Part Two.

This particular chapter provides brief overview of the Mauritanian political context explaining women's political participation. The next chapter represents the followed methodology both in conducting the data and data analysis.

## Chapter Two: Research Methodology

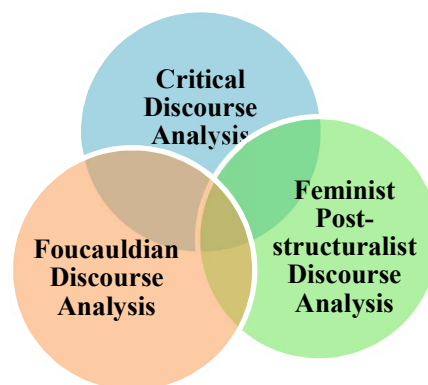
This chapter presents the methodological framework for this study. It contains four main sections that tackle the different aspects of the methodological process. Methodologically, this study delves into a deeper inquiry to dissect the socio-political and cultural agendas that constructed the identity of the female politician via their discursive practices. Undoubtedly, dealing with an interdisciplinary topic such as this in which combined theories of gender, discourse, linguistic, sociology, and political science requires adopting various analytical approaches. Based on the aims of this study, both qualitative and quantitative approaches are used. It is also important to point out that since the core argumentation of the dissertation revolves around language, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used as the main methodological approach. It is worthy to note that based on the multidisciplinary nature of the study, CDA will be approached from feminist post-structuralist perspective.

### 1. Theoretical Framework

*Indeed, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. It is this distribution that we must reconstruct, with the things said and those concealed, the enunciations required and those forbidden, that it comprises; with the variants and different effects – according to who is speaking, his position of power, the institutional context in which he happens to be situated – that it implies; and in the shifts and reutilizations of identical formulas for contrary objectives that I also includes. Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are.*

*We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (Foucault, 1978: 100-101)*

The methodology of this study is imbedded in the adopted definition of discourse that is provided in section 3.1 of Chapter One. Interestingly, Foucault in the above quote summarizes the relationship between power and discourse which defines the theoretical framework adopted in the present study. It has been argued in the previous part of this thesis that discourse constructs the subjective experience of women and thus limits their chances to act outside the patriarchal realms of femininity. In this framework, the methodology used in this study incorporates a multidisciplinary perspective on discourse in that it adopts three approaches: critical discourse analysis, Foucauldian discourse analysis, and feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis. Thus, this thesis positions itself at the crossroads of these three methodological perspectives. The methodological framework is summarized in **Figure 6**.



**Figure 6: The used approaches to discourse analysis**

Researchers should be selective in regard to the research techniques and materials. The aim and objectives of any study determine the methodological framework. Since the main aims of this study are: first to critically analyze the validity of women's political discourse investigating how the feminine identity is expressed or suppressed via this discourse and, second, to examine the effectiveness of their political participation, the next section is devoted to discussing the adopted approaches to discourse analysis.

## **2. Approaches to Discourse Analysis**

Social scientists and humanists have drawn attention toward the significant role that language played in constructing reality. This discursive turn results in the establishment of Discourse Analysis (DA) as a major approach to research. Traditionally, DA belonged to the domain of linguistics; thus, it focused on analyzing the structure and systematic use of language. However, with the attention paid to the importance of language in understanding social issues which has attracted researchers from different disciplines, the function of DA moved from the systematic analysis of language to analyzing the conditions and possibilities that are behind language use or the sociolinguistic perspective.

DA, as Trappes-Lomax notes, is “a multi-disciplinary field [that is] hugely diverse in the range of its interests” (2004, p. 133). Thus, this multi-disciplinary nature of DA makes it difficult to provide a common definition of this controversial field and concepts that fall within its scope. Each discipline approaches it from different perspective depending on how it conceptualizes *discourse*. Thus, to meet the main analytical purposes of the present study, emphasis is on DA as an umbrella term under which various approaches and methods for examining how meaning is produced and reproduced through text and discourse(s). On this line of thought, the three approaches to DA that are integrated and used in data analysis for this study, Critical Discourse

Analysis (CDA), Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), and Feminist Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA), are explained in the following subsections.

### **2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical Discourse analysis is an approach to the study of language that has been introduced in various research fields. Wodak explains that CDA takes “a particular interest in the relation between language and power” (2001: 2). Defining CDA, she argues that it is an analytical approach which is “fundamentally concerned with analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (p. 2). This is to say that CDA aims at investigating social inequalities that are (re)constructed and reinforced through the use of language. Influenced by the German sociologist Jurgen Habermas, critical discourse analysts assume that language work to maintain power. Thus, when adopting CDA approach, analysts do not only concentrate on the structure of language but also investigate both “the social processes and structures which give rise to the production of a text, and the social structures and processes within which individuals or groups as social historical subjects, create meanings in their interaction with texts” (Wodak, 2001: 3).

Similarly, Van Dijk (1990) points out that though language is of a significant use to understanding social life, in order to unveil the implicit circumstances behind social inequality, language should be approached in relation to other non-linguistic systems. Thus, the social context in which text or discourse is produced is of much importance than the isolated text or discourse itself. Commenting on the importance of context when analyzing social and political issues, Wodak states that:

For CDA, language is not powerful on its own – it gains power by the use powerful people make of it. This explains why CDA often chooses the



perspective those who suffer, and critically analyzes the language use of those in power, who are responsible for the existence of inequalities and who also have the means and the opportunity to improve conditions. The discourse analyzed is the dominant discourse, which aims at constructing an identity through the discursive forms of inclusion and exclusion. (2002: 10)

In the present study, the dominant discourse is that of Mauritanian male politicians; thus, it will be analyzed to investigate how the feminine is reflected in their discourse. However, the discourse of female politicians will also be analyzed in relation to how discursive strategies are used to represent the gendered self that confirms to or refute the patriarchal ideology.

Generally, within CDA, language can never be neutral. It constructs meaning and negotiates power and ideology. Thus, the linguistic dimensions of text or discourse are important when analyzed in their sociopolitical context. Word choice, for example, in discourse is not a neutral linguistic behavior, but hidden intentions are embodied into the used language which maintains and serves power. Consequently, CDA provides researchers with a useful tool to deconstruct the discursive formational methods that are used to maintain power and spread inequality (gender inequality in this case).

With its ability to not only explain or describe the sameness/difference linguistic strategies that characterize the stereotypical nature of politics, but also to go beyond linguistic features of discourse including socio-political mechanisms of construction in order to analyze men and women politicians' gendered discourses that reinforce the invisibility of the female politician, CDA serves the purposes of this study. The analysis of the non-linguistic dimensions (including the social, cultural and institutional areas in which language is constructed) of discourse is the common point where CDA meets with Foucauldian Discourse Analysis.

## **2.2. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis**

Unlike structural linguists whose analysis of discourse is based on the systematic structure of language, Foucault, as it has been already introduced in part one the dissertation, approaches discourse analysis differently. Basing his analysis on the concept of discursive formation, Foucault “is concerned with asking questions such as what rules permit certain statements to be made: what rules order these statement; and what rules enable us to identify statements as true or false?” (Edward, Gilbert & Skinner, 2002: 58).

Since social practices are understood only through analyzing discursive construction, Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis is based on the assumption that discourse facilitates and limits the possibilities of meaning. This, then, explains Foucault’s notion of the subjective self. Discourse does not only limit and allow possibilities of creation, but it also leads individuals to position themselves accordingly. In our case, women, for example, define themselves on the base of the gendered discursive practices surrounding them, which means that discourse creates conditions for subjective experience of social individuals.

Moreover, Foucault’s notion of dominant discourses is a significant contribution to discourse analysis in general and political discourse analysis in particular. Dominant discourses for Foucault maintain realities that reinforce power relations and construct social ideology. Once again, in the case of this dissertation, political masculine discourse is an example of the dominant discourse which is taken for granted as the only effective discourse that successful political actors should follow. Edward, Gilbert and Skinner summarize the main points of FDA as follows:

Foucault stress that a discourse analysis concerns itself with the following power knowledge issues: (1) the system of differentiations or privileged access to the discourse; (2) the types of objectives of one group of adherents over another; (3)

the means of brining power relations into being that reveals surveillance systems, threats and dismissals; (4) forms of institutionalization such as bureaucratic structure; and (5) degree of rationalization required to support power arrangements. (2002:61)

FDA, thus, is taking a macro-level analytical stance. It does not only consider things that are said, it also takes into consideration things that are not said. It is a critical reading of the whole social system in order to challenge power distribution. However, it is important to note that FDA shares some points with CDA. Both approaches consider context and power relations in the analysis. Consequently, Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis is also influenced by both FDA and CDA.

### **2.3. Feminist Post-Structural Discourse Analysis**

Feminist poststructural discourse analysis (FPDA) is an approach to discourse analysis that offers a research method for feminist study of language and discourse. Weedon describes feminist poststructural discourse analysis “as a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and identify areas and strategies for change” (cited in Gavey,1989: 460). Influenced by a number of poststructuralist scholars such as Althusser, Lacan, Derrida, Barthes, Foucault and the French feminists particularly Kristiva, Cixous and Irigray, analysts who adopt FPDA start from the assumption that since meaning is embedded into language and since language is male constructed to serve patriarchal power, women’s discursive behavior should not be assessed as only being passive consumer but that their discourse can resist the patriarchal construction of femininity and masculinity.

Baxter (2003) defines FPDA as “a feminist approach to analyzing the ways in which speakers negotiate their identities, relationships and positions in their world according to the

ways in which they are located by competing yet interwoven discourse” (p. 1). Moreover, Diabah (2011) argues that FPDA’s “central concern is to examine how speakers construct their identities by negotiating, challenging and resisting existing subject-positions in competing discourse” (p. 174).

Diabah finds that applying FPDA along with CDA is of much importance to the study of gendered discourse and the construction of the female identity simply because FPDA completes the missing points that CDA did not emphasize. Quoting Baxter, Diabah writes “there may be dominant discourses constructing stereotypical assumptions about masculinity, femininity and binary gender differences [...] there may also be resistant or oppositional discourses advocating for example, gender diversity, inclusion or separatism” (2011: 175). The post-structuralist perspective that FPDA concentrates on is of much use for the analysis of the influence of power relations on women politicians’ discursive behavior which of course hits at the core points that this dissertation revolves around. This section introduced the methodological framework in which the adopted approaches to discourse analysis were explained. The following section presents the design of the study concerning both the adopted data methods and the data analysis techniques.

### **3. Research Design**

This study aims at delving into a deeper inquiry about the nuances of the Mauritanian political arena with an effort to dissect the socio-political and cultural agendas that construct the identity of the female politician. In this respect, the study is based on three main hypotheses, which are (1) Mauritanian women are imposed on politics because of the illusion that their physical presence constructs a fake democratic image of the country, (2) adding unfeminist women into politics is just as that of adding more patriarchal men to power institutions, and (3)

women politicians depersonalize some aspects of their feminine identity and categorize themselves more with the masculine political leader image.

In order to meet the aims and testify the hypotheses, the study is based on two different data sets. The first collected data and the most important in regard to the main hypothesis of the study are a qualitative analysis of women's politicians' discursive behavior. The second data are mixture of qualitative and quantitative data gathered with the purpose of investigating Mauritanian women's political participation and political effectiveness. These data also are directed at analyzing the Mauritanian cultural perception of leadership positions. The methodological process and choices are designed and discussed in the following subsections.

### **3.1. Framing the Analytic Discursive Features**

As it has been clarified in Chapter Three, there are different feminist approaches to gender and language. Some of these approaches assume women's language to be different from that of men due to the fact that both of the sexes belong to different subcultures. Based on the difference/sameness approaches women's discursive behavior has been evaluated and testified against that of men. Linguistically, being associated with private sphere, women's public discursive competences have been evaluated as weak and inappropriate for the political landscape. Thus, in order for women to cope with the contradictory social expectations of *successful political actor*, they find themselves trapped in the linguistic double-bind of the political domain. Though studying female politicians' discursive style in accordance with that of their male counterparts is very interesting, the dissertation's focus is solely on the construction of the feminine identity within political discourse as well as the representation of the feminine via male politicians' discourse. Thus, to meet such aims, analyzing women's political

communication and examining their gendered rhetoric use is of much importance for the present study.

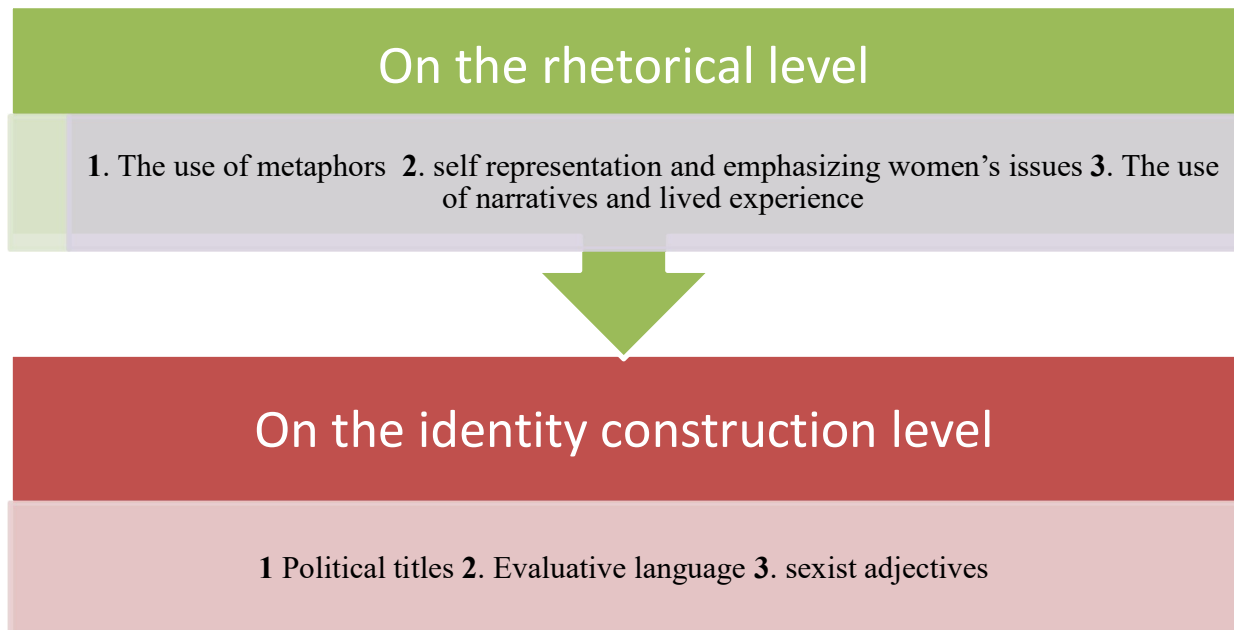
Many political analysts pay particular attention to rhetoric in the field of political science in general and political discourse analysis in particular. The British political theorist Alan Finlayson developed a discursive method to political discourse which he refers to as rhetorical political analysis. Griggs and Howarth (2013: 35) explain that “rhetorical political analysis focuses on the role of argumentative practices and persuasion [...] An important strength of Finlayson’s proposal is that he provides a series of analytical strategies for investigating different kinds of argumentative practice in different context of political life”.

On this line of thought and based on the aforementioned hypothesis, spoken discourse of Mauritanian women politicians who belong to different political, educational, and regional backgrounds will be analyzed. The analysis is designed according to three rhetorical features: (1) the use of conceptual metaphors, (2) testifying female politicians’ representation of themselves and of women in their discourse, and (3) the use of lived experience and self-reference. Despite the fact that patriarchal political norms classified various rhetoric strategies as being feminine and masculine, only the three above communicative features will be analyzed in relation to feminine political rhetoric and the construction of the feminine identity.

The issue of identity construction is a major element that this study is concerned with. Gender identity is based on one’s performance of certain norms that are more or less associated with masculinity or femininity. Critically, the extent to which Mauritanian women politicians position themselves as both women and political leaders will be analyzed in relation to Butler’s performativity. Drawing on John Turner’s self-categorization theory, the socio-cultural context influences subjective identity. Turner and Onorato argue that “the self is not largely, basically, or

predominantly personal. People categorize themselves at different levels of inclusiveness, of which the personal or individual level is only one. They can categorize themselves at levels more inclusive than that of the individual as we and us” (1999: 24). As individuals can categorize themselves in accordance with the socio-circumstances of the interactional operation, they can also depersonalize themselves from some aspects of self-definition. Depersonalization is not a loss of the self, but highlighting some aspects of the constructed identity. As it has been already discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation, Judith Butler explains the same concept in her development of performativity when she argues that identity is not fixed but fluid. This is to say that there is not fixed male or female and not purely masculine or feminine rather the gendered subjectivity is contextually preformed.

Accordingly, this study will attempt to analyze context-dependent discourse in which women politicians identify with the masculine norms of leadership in order for them to be socially accepted as belonging to the political sphere. In the context of this dissertation, it is hypothesized that women politician depersonalize some aspects of their feminine identity and categorize themselves with the political leader image which is stereotypically perceived as being masculine. On the level of identity construction, some linguistic features that indicate identity salience and self-categorization will be taken into consideration such as: (1) the use of masculine titles, (2) gendered features of evaluative language, and (3) sexist adjectives. **Figure 7** summarizes the features that will be analyzed in the present study.



**Figure 7: The discursive features to be analyzed**

As this subsection designed the discursive features which are taken into consideration while analyzing, the following subject presents the process followed in selecting the participants.

### **3.2. Sampling Procedures**

As it has been already discussed, the study aims to conduct a discursive analysis of Mauritanian women political discourse on two different bases. On the one hand, to address the issues of whether there is a unique feminine discursive style, women's political effectiveness, their competence, and the society's attitudes toward women politicians, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative analysis is conducted in this respect. On the other hand, the study is directed toward investigating Mauritanian women's identity construction via the analysis of their feminine discursive style.

Clearly, the study population is Mauritanian as a whole, both politicians and common people. However, this is a very general scope that must be specified into a sample. It is true that any study must have a target population that data can be elicited from, but the importance of the



sampling technique is to select a part of this hegemonic population so that the findings of the study will be representative of the entire population. A sample, as Marlow (2010) defines, is an item under study selected from the population.

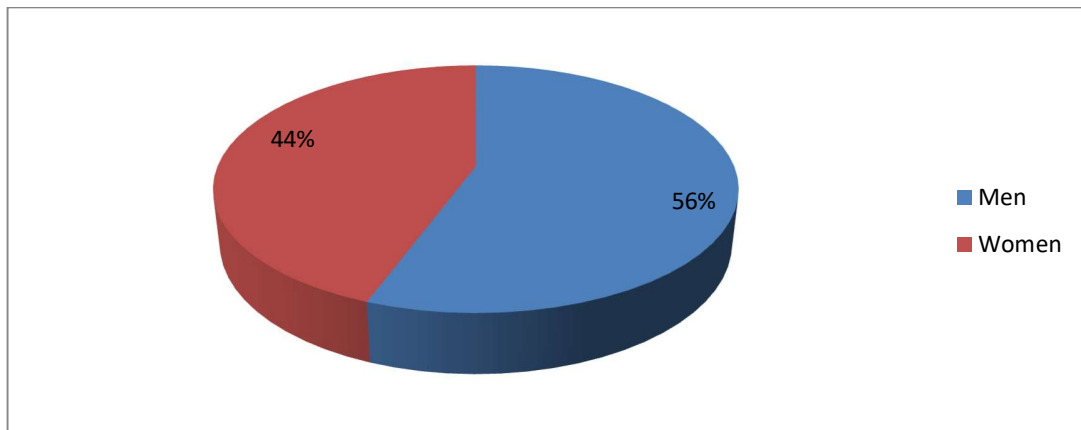
There are various types of sampling procedures that a researcher can select. The objectives and the scope of the study determine the adopted sampling technique. There are mainly two major ways upon which the sample can be selected, probability and non-probability sampling. When adopting probability sampling, one follows a sample where everyone in the population has the chance to be selected. The probability sampling method is more representative especially when applied to quantitative approach in which generalization is the main purpose of the researcher. Non-probability sampling, on the other hand, “allows the researcher to handpick the sample according to the nature of the research problem and the phenomenon under study. [...] It is often the sampling method of choice in qualitative study, where generalization of results is less important” (Marlow, 2010: 140).

Due to the fact that the study is based on both qualitative and quantitative approaches, both types of sampling methods were adopted. Concerning the non-probability sampling, the selection of the participants was based on different categorization. Because the sample should mirror all Mauritians, the participants were chosen from three major categories, political community, education community, and lay people. This is, of course, concerning the first data which is collected for the purpose of investigating political effectiveness of female political actors and the social attitudes and perceptions towards the role that women play in the political sector. Concerning the mechanism through which the selection was chosen, probability sampling, mainly convenience sampling was adopted. This is to say that participants from the three categories were chosen according to their accessibility. The questionnaire was the main

data collection technique that was meant to elicit the data. It was delivered to 376 people, but only 300 respondents filled out the questionnaire.

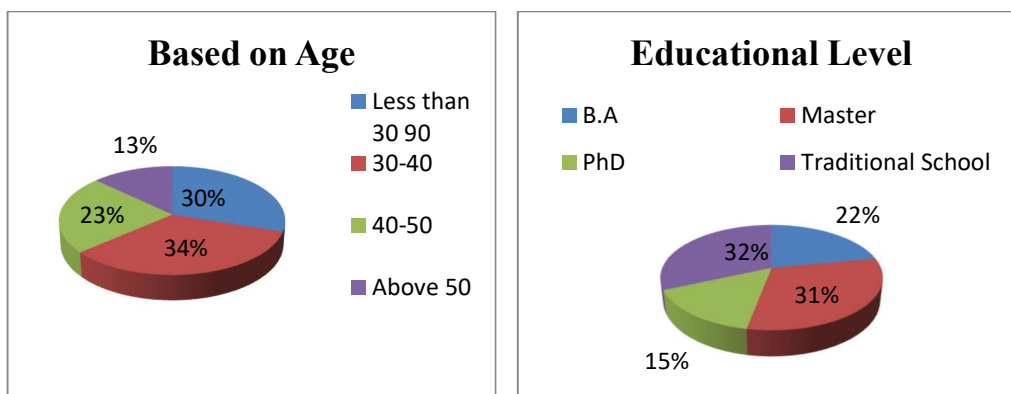
Political Community	Education Community	Laypeople
100 participants	100 participants	100 participants
54 Men 46 Women	63 Men 37 women	50 Men 50 Women

**Figure 8: Categorizing the sample**



**Figure 9: Gender representation of the sample**

The sample is not only chosen on the base of different categories, including all ethnic groups, and being representative on the gender base, but also there are other factors that were taken into consideration. These factors are age and educational level.



**Figure 10: Age and education of the participants**

Moreover, to enhance the qualitative data and following probability sampling method, eleven interviews were conducted with politicians from different political backgrounds, males and females depending on their availability and willingness.

Concerning the second part of the study which is based on discursive analysis, fifty political speeches that were delivered by female politicians and thirty by male politicians were chosen. The scope of the present study started from 2009 presidential and legislative elections to the present. The selected period of time covers political speeches in different political events and delivered by politicians from different parities. The political events under analysis are: parliamentary debates, TV debating shows, interview TV shows, and campaign speeches.

Because YouTube documented political speeches and interviews are more easily accessible for the researcher, it is an appropriate source for the study. Due to the fact that I spent much of the time in Morocco for attending the training courses which are part of the doctoral program, I was unable to attend the open political speeches of women politicians in Mauritania. Moreover, analyzing political discourse is more effective if the researcher is provided with the recorded video of the speech where she can investigate the different aspects that serve the research purposes. Thus, I adopted the videos on YouTube in the analysis.

#### **4. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

Since the present study aims not only at analyzing identity construction through the discursive behavior of Mauritanian women politicians but also to investigate their political effectiveness and to what extent the society in general and the political society in particular accept the feminine presence in politics, adopting both qualitative and quantitative methods will help in accomplishing the research goals. For this purpose, two data collection methods were used in this study, the questionnaire and the interview. Of course, it is important to mention that along with the interview and the questionnaire there are other methods including observation as well as qualitative corpus analysis that are combined together during the process of analyzing political discourse.

##### **4.1. Data Collection Methods**

Based on the nature of the analyzed topic and the context of the study, the researcher should make decisions about what data techniques to use. To state it differently, the issue of the research determines the type of data techniques used and data analysis approaches. Thus, each research may need a particular approach to data collection and analysis. In other words, the researcher should be well informed about different research stages and procedures.

Concerning the present study, the most relevant data techniques were chosen to meet the aims and objectives of the research. Thus, the questionnaire and the interview were chosen. The questionnaire was chosen because it helps the researcher to reach more people. It also helps bring more spontaneous data regarding the social attitudes toward women's political participation and in what way the society evaluates their political experience. Concerning the interview, it was used in this study because through it the researcher can get more elaboration

from specific participants on the required issues. The interviews as it is aforementioned were meant to collect specific data from some political actors, males and females.

Choosing these two instruments was for the purpose of achieving methodology triangulation. Triangulation is very important for any study because it helps, as Denscombe (2003: 135) argues, in:

1. Findings can be corroborated or questioned by comparing the data produced by different methods.
2. Findings can be complemented by adding something new and different from one method to what is known about the topic using another.

#### **4.1.1. The Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was translated into Arabic and French because English is not a widespread language among Mauritians. As it has been already mentioned 376 questionnaires were distributed but only 300 completed the survey. The respondents were not asked to mention their political orientation; however, the researcher makes sure to divide the different categories of the sample. This is to say that questionnaires delivered to the political community for example as other categories were kept separately from each others, so that each category is analyzed differently in order to draw conclusions based on the adopted categorization.

The questionnaire consists of two sections in addition to an opening statement in which the purpose of the study was explained. In questionnaire design, usually the first set of items are meant to elicit participants background; however, questions on personal information were placed at the end of the questionnaire to make sure that the participants will respond to all items (see the **Appendix** page 364). The first section of the questionnaire was directed to eliciting data about Mauritanian women's political readiness, the quality of their political participation,

their presence in positions of power, the cultural attitudes toward the feminization of the political sphere, and the participants' knowledge about the feminine political discourse.

In general, the majority of the included questions are close ended questions. The close ended questions are either a 'yes', 'no' questions like **item number 9** or a multiple choice question like **item number 5**:

- **Item number 9**: Can a woman be a prime minister?

Yes     No

-**Item number 5**: What do you think of Mauritanian women's involvement in politics?

Strong     satisfactory     Average     Weak

There are also open ended questions such **item number 2** and **item number 15**, which are meant to conduct qualitative data via more elaboration from the participants.

**Item number 2**: In your opinion how do you describe the ideal political leader?

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**Item number 15**: Can you name a successful Mauritanian female politician who you think left her mark in the political sphere?

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At the end of the questionnaire, participants were given the chance to add any information of relevance to the topic.

It is essential to clarify that taking into consideration that Facebook is the most popular social media platform via which the researcher can access the majority of her sample and which gives the researcher the chance to obtain the needed data through using pictures and audios

which helps in elaborating the aim of the questions, in certain issues specially those which are related to attitudes toward women politicians as well as political education among young Mauritanian women, I adopt Facebook survey because it is more useful than including them into the questionnaire. This is that using visual materials enhances the chances for analyzing the real attitude that the participants hold toward women politicians. The mechanism through which this method was applied was simply through posting on two of the most popular Mauritanian Facebook groups; one contains only female members while the other contains both, women and men.

#### **4.1.2. The Interview**

The type of interview adopted is the semi-structured interview. Unlike structured interviews in which the interviewer is obliged to go through questions in specific order and to ask the same questions to all interviewees, in semi-structured interview the researcher is free to add questions when needed and to change the order of the fixed questions. This type of interviews is more suitable for the present study because it allows the participants to express themselves in more flexible way without forcing them to follow a certain order; also, it respects the differences between the interviewees. So, through the semi-structured interview, the researcher can collect more elaborated data by respecting the diversity the respondents.

I planned to do more interviews especially with female ministers, representatives, and the president of the Urban Community of Nouakchott, but these women were inaccessible. I tried, for example, different ways to meet Minister of Trade and Industry, Naha Mint Mouknass, and Minister of Family and Social Affairs, Meymona Min Taqi, but they refused claiming that they have no time for researchers. This is to say that only few politicians were willing to be part of

this research. Due to willingness again, the majority of the interviews I conducted were with the opposition parties because they were more willing to participate.

Interviews were conducted between 8 June 2015 and 19 July 2017 while their length was between 45 minutes and 23 minutes. The aim of the interviews was to elaborate on different issues concerning women’s political participation and their political discourse. Thus, I made sure to include both women and men in these interviews. Generally, the question during the interview revolved mainly around the following points:

- The participants view of the positive discrimination (the quota)
- The reasons behind the absence of women from position of power
- Their view toward if there is a type of discourse that can be described as being feminine
- The characteristics of the feminine political discourse if it exists

This of course accompanied with a number of questions that vary from a participant to another on different issues that serve the purpose of the study.

The following table shows the categories of the interviewees.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Mayors</b>	2	2
<b>Party Member</b>	1	2
<b>Parliamentary representatives</b>	1	2
<b>Former political candidate</b>	1	1
<b>Civil society and feminist NGOs</b>	0	2
<b>Academic</b>	2	1

**Table 2: Interviewees' professional background**



## **4.2. Data Analysis Procedures**

As Seliger and Shohamy (1989) argue, “data analysis refers to sifting, organizing, summarizing, and synthesizing the data so as to arrive at the results and conclusions of the research” (p. 201). Because data analysis stage is the heart of the study, the researcher should pay special attention to it so that he or she can get reliable results. The subsections below explain the methods that are followed in analysing the collected data.

### **4.2.1. Quantitative Methods**

Quantitative data are the numerical data, which are analyzed statically. Since they are countable, they are seen as being easier in analyzing than the qualitative data. The quantitative data in the present study were collected through the close-ended items in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in a way that included multiple choice questions and ‘yes no’ questions, which provide quantitative data. Regarding the analysis of the quantitative data, the data were categorized into groups that serve the aims of the study. The quantitative data were presented in the tables and then discussed in an analytic way supported by examples from the qualitative data.

### **4.2.2. Qualitative Methods**

In contrast to quantitative data, qualitative data are used to get more detailed information from the respondents. The present study was built mainly on the qualitative data. In the interviews which sometimes more than an hour long all the questions were meant to collect qualitative data. During the interviews, participants were informed about the recording of the interview. Regarding the analysis of the qualitative data, the data were categorized into general groups and used either to support or comment on the findings of the qualitative data.

Concerning the analysis of the 50 political speeches both qualitative and quantitative approach to analysis were followed. In other words, discursive features were categorized into quantitative data that were presented in tables and figures. From the 50 political speeches under analysis, qualitative data was used to support the main arguments of the study and to testify the hypothesis. As this chapter presented the mechanisms followed in designing the methodology of this study, the following chapter presents and discusses the first set of data which is meant to investigate Mauritanian women's political involvement and the social attitudes and expectations toward women's political participation.

### **Chapter three:**

#### **Mauritanian Women's Involvement in Politics**

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data that were collected in order to investigate Mauritanian women's political participation. As has been discussed in Chapter Five of this dissertation, Mauritanian women have been involved in politics since the independence. Though their political participation was influenced by the traditional gender roles that are associated with traditional perception of womanhood, it is noticed that the number of women in political positions has increased in the last years. One of the main research questions of the present study is whether women presence in Mauritanian politics is achieved as a result of women's struggle for political rights or if it is just an international obligation that the country is forced to follow in order to cope with the signed international conventions regarding women's rights. In other words, based on the research hypothesis number one, the growing numbers of women in the political sector will not lead to a better representation for them.

Based on the above research question, this chapter is divided into four sections. Each section deals with an issue that helps in investigating the case of Mauritanian women's political involvement. Each society has its own view of the ideal leader which does not only influence individuals' political chances but also manipulate individual's political presence. In patriarchal societies such as Mauritania, social expectations determine women politicians' self-representation. These points will be discussed in the first section under the title of "Mauritanians' Perceptions of Women's Leadership".

The second section will cover "Women's Political Commitment and Competence". The female is constructed as a social subject to confirm to her gender identity as an adult. This is to say that the process of socialization shapes women's experience in terms of their self-

recognition, self-categorization, and every other concept that determines their existence (see Chapter One of the first part for more details). Under the title of this section, women's political education will be discussed analyzing how Mauritanian women position themselves in relation to the public domain and to what extent they see themselves as being concerned with political issues. Moreover, the quota policy will be discussed as a way to enhance women's political participation.

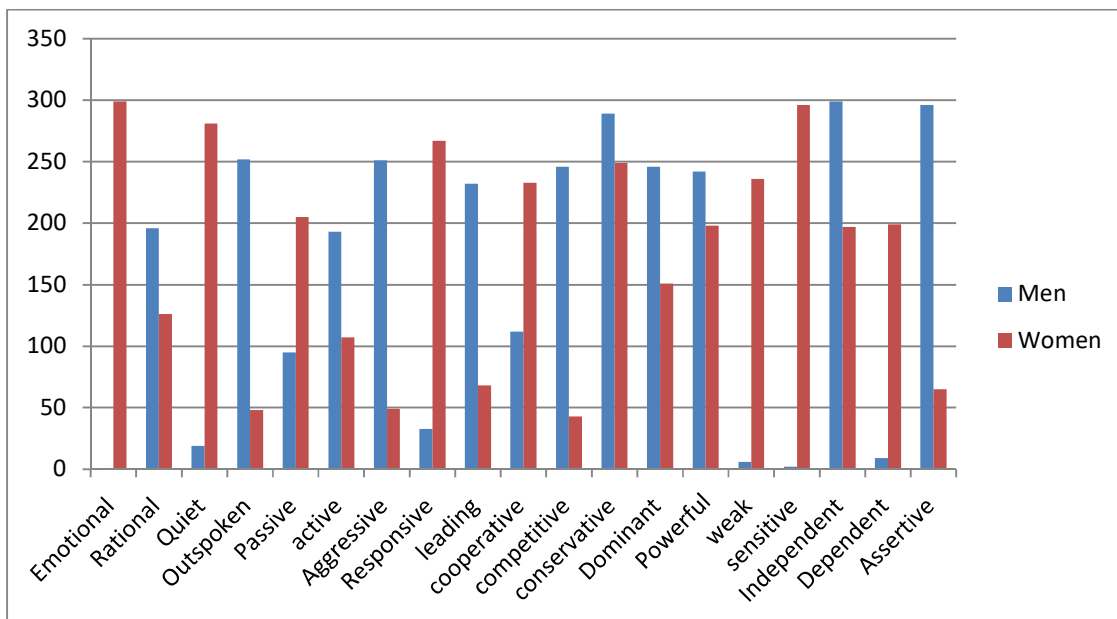
The third section of this chapter will be about "political positions and gender stereotypes". No one can deny that politics has always been a masculine game par excellence; thus, female presence in the political sphere (mainly in traditional societies such as Mauritania) is usually surrounded by gendered stereotypes. The Mauritanian ministerial system is classified into sovereign ministries and non-sovereign ones. A feminist based analysis will be carried out in this section to investigate women's presence in accordance with the existence of this ministerial classification. In other words, this section is concerned with social vision of women competence to lead the community through the experience of the women mayors and also Mauritanians' view toward women managing sovereign ministries.

The last section of this chapter will be about political chances for women. This section explores women's access to discursive resources as a power means that either creates more chances for women's political participation or limits the chances. It will also consider female candidates experience basing on the participants' answers in order to investigate the difficulties that women candidates face in Mauritanian based on being on their gender. Moreover, since feminism as a thought is based on women's movements that have helped women around the world to question patriarchal ideology, in this section I will try to analyze Mauritanian women's politicians view toward feminism.

## 1. Mauritians' Perceptions of Women's Leadership

### 1.1. Public Opinion: Gendering Politics

Gender is socially constructed; therefore, femininity and masculinity vary from a community to another. In order to set the ground for the Mauritanian social view of the ideal political leader, the questionnaire opens with a multiple choice question which aims to collect data on Mauritians' definition of femininity and masculinity with purpose to decode the nature of these definitions. Participants were given a number of adjectives and asked to classify them under two gender categories, men and women. The results obtained in reaction to **item number 1** are presented in the following chart:



**Figure 11: Masculinity vs. femininity traits**

First, it is important to clarify that the adjective placed in this question were selected drawing on the literature on their identification as belonging to masculinity and femininity. The results indicate that out of the 133 women respondents 106 (79.6%) women chose negative traits (passive, responsive, weak, and dependent) as being feminine characteristics. In analyzing how

these women come to associate such qualities with femininity, it is important to emphasize that this negative self-image is internalized by these women because it is the only truth that is for them about femininity through which they can define womanhood. This implies that patriarchal power reinforces gender identity of women through the process of socialization; thus, the ordinary Mauritanian woman represents herself automatically as being passive, responsive, weak and dependent.

To better understand the nature of the social view of the feminine and masculine characteristics, participants were asked to express their opinions on the ideal political leader. To this end, they were asked question number 2 (see the Appendix). In their reaction to this question, only 193 out of the 300 participants responded to this particular question. Their answers can be classified into two criteria of effective political leader, personal traits and political style.

The personal characteristics that the majority of the respondents identify as being basic qualities that a political leader has to have in order to be effective are: charisma, intelligence, honesty, wisdom, self-confidence, and strength. Regarding the political style, respondents varied in their answers. Some stressed the authoritative side of leadership. The following are examples from the participants' responses:

**Participant A:** For me the ideal political leader should be the one that is powerful and has the ability to stand against westernization and practice principals of Islamic leadership. *He* should be intelligent and leading, but he also should adopt consultation as a method for spreading justice. *He* should be close to people so that *he* understands their sufferings and knows their needs.

**Participant B:** Strength and courage in making the right decisions. *He* should be leading and dominant regarding certain issues, but at the same time *he* should not exclude others.

**Participant C:** In my point of view, the ideal political leader should be courageous, strict. He should listen to others' opinions, but this should not affect his decisions in the way that everyone can make him change his mind.

**Participant D:** The ideal leader should be risk taking and should not be shy. *He* has to be powerful, wise, strong, and assertive. *His* personality should be strong and he should have a leading charisma. *He* should be independent so that nobody can influence him.

**Participant E:** I think that the ideal political leader must be a strong *man*. He should have a political experience. It is also important for an effective political leader to have a strong political view and be able to influence others.

Arguably, the presence of the generic masculine pronoun “he” in the majority of participants' comments when describing the ideal political leader excludes women (Participant A, B, C, and D). Despite the fact that in the Arabic language (see Chapter Three, section 4) the masculine pronoun is used generically to include both men and women, it is obvious from the personal traits that the majority of participants when describing the ideal political leader they have the image of a male leader in mind. Actually, as it is clear from the above examples, the image of the ideal leader is stereotypically associated with masculine traits. This is to say that based the participants' classification of masculine and feminine qualities in their responses to item number 1 of the questionnaire, it can be argued that the characteristics that the participants associated with the ideal political leader privilege masculine values of leadership.

Moreover, examining the response of participant E shows clear that the ideal political leader is defined as being a male. The cultural view of strong leader is linked with being

powerful male. This view is socio-culturally conditioned, that is, in such a society women have always been culturally associated with the private sphere. However, the examination of the personal information of the respondents reveals that a large number of women participants constructed this view of strong man political leader.

However, it is worth noting that the few participants who used a mixture of feminine and masculine traits to describe the ideal political leader have bilingual background. These respondents stated that in order for a politician to be effective he or she has to be both feminine and masculine. It is important to note that the reference to “feminine” and “masculine” traits throughout the dissertation is based on the results of the respondents’ classification. For example, a respondent said:

I think that there are two approaches to political leadership: the authoritative leader who is powerful and strong and the cooperative leader who leaders with love, wisdom and morality. I believe that in order for a political leader to be effective, *he* has to combine both qualities.

Recognizing the importance of adopting feminine and masculine qualities for the ideal politician, the above view holds that the effectiveness of political leadership is not related to gender identity. However, when taking the quantity into consideration, people with the above view are only 10 participants out of the 193 participants who responded to the question. Nevertheless, when analyzing the results of the following item of questionnaire (item number 3, see the Appendix), it became clear that gender does really matter because 3 out of the 10 respondents who believed that the ideal leadership should mix both feminine and masculine qualities responded in item number 3 that women can never fit in the qualities they made of the ideal leader. Ironically, their choice of the option “no, never” can be explained that when they



mention the qualities that are considered feminine in their description, they did not mean to describe a female political leader but on the contrary they were painting an ideal male politician.

**Table 3: Public opinion of women's qualities for leadership**

<b>Question 3. Do you think that a woman can fit in the qualities you made about the ideal leader?</b>		
Yes, absolutely	Not all of them but some	No, never
<b>24 (25.8%)</b>	<b>92 (47.6%)</b>	<b>77 (39.8%)</b>

It is important to note that only the answers of those who responded to item number 2 were taken into consideration regarding item number 3 (193 participants). As it is shown in the above table, the majority of participants believe that women cannot totally fit into the ideal characteristics of the political leader. When interviewing the president of the Islamic party, the National Rally for Reform and Development (Tewassoul), Mohamed Jamil Mansor, he stated that:

As a political party that is based on Islamic ideology, we see no harm in women's leadership. However, personally, I think that women still have a long way to go through in order for them to gain public trust. Women in our country are socialized to be passive and to acquire other feminine characteristics that do not go hand in hand with the political sector.

Oxymoronically, Jamil Mansor contradicts himself in the above quote. Though he clarifies distinguishing his personal idea from the policy of his party that they have no problem with women's political leadership, he unconsciously admits that in order for women to opt for political positions, they have to detach themselves from their feminine identity which is according to him do not fit into the principals of the political leader. This touches an important

point that shapes the Mauritanian political sphere which is that feminine characteristics are inappropriate for being an effective political leader. This is to say that based on this view, women politicians are assumed as being passive and unsuccessful political actors especially when showing aspects of their feminine identity.

Asking Nana Mint Mohamed Laghdaf, the president of women organization in the Union of Democratic Forces, about the public opinion of the masculine nature of political leadership, she points out that:

Yes, politics have always been a masculine field. For this reason, it is difficult for Mauritians to imagine a political leader wearing melhfa [metaphor of being feminine]. However, women politicians' positive presence can affect public opinion in favor of women's political involvement. We, as women politicians, will be publically accepted only through the good image that we should provide about the female leader.

However, since the political audience takes for granted that masculinity is a synonym for political effectiveness, how can women politicians make themselves visible unless if they adopt a masculine approach to politics?

Based on the Mauritanian public opinion toward women's involvement in politics, the 300 participants responded to item number 5 in the following way:

**Table 4: Mauritanians' view toward the level of women's involvement in politics**

<b>Item number 5: What do you think of Mauritanian women's involvement in politics?</b>			
<b>Strong</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Weak</b>
41 (13.6%)	138 (46%)	96 (32%)	25 (8.3%)

Drawing on the gender perception of political leadership, the majority of the participants see that giving women a quota of 20% in the legislative and municipal councils is more than

enough especially with the fact that the current government includes nine women ministers. Based on the aforementioned characteristics of the ideal political leader, it is not surprising to find that only 25 respondents who think that women's participation is weak. Since Mauritians draw a masculine picture for the political leader, any female participation in politics will be satisfying.

### **1.2. Adapting to Gender Norms: Spatializing Politics**

As Foucault and other poststructuralist scholars argue, space can never be neutral. It is constructed. Thus, the relationship between power and place cannot be denied when studying any social phenomenon. It is true that women gained access to public sphere; however, is their physical presence enough to assume that their invading to the masculine space guaranteed a significant role to play?

With the emergence of international conventions supporting women's participation in public life, women overcame the traditional physical spatial division of the public and private; however, they still face modern metaphoric division of spaces. In order for women to be in the public space, '*the masculine space*', they have to conform to the gendered conditions of their presence. Thus, this subsection is meant to examine Mauritanian politicians' style as well as their spatial behavior. The aim is to convey that the physical presence of these women and their self-representation is not empty, but it conveys their gendered identity construction as well as it defines their position in society in accordance with the patriarchal conceptualization of space. Patriarchal expectations control women's spatial experience because simply social subjects construct their identities in relation to the Other, and in this case the feminine subject comes into existence in relation to her being recognized by the masculine.

Because Mauritians (Moorish) are attached to their traditions, melhfa or the veil is the common cloth of all Moorish women. But, they wear it differently; some wear it as an Islamic veil and others wear it only as a traditional cloth. Based on a secular feminist perspective, the veil is originally meant to create spatial division and this is the intention behind its Arabic linguistic meaning which is *hijab* that is derived from the term *hajaba* which means to hide from view. In traditional societies women were excluded from the public space by the concept of *hijab* which is symbolized by the private *haram*. However, in the modern societies, the religious patriarchal mechanisms changed to cope with modern circumstances.

It is important to remind that this dissertation is not adopting the ideas of secular feminist scholars who see the veil in general as being a barrier for women's participation in public life, but, it simply questions the emerging new veiling style among some Mauritanian women politicians in which they exaggerate in the way they wear the veil on the political stage. It is important to show examples of the way that Mauritanian women wear their melhfa, the veil.



**Figure 12: Example of melhfa as a traditional cloth. (Source: Media Foundation for West Africa Newspaper)**

As the above picture shows, some women wear melhfa just as a traditional cloth in which parts of their bodies such as arms and the front side of their hairs are uncovered.



**Figure 13: Example of Melhfa as an Islamic veil. (Source: Arabstoday.net)**

Wearing melhfa as an Islamic hijab requires covering the whole body except the face and the hands. Covering the whole body except the eyes is rare in Mauritania; however, with the emergence of Islamic groups such as Muslim advocacy group few women started wearing *neqab*.

Though the Mauritanian female body has been always been introduced as a veiled body, it is observed that some women politicians followed a new style in their melhfes through which they cover part of the face. It is not the common way of neqab that is used by Arab-Muslim women while it is not the common way that Mauritanian conservatives wear their melhfa.



**Figure 14: Women politicians during a meeting with the president of their party**



**Figure 15: Women politicians participating in a political event**



**Figure 16: A political meeting with the president of the party**



**Figure 17: Parliamentary representatives from the Islamist party, Tawassoul**



**Figure 18: A female politician from the same party**



**Figure 19: Another woman politician**

When examining the above pictures, it is noticeable that women politicians in the different pictures cover sides of their faces by melhfa. Arguably, exaggerating in the way that



they wear melhfa, which is not the common social way of wearing it as Islamic *hijab*, it can be argued that these women believe that they are in the wrong space. Because it is a masculine space in which women are considered as sexual bodies (*fitna*), they make themselves invisible by covering their faces in that way. Clearly, despite their spatial presence, these women metaphorically are creating a private space for themselves through their spatial behavior that reinforces the public/private division.

Power relations limit spatial mobility for women. This is to say that patriarchal construction of gendered spaces influences women's self-representation. In order for women to be accepted in the masculine space, they have to be conscious of the danger of their feminine bodies. In order to understand the veil style of these women, it is important to understand the negotiation of their identities as domestic selves in relation to the political ideology of the political party they belong to. Interestingly, all women politicians in the above pictures belong to the same party, the Islamist Mauritanian party, Tewassoul. Analyzing the way that these women negotiate their body presence; it can be argued that they represent their bodies as signifying the unwelcomed other. This is to say that being members of an Islamist party, these women internalize the modesty that they are expected to show by lowering their gazes in the presence of men and covering their faces as being a source of *fitna*. Actually, this may not be the expectations of all male members of the party, but such spatial division is deeply immersed in the patriarchal and misogynistic perception of womanhood that constructs female domesticity, docility and subservience.

From the above sense, the patriarchal religious discourse surrounding the feminine body presence in public space as an object contributes to women's internalization of this body image as the truth according to which they develop a passive sense toward their own bodies. The veiled

body identity is, thus, reinforced as way to satisfy the Other. This is that in order for these women to be named by the religious masculine subject (their male counterparts) as being “*good*” women, they have to define themselves in relation to the Panopticon concept (see page 23). Therefore, these women construct their identity as being the object of the masculine gaze.

Women of all kinds are expected to look right, and to look right for a gaze which is masculine. [...] The threatening masculine look materially inscribes its power onto women’s bodies by constituting feminine subjects through an intense self-awareness about being seen and about taking up space [...] Women’s sense of embodiment can make space feel like a thousand piercing eyes. [...] it is a space which constitutes women as embodied objects to be looked at (Rose, 1993: 145-146)

This is to say that being exposed to the male gaze, the woman politicians through exaggerating in veiling herself she constructs an abject relation to her own body as being sexual body that needs to be over veiled and hidden in order to be ready for the masculine gaze and in order for her to be accepted in the masculine space.

From the above sense, since these women politicians go through corporeal experience of the public space in which they consider themselves as sexual strange bodies that need to be suppressed, they construct a passive navigations of space. More dangerously, through examining the spatial positioning of some women politicians, it is clear that women politicians somehow are still at the bottom of the political hierarchy conforming to the cultural dichotomization of mind/body, public/private, morality/sexuality with the second often associated with women. As Rose argues “behavior and space are mutually dependent” (1993: 17) which means that masculine definition of these spatial dichotomies constructs women’s spatial behavior. The following pictures are examples of the gendered spatial positioning of women politicians:



**Figure 20: Women politicians' spatial positioning**



**Figure 21: Another example of spatial positioning**

The woman politicians in the two pictures inserted above position themselves at the margins of the political event table. It can be argued that just as the exaggeration of the veil this invisible self-representation of these women gives the impression that they act in accordance with the spatial gendered boundaries. They control their bodies separating them from the main

political platform which is dominated by men in performing their gender identity that mirror their constructed views toward femininity, morality, and religion.

In the Mauritanian patriarchal culture, in order for a woman to represent herself inside the borders of ideal femininity, she has to show a well disciplined action especially in public. The feminine self, thus, is defined in relation to masculine normality. Simply put, crossing the boundaries of the masculine space constructs Mauritanian women's articulations of their gender identities. In the case of the women (examples given in the above pictures), since identity as Stuart Hall argues is "the name we give to the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within the narratives of the past" (1990, 225), being aware of both the image of the ideal feminine self and belonging to an Islamist party, these women construct their self-image within the circle of corporeal invisibility within the public space. The identities of these women come into being as a reaction toward the misogynist Islamist-cultural definition of the female spatial presence.

Though this spatial separation is mainly observed in the Islamist political party in Mauritania, Tawassoul, women in other parties usually are not an exception. The fact that women in Mauritanian political parties in general participate under the name of the Organization of the Women of the Party where their political events are usually carried separately from the main events organized by male members of the party which are taken as more formal than that of women can be explained as maintaining the gendered spatial division. Moreover, when participating in "mixed sex" political events, women politicians usually take their turn at the end of the event when their male counterparts deliver their speeches.

Taking the aforementioned examples of Tawassoul women's experience of place, it can be argued that power relation construct public space as a masculine place within which women define themselves as foreigners and men as the owners of the space.

Though the majority of Mauritanian female politicians experience gendered spatial barriers, there are examples of other women politicians who resist cultural value of spatial representation of the ideal public feminine, but they faced wide social criticism.



**Figure 22: Example of women politicians' resisting spatial separation**

In order to investigate social reaction toward the above picture, I posted it in the most famous Mauritanian political Facebook group without explaining the purpose behind posting it. It is important to mention that there are 17900 male and female members in the group. Interestingly, the majority of those who participated attacked the female ministers in the picture. Their comments were revolving around the immorality that these women show by sitting very close to the man. Others attack the male minister as being an example of a bad man who does not respect the Islamic identity of Mauritania. Actually, when examining the picture, it is clear that

there is enough space between the three ministers meaning that they are not bodily touched. However, the way that these women position themselves without respecting the gendered spatial separation of the society deconstructs the patriarchal image of the ideal woman.

Violating the main principles upon which spatial segregation is based on, knowingly or unknowingly, is rare because those who dare to do it face social punishment that may endanger their political carrier. Though women politicians in Mauritania are very conscious of the gender norms surrounding the political space, I cannot generalize the spatial disciplining of female politicians. However, during the four years I spent developing this project, I observed that women politicians from all political parties develop mainly a similar passive self-representation which is reflected in their body movement and clothing style.

When examining public mobility in the Mauritanian culture, one can argue that passivity is an aspect that defines what it means to be feminine in the Mauritanian society. Women are socialized to control their spatial mobility. Taking the following proverb as an example, it is clear that the feminine subject develops a sense of belonging in relation to her perceptions of space; whether she belongs to a particular space or not and whether this space is a threatening one or not. The proverb says:

النبيثي نقطة أودك

(A female is a drop of butter)

This idiom nicely demonstrates that it is not supposed for a woman to over react or get engaged in bodily action especially in public space. Women occupation of public space is conditioned by the limitation of their body mobility. The patriarchal values of femininity do not only influence the public act but the way that the act should be preformed. This can be explained by the nature of the physical design of the public space in which women are obliged to either

respect their bodily isolation, their spatial segregation, or be ready to public negative judgment when violating the patriarchal spatial norms.

Clearly, based on the above analysis and since gendering space does not only result in shaping the physical division but more importantly it constructs the individual's perception of the mental space, women politicians who found themselves limited by the devaluated spatial position they occupy will accordingly develop a negative sense toward themselves and thus feel that they are in the inappropriate place.

## **2. Women's Political Commitment and Competence**

This section of the chapter is meant to discuss two important issues concerning Mauritanian women's political involvement. The first issue which is discussed in the first subsection is political awareness among Mauritanian women especially young women. One of the main reasons that enhances women's effective political participation is being aware of the need for their participation in politics. In this subsection, the main aim is to examine young Mauritanian women political education linking it to the influence of socialization on women attitudes and its relation to the image that women politicians construct about the Mauritanian public woman. In the second subsection, a critical examination of the quota system is presented.

### **2.1. Mauritanian Women's Political Education**

In order to examine political awareness among young Mauritanian women, online survey was adopted for this particular purpose. Facebook was used as a strategy to reach the majority of young women because of the wide spread use of social media among Mauritanian women. In the most Mauritanian famous group on Facebook that contains 112000 female members, pictures of

four famous women politicians were posted asking “what do you think of the political qualities of these women?” 231 women participated commenting on the picture.



**Figure 23: Testifying women's political knowledge**

65 of the participants did not recognize the women politicians in the picture; thus, they asked questions requesting information about the women. From their comments, 18 participants were not sure about the women; they knew their faces but they have no idea about their political positions. For the remaining (75) participants, it was clear from their comments that they have information about the politicians and their positions, but the majority of them directed their comments on describing their physical appearance and fashion style instead of talking about their political qualities.



The comments of the participants reveal that these young women have a low level of political awareness. Simply, Mauritanian women's interests like that of any women living in patriarchal society are constructed through the process of socialization. In order for women to be controlled and kept away from public sphere patriarchal power institutions shape their attitudes toward public issues. Consequently, the participants were mainly divided into two groups, those who do not know anything about the women politicians because being a public actor is outside the realm of their interests as feminine subjects and those who guided the discussion to the area of the *supposedly* feminine interest which is beauty and fashion.

Undoubtedly, the cultural *making* of the Mauritanian woman requires a division between what is masculine and what is feminine. Thus, women are from their very early childhood convinced that certain concerns are masculine and those who show any interest in them will be named as being unfeminine. Therefore, since politics is a major masculine concern, the reaction of these young Mauritanian women toward the pictures of the female politicians demonstrates that politics is beyond the cultural definition of femininity. Though some Mauritanian women have been involved in politics since 1960s, the majority are more associated with the traditional view that politics is a masculine issue. Thus, as a Mauritanian woman, it can be stated that a group of Mauritanian women rarely discuss public issues except when they are part of a political event. Usually, the topics that women cover when gathering are those that are related to the private space. One of the interviewees commented on the reasons behind the low level of political awareness among women saying:

I think that politics is not traditionally women's specialty; thus, they have no experience of this matter so they develop a negative attitude toward it. Also, women's lack of education makes them unable to understand political issues. Moreover, I think that women mainly are concerned with their husbands, raising

children and competing with other women in matters of jewelry, the latest mode on dress and the like. Thus, in their view politics is a masculine boring issue. Of course, this is due to socialization because society does not only shape our behaviors as individuals but it also shapes our interests.

Undoubtedly, individuals are social subjects that are constructed through power relations that enhance or limit the possibilities for knowledge access and exchange. Foucault explains this form of power as that which:

implies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him [*sic*] by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. (1982: 212)

It is in the above sense that women's interests are directed toward issues related to the private sphere as a marker of their feminine identity. Politics as a public issue is, thus, outside the discursive possibilities that are available for women. Consequently, since Mauritanian women have a low level of political awareness as a part of their identities construction as feminine subjects, their political participation will be low because the majority of them are not interested in politics and view it as a masculine field. Thus, the country followed positive discrimination (the gender quotas) to increase the number of women in leadership positions.

## **2.2. Positive Discrimination and Political Competence**

Taking into consideration the low level of political awareness among the majority of Mauritanian women, I included an item (item number 4) into the questionnaire to examine the women's attitude toward political leadership.

**Table 5: Women's attitudes toward leadership**

<b>Item number 4: What do you think of women's attitudes toward leadership?</b>			
<b>Against it</b>	<b>Scared of it</b>	<b>Ready for it</b>	<b>Undecided</b>
18 (6%)	42 (14%)	152 (50.6%)	88 (29.3%)

After the completion of data collection, it was noticed that the question can be understood in different ways because it did not specify the women meant by “women”, all Mauritanian women or those who are already involved in politics. Since the answers show that the majority of the participants believe that women are ready to take up leadership positions, it can be stated that they understood the question the way it was meant, this is, the attitudes of women who are involved in politics. If they took “women” to mean all Mauritanian women, the answer will differ since the majority of Mauritanian women are uninterested in politics (based on the analysis presented in the previous section). Thus, because of the ambiguity of the above question, the focus was on the answers of the interviewees in order to examine women's attitudes toward leadership which is very important in analyzing women politicians' competence in relation to the gender quota policy.

All the interviewees were asked the same question about what they think of the attitudes of women who are taking part in the political sphere toward leadership positions. The majority of them responded to this question almost in the same way. The following are three examples of the different responses. Jamil Mansor, the president of the Islamist party, Tawassou, stated:

I think that women's attitude toward leadership in general is a positive one. However, there are those who we feel that they are still unready despite being part of political institutions. This negative attitude is due to socialization, I guess, because some women are still influenced by the traditional view that limits

women's political abilities. In our party, we usually try to make training courses to develop women political skills and thus their competence.

Evidently, Mansor made an important remark about socialization of Mauritanian women that does not only construct the negative attitude toward public issues but also it shapes some characteristics that enhances women's political qualities such as being shy and unconfident.

On the other hand, the participant Malouma Mint Meidah, a previous member of the Mauritanian Parliament, said:

I think that all women who are politically active have a positive attitude toward politics that make them ready to take up any leadership positions because simply these women stand against the masculine values and thus they are ready to fight for their political rights.

Reading Mint Meidah's response, I noticed that some of the interviewees responded in a diplomatic way. This is to say that they dealt with the question with an emotional way through stressing the unrealistic assumption that all female political actors are ready and willing to take over any position of power. Nevertheless, basing on the general rule that women politicians in general should be ready to take part in every political task cannot be applied to all women in the political domain especially in societies where a large number of women politicians are *added* to politics only in order to serve the patriarchal invisible intentions behind the democratization of the country.

The participant Nana Mint Mohamed Laghdaf, the president of women organization in the party of Union of Democratic Forces added another important point saying:

When it comes to women's attitudes toward leadership, I feel that it is important to clarify that there are two types of women who we see in the political field today. There are those who fought for their political involvement and thus they

gained it because they deserve it, and there are those who were forced into the political action without being interested. Undoubtedly, those who fought for their involvement have a positive attitude toward leadership because it is part of their beliefs and which pushes them to raise their voice. About those who found themselves in the politics accidentally, for sure the majority of them are unready to take any political responsibility because simply they are incompetent. I just want to add that these women are the ones who gave the negative image of the Mauritanian woman politician.

Interestingly, Mint Mohamed Laghdaf categorized women politicians in a significant way. As she clarified, as there are real women politicians who are qualified there are also those who gained political power through family and tribe influence or through serving a certain political agenda.

The point that Mint Mohamed Laghdaf clarified is quite relevant. Some of these women who access power only because they have a relative in high political positions or because they belong to a tribe that the government wants to satisfy by appointing one of their women in a political position may develop a negative attitude toward leadership positions. This may negatively affects their political performance. Some accuse the quota of paving the way for unqualified women into politics.

All the interviewees were asked about their opinions of the quota as a strategy to promote women's access to decision making positions. It is important to restate that Mauritania appointed a quota of minimum 20% of electoral seats for women in 2006. Here are some examples of the responds:

Mohamed Ghulam Ould El Haj El Sheikh, a representative in the Parliament and vice president of Tewassoul, argued that:

I believe that the quota is necessary in a country like Mauritania in which politics is considered as a male domain. So, for women to have the chance to get involved in politics, they need the quota because if they compete with men, they will not be elected due to the cultural view that will make the political audience vote for men. However, I can say that the quota added little to women's political participation because some of the political parties used it negatively. These parties feel that they are forced to add women and thus they just add unqualified women to fill the lists.

The participant Fatimatou Mint Abdul Malk, the mayor of Tefraqh Zeyna stated that:

The quota is just a ladder for empowering women. And it is just a stage through it we will be able to access power positions. However, I think that some used the quota to limit women's political involvement instead of enhancing it. This is simply when some political parties nominate unqualified women who became political actors through the quota. You know that the society judges all women from the action of one woman, so when we have unqualified women in the political sphere, all women will be negatively affected by their poor political performance. I think that these political parties nominate unqualified women on purpose because they do not believe in women's political participation which is clear from the absence of women from the parties' administration.

Mohamed Saleck Oumar, the mayor of Leksar, another respondent added:

The positive side of the quota is that it helps women as any discriminated group to participant in public issues. Moreover, the quota helps in raising awareness among common people that women can be politically be active which is something that a patriarchal society like Mauritania needs. Also, through the quota women develop their political experience and this is the only way through which they can gain experience because they have always been kept away from public life for years. However, it has also a negative side which is that the quota reinforces the idea of access without quality. I think that people should be given

the chance to participate in politics based on their qualities instead of judging them on gender base.

Evidently, the three interviewed politicians mentioned almost the positive and the negative sides of promoting women's political involvement through the quota. With no doubt, through the quota women in patriarchal societies have the chance to access decision making positions and thus change the public opinion in favor of women's political activism. However, the quota violates an important aspect of effective political performance which is political competence.

As the interviewees' statements show, gender quota brings incompetent women to politics. This as Mint Abdul Malk interestingly put affect all women politicians because when it comes to women, labeling one woman is labeling her entire gender. Thus, political passivity of these women will construct a negative image of women's political activism in general; therefore, instead of helping women improving their political image, the gender quota works on making things worse for public women. This is to say that political parties by filling the nominated lists with incompetent female candidates enhance the chances of political ineffectiveness for the future women politicians.

Critically, thinking beyond the political debate about whether gender quotas really work for women as a way to foster political representation or against them when bringing incompetent women to power, it can be argued that the percentage that is given to women through the quotas is problematic by itself. Ironically, the minimum 20% that is reserved for women in electoral seats symbolizes the normative perception of domestic feminine subject in Mauritania. When the government felt the need to enhance women's political participation through promoting gender quota, the quota itself mirrors the patriarchal view toward women's involvement in public life. When the interviewees were asked if they think that 20% is enough for women who represent

approximately 52% of the Mauritanian population, the majority of them agreed that the quota is satisfactory except two women politicians who added that it is enough if it is temporary and that they hope that it would be increased in the future.

Based on the above interpretation, women's political representation is constructed under the influence of the cultural view that politics is a masculine domain. The 20% quota, analytically speaking, represents women's underrepresentation in politics compared to the number of women in the society. Through their satisfaction with the gender quota, Mauritanian female political elites admit that men are the masters of the public sphere and that it is enough for women to be given that small space within politics which is supposedly a masculine property. This would imply that female political actors are stereotypically associated with political positions that are inferior compared to that of males.

### **3. Political Positions and Gender Stereotypes**

First, it is important to note that gender stereotype in its simplest meaning is "a set of beliefs about what it means to be female or male" (Golombok & Fivush, 1994: 17). In other words, gender stereotypes are the social expectations that women and men should meet in order to fit in their masculine and feminine gender identities. These beliefs and expectations shape the roles and responsibilities of each gender category. Thus, the roles that women are expected to play are those which fit into the biological determinism assumptions of femininity. This is to say that women are usually attached to responsibilities that are related to the private space. However, with the modernization of patriarchy, women take up public responsibilities, but it should be highlighted that these responsibilities are still under the influence of gender stereotypes.

In this section, the focus is on analyzing gender stereotypes that disadvantage women in Mauritanian politics. In this respect, it is worth noting that the Mauritanian political sphere the



number of women decreases when moving up in the political ladder. Building on the feminine and masculine personality traits ascribed to women and men, women are seen as being less able to manage political high positions. This section is a focused reading into the paradox of allowing women into the public space while keeping them imprisoned inside the stereotypical image associated with their femininity. It aims to analyze the causes that limit women's chances to occupy political decision-making posts. Analyzing gender stereotypes that characterize women's political participation, women's municipal experience is taken as an example of a political institution that has always been dominated by men.

### 3.1. Feminine Ministries Vs. Masculine Ministries

A critical investigation into the Mauritanian political structure will reveal that women are represented in certain political areas such as family, health, and education, while they are mainly absent in other areas such as defense, finance, and justice. Before going deeper into the analysis of this phenomenon, it is important to provide an overview of the Mauritanian ministerial structure and a brief history of women ministerial occupation. The following tables are a gender-based representation of the 2018 Mauritanian government.

**Table 6: Masculine dominated ministries**

Ministries	The Minister	Comments
The Prime Minister	Male	This post has always been reserved for men.
Minister of Justice	Male	There has never been any woman on the head of this ministry
Ministry of National Defense	Male	No woman has ever held this ministerial portfolio.
Ministry of the	Male	No woman has been given the chance to be the minister of

Interior and Decentralization		the Interior and Decentralization.
Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Traditional Education	Male	This ministry has always been dominated by men.
Ministry of Economy and Finance	Male	No woman has ever been a minister in for this post.
Ministry of Petroleum, Energy and Minerals	Male	No woman has ever held this ministerial portfolio.
Ministry Petroleum, Energy and Minerals	Male	No woman has ever been on the top of this ministry.
The Ministry of Fisheries and Maritime Economy	Male	A ministry that has always been dominated by men. No women have ever been appointed on the head of this ministry.
The Ministry of Equipment and Transport	Male	No woman ever has been on charge of this ministry.
The Ministry of Water and Sanitation	Male	No woman has ever held this ministerial portfolio.
The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research	Male	No woman has ever been a minister in this political institution.

**Table 7: Political posts that are in a degree of minister**

Ministries	The Minister	Comments
Governor of the Central Bank	Male	No woman has ever been in this post.
Commissioner for Human Rights and Humanitarian Action	Male	No woman has ever been appointed for this post.
Commissioner for Food Security	Female	The only woman who has ever been in this post is the current commissioner.

**Table 8: Ministries that women have access to**

Ministries	The Minister	Comments
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation	Male	Women have never held this powerful position before 2009 with the appointment of Naha Mint Mouknass. In 2014 Fatma Vall Mint Soueinae was appointed for this post. So, only two women were given the chance for this ministry.
Ministry of Labor, Public Service, and Modernization of the Administration	Female	Few women have gained access to this ministry.
The Ministry of Health	Male	In the history of the ministry two women have been appointed as Ministers of Health. (During 44 male ministers and only two female ministers)
The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism	Female	Three women have been appointed as ministers of Commerce.
The Ministry of Housing,	Female	There have been only two women for this ministry.

Urbanization and Land Reclamation		
Ministry of Agriculture	Female	This ministry was included under the Ministry of Rural Development that once was under the charge of Messaouda Mint Bahma during the period of 2008-2009. This ministry was divided into two Ministries, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Cattle and Livestock. And both newborn ministries are under the charge of women ministers.
The Ministry of Cattle and Livestock	Female	Newborn ministry. (see above)
The Ministry of National Education	Male	The only woman who have accessed this ministerial portfolio Nebghouha Mint Mohamed Vall, 2007-2008.
The Ministry of Employment, Vocational Training and Information Technologies	Male	This ministry was of a renewing of the Ministry of Professional Training, Technologies and Communication. Fatima Habib, 2013-2014, was the only female politician to be appointed as a minister of the old version of Ministry of Empowerment, Vocational Training and Information Technologies.
Ministry of Culture and Handicrafts Government Spokesperson	Male	There have been women ministries in the history of the ministry.
The Ministry of Youth and Support	Male	Three women have been appointed as ministers of Youth and Support. (Mehela Mint Ahmed, Coumba Ba, and Fatma Vall Mint Soueinae)
The Ministry of Relations with the Parliament and Civil Society	Female	Only one woman, the current minister, has the chance to access this ministerial portfolio.

The Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development	Male	No woman has ever been on the top of this Ministry. However, Aicha Mint Sidi Bouna was appointed as Vice-Minister in Charge of the Environment attached to the Prime Minister, 2007-2008.
The Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family	Female	This is the only ministerial portfolio that no man has ever held in the Mauritanian history.
Secretary General of the Government	Female	Two women have been Secretary General of the Government.
Minister-Delegate of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation charged with Maghreb and African Affairs	Female	This ministerial post has been accessed by women.
Minister Delegate <i>to</i> the Minister of Economy and Finance in Charge of the Budget	Male	

Clearly, as it is presented in the above tables, there are 10 women holding ministerial posts out of the total 31 posts (32.25%), which is the highest number of female ministries in the history of Mauritania. Out of these 31 ministerial posts, 14 have never been accessed by woman. It is important to note that ministries are hierarchically classified in two categories, sovereign ministries and non-sovereign ministries. Sovereign ministries are usually assigned to male politicians while the non-sovereign ministries are associated with female politicians.

Definitely, as **table 6** illustrates, there are ministerial posts that have always been a masculine property in the history of Mauritanian government. As it is already discussed in Chapter Five, Mauritanian women's presence in ministerial portfolio has always been limited to the realm of women's stereotypical interests. However, in 2009 with Ould Abdel Aziz rule, women gained access to one of the most important sovereign ministries, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. The feminization of this ministry did not last long; only two women held this political portfolio. Other ministries that women have been appointed to are ministries in areas such as women issues, youth and sport, agriculture, environment, livestock, and commerce. (See table number 8) On the other, male politicians tend to dominate areas such as defense, interior issues, Islamic affairs, and fisheries (see **table 8**).

Since politics of any country cannot be examined isolated from the attitudes and beliefs of the community of that country, items were included in the questionnaire to examine Mauritians' gendered view toward certain political positions in order to analyze women's absence from high ministerial portfolios. The following table presents the participants' reactions to these questions:

**Table 9: Mauritians' attitudes toward certain political positions**

<b>Item number 6: Can a man be a minister of Women Affairs?</b>	
Yes 37 (12.33%)	No 263 (87.66%)
<b>Item number 7: Can a woman be minister of defense?</b>	
Yes 54 (18%)	No 246 (82%)
<b>Item number 8: Can a woman be a minister of Islamic Affairs?</b>	
Yes 7 (2.33%)	No 293 (97.66%)
<b>Item number 9: Can a woman be a prime minister?</b>	
Yes 171 (57%)	No 129 (43%)

The above responses illustrate that based on gender stereotypical perceptions the majority of the participants believe that when assigning political position to a person, their gender should be taken into consideration. As it is presented in Table 9, only 37 people chose the yes option for item number 6 which means that these participants do not mind a man taking over a political position that is meant to manage issues that are related to the domestic sphere. Examining the personal information of these 37 people, it was found that 12 of them are Afro-Mauritians while the rest are Hassaniya speakers. 23 of them are men while the remaining 14 are women. Importantly, the 37 participants are bilinguals. Thus, it can be stated that based on their racial and linguistic background these people are more likely to accept the idea of a man holding a political position that is socially considered as feminine. In the interview, Nana Mint Mohamed Laghdaf supports this idea saying:

It will be nice if we have a man as the Minister of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family which will symbolizes that we, as a country, reached a level of development that makes us think beyond gender. I will really be happy if I see a man in this position. But, I am quite sure that we still need so many years and strong efforts to make this dream reality.

The participant Fatimatou Mint Abdul Malk, on the other hand, argued that she is not in support of a man holding a ministerial portfolio related to women affairs because, as she put it:

No one can understand women's sufferings better than women themselves. So, since this ministry is in charge of issues such as violence, child custody, and other feminine related issues, a male minister will not help women. Actually, I am just against this idea.

Interestingly, when Mint Abdul Malke argued against a male minister for women's issues and family explaining that for the minister to succeed in guaranteeing women's rights, the post

should be held by a woman. She emphasized the dichotomous perception of feminine related issues vs. the public issues. Logically, Minister of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family is a political position that can be performed by any person since this person works for women's empowerment. However, since it is believed that women have more experience with private space, they gain more trust in managing political issues within this circle.

Back to the results presented in Table 9, only 7 participants thought that it is possible for a woman to be the Minister of Islamic Affairs. First, it is important, analytically speaking, to take into consideration the responsibilities assigned to the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Traditional education. This ministry is in charge of *al-Da'wa* (spreading the call of Islam), mosques, Muslim scholars and preachers, traditional education, *el-mahdera*, cooperation with Islamic organization in other Muslim countries, and the like. It is important, thus, for the minister to be qualified, meaning to have an Islamic educational background, to be *alem* or at least *faquih*. Clearly, these responsibilities culturally force masculinity as an important condition for appointing the minister for this portfolio. This is, of course, not to say that there are no female qualified Islamic scholars in Mauritania, *alimat*, but to argue that the patriarchal perceptions do not support women's presence in such position.

The misogynist readings of Islamic texts exclude women from the public domain. Therefore, it is obvious that even if the Mauritanian president is in support of women stepping beyond the conventional image of feminine ministers, '*he*' cannot force a woman minister into a community that already believes that everything related to woman is *awrah* even her own voice. Generally speaking the majority of the members of the community which the Ministry of Islamic Affairs is in charge of, depending on the patriarchal interpretation of religious texts, believe that women lack in their intelligence. An example of religious texts that are used against women is



Abu Said Al-Khudri's hadith about women lacking of intelligence and religion. This *hadith* has always been misogynically interpreted to intellectually silence women and keep them away from asserting their presence in public domain. Therefore, logically, how can a woman who is believed to be lacking intelligence gain trust from the religious community that she is supposed to be the minister in charge of?

Generally, religious people in Mauritania will not accept a woman as a minister because as it is aforementioned they do not believe in women's public participation. (See Chapter Two for more information about the religious construction of patriarchy). In other words, based on patriarchal perception of womanhood, women are excluded from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.

Mauritanian women are underrepresented in the majority of the important ministerial portfolios and other high political positions such as presidency of the Legislative Councils and governance of the Central Bank. The mayor of Tefraq Zeyna, Nouakchott, Mint Abdul Malik does not think that women absence from the aforementioned powerful political positions a weakness in the political representation of women. In the interview, she stated that:

I think that Mauritania is one of the best countries in terms of women's ministerial portfolio representation. Concerning, women's access to sovereign ministries, I think that the hierarchal ranking of ministries assigned to women is not of that much importance. The fact that we have more than ten female ministries in the current government, which is a very important step toward women's empowerment, is more important than questioning the nature of the ministries under women control.

It is clear from her response that it is enough for women to have ministers' representatives in the governmental cabinet without taking into consideration what ministries they are regulated to. It can be argued thus that some women politicians are more loyal to the

policy of the political party they belong to than to their own gender. Supporting this idea, the participant Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Amat, the vice president of the Union of Democratic Forces, explained that:

Women's absence from these political positions is due mainly to two factors. The first reason behind it is the fact that Mauritania is patriarchal society that still have to go through more civilization in order for it to accept women's public involvement. The second factor is that Mauritanian women do not believe in their political rights. Women are usually used either by the government or some political parties. They use women's political representation as propaganda, and you see women who are happy with the little growth in their representation. Thus, I will admit that in order for women to gain access to these positions which are believed to be masculine, they have first to believe in their right for equal access to political posts.

Based on the above sense, it can be argued that despite the fact that women movement in Mauritania have played an important role in the growth of women's political representation, President Ould Abde Aziz seemed to use women's political involvement as an important democratic step. Thus, Mint Abdul Malike, like other women of the governing party, Union for the Republic, praises the President for appointing eleven women ministers in the government, paying too much attention to the quantity without questioning the quality of this political involvement.

Ironically, interviewed politicians from the Tawassoul responded to the aforementioned question in an unexpected way. Mohamed Ghulam Ould El Haj El Sheikh ensured that his Islamist party has no problem with women's appointment in high prestigious political positions. He stated:

We, as a political party do not see any problem in women holding the highest political position, even they can be president since it presidency is not the great imamate. I believe that there are women who are more qualified to hold sovereign political seats than men. However, due to the fact that those who are responsible for appointing women in such positions take such decisions from a patriarchal point of view, they exclude women from these posts. It is really dangerous that in the twenty-first century we still categorize political posts in this stereotypical way that does not give women chance. (Interviewee)

Mayor of Dar Al-Naim, Kenata Ould Al-Neghra who are also from Tawassoul party, added:

As a political party based on Islamic ideology, we believe in political quality between the sexes. On the contrary, I strongly believe that women should be given the chance to have access to sovereign ministries because according to my experience, I have never witnessed corruption in ministries or other political institutions that are under women's control. (Interviewee)

Paradoxically, the above Islamist politicians' responses contradict the quality of women's political representation of their political party. Despite the fact that both interviewees argued that their party is in support of women's appointment in high political positions even they can be president, their party does not practice such belief. Women in Twassoul are isolated in their political organization, which they are usually associated with social services and campaigning for the party. Moreover, in the history of Tawassoul, there has never been a woman as a president or vice president of the party. The only major role that Tawassoul women have played is that of MPs and municipal councils.

Interestingly, Legsar Mayor, Mohamed Salck Ould Oumar, explained that women's absence from sovereign ministerial positions is due to the socio-cultural concepts of Mauritians. He added:

It is true that I hope to see women in such positions, but we cannot ignore two factors that exclude women from these political posts. These factors are: first, women's lack of political experience due to the fact that they have just been recently involved in politics and second the cultural stereotypes that do not go in favor of women's occupation of such posts. Ministries such as the Ministry of the Interior and Decentralization, for example, need a person who has a deep political experience. The Interior, as another example, is a very demanding ministry. It requires dealing with dangerous issues so its minister should be able to meet day and night mixing with people in different situation. Thus, a woman who is forbidden in the name of Islam from mixing with men will not be able to fulfill these duties. (Interviewee)

The above argument by Ould Oumar hits at the core of the problem of Mauritanian women politicians' absence from sovereign ministries and other powerful political institutions. In addition to the aforementioned patriarchal perception of womanhood that other interviewees talked about as essential factors behind this absence, Ould Oumar mentioned another important factor which is the manipulation of women spatial mobility that assumes that Islam has forbidden women from mixing with men and for this reason women cannot fit into a demanding ministries such as Defense and the Interior. Despite the fact that so many Islamic scholars justify that Islam did not forbid women's mixing with non-*mahram* if it is under public eye, the majority still insist that women mixing with men in public space is not allowed in Islam. On the contrary, Islam forbids women staying alone with men who are not their *mahrams*, and this is not the case with women ministers who are usually surrounded by people.

In this context, it can be argued that the Ministry of Defense is in the Mauritanian cultural psychology is related to the masculine strong body that can defeat the enemy and secure the nation; women with their weak bodies are considered to be inappropriate for such political post. However, as the former Minister of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family, Seniya Mint Sidi Heyba, summarized the issue,

Despite their political involvement, women are still judged according to the traditional view that they are capable with the private only and anything that is related to power require efforts will be seen as a male issue. However, we have to keep working and wait. Changing social mentality is not an easy job. It needs both time and efforts. (Interviewee)

In spite of this analysis, women ministerial experience reinforce the public/private dichotomy placing women into a paradox of negotiating the public through the private vision, some women have been assigned to political posts that have always been reserved for male politicians.

### **3.2. Challenges of Leading the Local Community: Women Mayors**

Despite the observed upsurge in women's political involvement, municipal government in Mauritania like sovereign ministerial portfolios has always been a male dominated sector par excellence. However, after the implementation of the gender quote in 2006, women's municipal representation witnessed considerable development on the level of advisors and council members. Nevertheless, the mayoral positions remained occupied mainly by males. The following tables present a comparison between women's involvement in pre-quota and post-quota periods.

**Table 10: 28 October 2001. Supplement Legislative and municipal elections - Final results**

Regions	Total municipal councilors	Women municipal councilors	Women mayors
Hodh Cahrgui	486	5 (1.07%)	0
Hodh el Gharbi	409	6 (1.47%)	0
Assaba	404	11 (2.72%)	0
Gorgol	415	12 (2.89%)	0
Brakna	359	12 (3.34%)	0
Trarza	413	8 (1.93%)	0
Adrar	151	4 (2.65%)	0
D. Nouadhibou	65	4 (6.15%)	0
Tagant	162	5 (3.08%)	0
Guidimaka	294	6 (2.04%)	0
Tiris Zemmour	43	3 (6.97%)	0
Inchiri	28	2 (7.14%)	0
Nouakchott	189	15 (7.93%)	1
Total	3400	92 (2.7%)	1 (0.45%)

**Table 11: Répertoire de conseillers municipaux 2014 (the last municipal election)**

Regions	Total municipal councilors	Women municipal councilors	Women mayors
Hodh Cahrgui	537	184 (34.26%)	0
Hodh el Gharbi	447	165(36.91%)	0
Assaba	446	135 (30.26%)	1
Gorgol	489	164(33.53%)	0
Brakna	379	120 (31.66%)	0
Trarza	429	119 (27.73%)	1
Adrar	169	83 (49.11%)	0
D. Nouadhibou	82	28 (34.14%)	0
Tagant	160	50 (31.25%)	1

Guidimaka	316	103 (32.5%)	1
Tiris Zemmour	47	17 (36.17%)	0
Inchiri	32	10 (31.25%)	0
Nouakchott	189	77 (40.74%)	2
Total	3722	1255(33.71%)	6 (2.75%)

Examining the data in table 10 and 11 indicates that the percentage of women's mayoral involvement increased in the last election. On the level of women municipal councilors, the number of women increased from 3.35% to 33.71 while on the level of women mayors the change was not that much. In 2001, out of the 218 mayor there was only one woman mayor (0.345%), the Mayor of Tefraqh Zeyina, Nouakchott, while in 2014 the number of women mayors increased to reach 6 mayors (2.75%), 2 in the capital, Nouakchott and 4 in other parts of Mauritania. This is actually a small number compared to the percentage of women in Mauritanian population, but still it is true that just before few years it was impossible to imagine the existence of a woman mayor.

In this section, the aim is to provide an analysis of the reasons behind women's under-representation in mayoral posts as well as the challenges that women mayors face when managing local government. Interestingly, Raisa B. Deber's discussed four disadvantaging points that lower women's chances in election in a study she conducted in 1982. Based on Deber's study this section and the following one will be an attempt at applying these points on the Mauritanian context. The factors that Deber found are (1) women's lack of motivation toward electoral positions (this point has been discussed in the previous section), (2) political parties are more likely to select men for these posts, (3) women have less access to political resources compared to their male counterparts, and (4) the sexist attitude of the voting population toward women candidates.

Thus, in this particular section, points number 2 and 4 will be testified as an explanation for Mauritanian women's underrepresentation in mayoral posts. Moreover, experience of the few women who won mayoral seats are analyzed with the intention to evaluate the feminine touch in the male dominated municipality domain. Therefore, the analysis is based mainly on the interviews conducted with five mayors among whom two female mayors and a female vice mayor. This is to say that the investigation of women mayors' experience will be based on the accessed data.

Concerning the evaluation of women's experience of local government, an open ended question, item 16, was included in the questionnaire to obtain qualitative data about women's municipal experience in Nouakchott, the Municipality of Tevregg-Zeina and the Urban Group of Nouakchott.

**Item 16:** As you know there are two municipalities in Nouakchott headed by women, the Municipality of Tevregg-Zeina and the Urban Group of Nouakchott. How do you evaluate women's municipal experience?

Before analyzing the data provided by the respondents in reaction to this question, it is important to examine women's underrepresentation in municipality. There are many factors that reduce women's chances for municipal positions. These factors can be classified in two categories, socio-cultural factors and individual factors. The socio cultural factors are those that are related to patriarchal perception of womanhood. Despite the fact that in patriarchal societies women usually do not have many opportunities for taking local governing bodies, the gender quotas through reserving a minimum number of seats for women successes in opening the municipal door for women. However, as it aforementioned the quota enhances women's



participation only on the level of councilors and fails on the mayoral level. the Vice Mayor of Nema, a city in southeastern Mauritania explained that:

I think that women's underrepresentation in mayoral positions is due to the fact that political parties do not nominate women on the top of the list of their municipal councils. They usually give men the priority while women the second or the third on the list. This is a problem that the quota did not take into consideration. If the quota is truly adopted, there should be at least 20% of female mayors out of the 218 mayors. (Interviewee)

This response may entail that in the political race, every party works for its own benefits that may not be guaranteed if women candidates are selected. Thus, instead of solving gender related issues that reduce women's participation this approach to politics enhances them. In order for them to win the municipal electoral positions, political parties would rather give more opportunities to men than women. No doubt, the patriarchal mentality of the voting population will prefer voting for men than for women. Thus, political parties usually grant women middle and lower-range positions on party lists as a strategy of implementing the obligatory gender quota while at the same time guarantying victory for the party when nominating a man on the top of the list. Moreover, the absence of women from higher positions inside the party itself makes women the last choice for mayoral seats. Interestingly, the Mayor of Tefraqh-Zeina, added an important point on this regard:

Parties are not the only one to be blamed on women's under-representation in municipality. It is true that there is a noticeable absence of female voice in the top of the administrative pyramid of the political party which makes reduces the chances for women to be nominated for such electoral position, but also the lack of feminist orientation among the majority of women of the party is of a greater impact on women's political involvement. (Interviewee)

In this context, it is worth noting that a feminist view will grantee women's the right to have more representation in all areas of the political sphere (see the following section for more elaboration). However, despite the lack of feminist awareness among women in the political parties and other political positions, due to the interaction that local governmental office creates between people and the mayor, this post is more likely to influence political awareness among women in general and young girls in particular if the mayor is a woman. Based on a study conducted on US women mayors, Ferreira and Gyourko (2014) find that despite the fact that "having a woman win the mayor's office has virtually no positive impact on the probability of other females winning political office" (p. 39). Still, women mayors serve as role models to other females.

Along with this, in 2017 I had the chance to teach composition and communication at the Higher Institute for Languages and Translation in Nouakchott. During these sessions, I observed the use of sentences as examples expressing positive feeling toward the existence of a woman mayor by few female students who live in Tevergh-zeina. They frequently mentioned the Mayor of Teverqh-Zeina as a model of a successful woman politician who they wish will be like in their future.

Another factor that can explain women's absence from mayoral position is tribal politics. Tribal support has a great impact on women access to electoral positions in general and municipality in particular. Etaqiya Mint Habibu Allah, the Mayor of Intichit a rural municipality in the region of Trarza, argued that it is necessary for the female mayoral candidate to be highly supported by the tribe or tribes of the region she is running for in order for her to win the election (interviewee). Despite the strong influence of tribes in Mauritania, there is a lack

of research on this area. Tribes can either facilitate or restraint women's access to mayoral posts.

One of the respondents explained that:

Despite the existence of the modern democratic government, Mauritania is still a tribal country. Usually before choosing the nominated party list, there should be a selective process that guarantees equal representation of tribes inside this list. In this process, when the political posts are divided between tribes of a certain region, women are usually not suggested to represent a certain tribe because the masculine mentality of the tribe will not introduce her as a possible choice.

From the above sense, it is important to note that 5 out of the 6 Mauritanian female Mayors belong to the same political party, the ruling party, Union for the Republic. This confirms the aforementioned factor about the importance of party support.

However, party support does not guarantee for women access to electoral positions if it is not accompanied by tribe support. In certain places, for example, members of the Union for the Republic announced their withdrawal from the party as a reaction against placing women at the top of the municipal lists. Thus, nominating women for local election is usually unwelcomed not only by the common voters but also by male members of the same party itself. Intichit, a rural municipality in Trarza can be taken as an example. When the Union for the Republic nominated a woman for mayoral office, a number of male members of the party fought against the party decision.

أصدر فقهاء موريتانيون في بلدية انتشيط التابعة لمقاطعة بوتليميت جنوبي موريتانيا ، فتوى تحرم التصويت للمرأة في الانتخابات [..] وتتنافس في قرية انتشيط لا ئحتان احدهما تمثل حزب الاتحاد من اجل الجمهورية والاخرى تمثل حزب التجمع الوطني للاصلاح والتنمية تواصل ، وتسعى العمدة السابقة للبلدية التقية بنت حبيب الى الفوز في الانتخابات مستندة على دعم من الحزب الحاكم بينما يناقشها مرشح حزب تواصل محمد ولد الشيخ محمد فال [..] وواجه قرار الحزب ترشيح تلك السيدة انتقادات من طرف مجموعة

من مناضلي الحزب الحاكم في بلدية انتيشيت حيث اعلنت تمردها عليه بعد أن قرر إعادة ترشيح العمدة الحالية للبلدية، مؤكدة المجموعة أنها لن تدعن لهذا القرار الذي وصفته بالقرار الأرعن.

Religious scholars in the Intichit municipality [...] in south Mauritania have issued a fatwa forbidding voting for women in elections. [...] (Candidates from two major parties are contesting in the area). Intichit's outgoing mayor, Taqiya Mint Habib, [before running for the mayoral post, being the Vice Mayor, Mint Habib was in charge of the municipality about a year after the death of the former mayor] is seeking re-election, supported by the ruling party. Her rival, Mohamed O. Sheikh Mohamed Vall, represents the Tawassoul party. The decision by Taqiya's party to nominate her for the post has come under harsh criticism from a number of her co-militants who declared disobedience to the party in protest. They described the nomination as reckless. (Meydaninfo, 8 December, 2013).

A clear indication of patriarchal influence that imbued some male politicians' psychology can be seen in the reaction of Intichit's male politicians against their party's decision. Nominating a woman for them was a kind of insult. Though some call for the importance of integrating women into the political sphere, the majority consider women's involvement just as protocol that helps in democratizing the party. However, these people see that it is enough for women to be included in the party list but not of course on the top of it. The elected Mayor of Intichit, Taqiya Mint Habib, commented on this attack saying,

I was sure from the very beginning that so many men even inside my tribe and the party environment will stand against me only because of my gender. However, I did not stop because I knew my party is supporting me as well as those who believe in women's right to take their chance in leading the community. (Interviewee)

To shed the light on the wrong choice of the ruling party when nominating Mint Habib for the mayoral position, Mohamed Lamine Ould Ahmed, a writer and a political activist from Intichit municipality argues in an article posted in Tawary electronic newspaper that:

لقد عمدت مرشحة الحزب الحاكم في بلدية "انتيشط" التابعة لمقاطعة بتلميت التقية بنت حبيب، إلى تزييف الحقائق واختلاق قصص خرافية. كما أنها دأبت على المتاجرة بقضايا المرأة وكأن خسارتها للبلدية ستكون ضربة لقضية المرأة وصورتها في موريتانيا و العالم. والسؤال هو هل يكفي أن يكون المرشح(ة) امرأة حتى يفوز بالانتخابات؟ لقد حصلت هذه السيدة على نحو ثلث الناخبين في البلدية في الشوط الأول جراء الضغوط التي مارسها أطر الحزب الحاكم مستخدمين اساليب الترغيب والترهيب التقليدية بنفوذ الدولة. ولولا ذلك لما وصلت أصلا للشوط الثاني لأنها لا تملك أي قاعدة شعبية.

The ruling party's Intichit candidate (in the department of Boutilimit) Taqiya Bint Habib has engaged in falsification and the invention of chimeric stories. She's used to trade with the feminist cause and to present her own defeat as a blow to the rights of all women and to their overall image in Mauritania and the world. The question is: is just being a woman a guarantee for electoral victory? This lady has secured about a third of the votes in the said municipality in the first round only through pressure by party officials and through the traditional stratagems of enticement and intimidation aided by the influence of the state. (10 December, 2013)

The above view of Ould Ahmed does not only indicate a clear criticism of the female candidate accusing her of the negative use of gender-card only to be elected, but it also unveils another important point which is the power of the political party. Ould Ahmed argues that Mint Habib passed to the second round only because of the pressure of the ruling party. He emphasizes on the use of gender card metaphor in Mint Habib's political discourse. Though playing the gender card can sometimes be beneficial for women politicians, there must be a base of feminist orientation among the voting population, especially among women voters, which is not the case in Mauritania and also the female politician who is stressing on gender issues should

be intelligent enough to play the gender card in a way that influence women's voting population. However, it is obvious that a candidate will not play gender discourse as her only strategy to win in a society that still do not believe in women's involvement in public life.

Notably, once the party was convinced to introduce a woman for the mayoral post, she will have more chances to win in rural areas where the influence of the political party is stronger than questioning the gender of the candidate. Paradoxically, one may doubt this point based on the assumption that women logically have less chances in rural municipalities where illiteracy and patriarchal ideology is more perceived than in big cities. However, in Mauritania it is noticed that the ruling party throughout the political history of the country usually gains electoral success in rural areas where people unquestionably vote for its candidates simply because they are proposed by the ruling party. Thus, 4 out of the 6 women mayors were elected in rural municipalities.

Back to the evaluation of the Mauritanian female municipal experience, due to time and difficulties in reaching rural municipalities, data is conducted from the two municipalities which are headed by women, Municipality of Teverqh-Zeina and the Urban Group of Nouakchott. Concerning the Urban Group of Nouakchott, it was planned to to conduct an interview with the Mayor, Maty Mint Hamady, but unfortunately she refused claiming that she had no time for researchers. It is important to note that Maty Mint Hamady was elected as the Mayor of Nouakchott, the President of the Urban Group in 2014. She is the first women in the Mauritanian history to hold such position. During her campaign, she promised in her political program that if she had the chance to be given the responsibility, she would work on cleaning the city, building parks, and cornices for Nouakchott. She emphasized the fact that no woman has ever been given the chance to show what women can do for the city and its people.

About a year after her election, a group of youth organized a non-violent march against that which they labeled Mint Hamady's corruption. They accused her for using the municipal budget for her personal benefits and that she did not work according to her proposed program. They used social media to pass over their messages under a Facebook *hashtag* "#Maty's\_garbage". Actually, only very few of the participants who reacted to Item 16 of the questionnaire reflected a positive feeling toward Mint Hamady's municipal experience. The majority of them stated that she is the worst in the history of the municipality. Others commented that as a woman, Mint Hamady lacks experience, thus, it is obvious that she has nothing to offer. Interestingly, two respondents agreed that the ruling party's nomination of Mint Mamady for the Municipality of Nouakchott was on purpose. One of them said:

I think that women's experience in the Urban Group of Nouakchott shows political incompetency of women. The President nominated Maty only because she is a woman and this means that he can pass whatever he wants through her. This is why we notice her being engaged in corruption and poor governance.

Arguably, as noticed from the reaction of the participants, Mint Hamady's municipal experience is used as a general evaluation against women political experience. As it has been already mentioned, in patriarchal societies usually judging a man is judging one person while judging a woman is judging her gender as a whole. However, on the other hand the majority of the respondents who talked about the Mayor of Tevergh-Zeina, Fatimetou Mint Abdul Elmalik, showed positive feelings toward her municipal experience. One of the respondents clarified a very interesting point:

Mint Abdul Malek is an exception compared with other women mayors. She has worked effectively for the people who elected her. However, I think, as an observer from the domain, that she could have done a better a work especially

with the fact that she has come to the Municipality of Tevergh-Zeina since 2001 which is quite a long time. But, still I will say that Mint Abdul Malik has a very good mayoral characteristic, which is that from her discourse and political behavior, she represents people who voted for her.

Arguably, this response interestingly explains why some of the respondents positively evaluated Mint Abdul Malik's political performance. Expressing their needs and opening the municipal door for people is a key characteristic for Mint Abdul Malik political effectiveness as 46% of the respondents explained. Interestingly, all the women mayors and vice mayors I interviewed agreed that the municipality is a woman's job explaining that women are more capable to feel and understand the needs of the citizens better than men because, as they revealed, women are by nature sensitive and caring. Another one of the respondents metaphorically argued that comparing the municipality with one's own house and thus "no one is better than women in taking care of the house". Paradoxically, the use of gendered double discourse by the female respondent mayors and vice mayors promotes women's claim to local governmental, but it reinforces the stereotypical biological determinist account of womanhood.

Comparing Maty Mint Hamady and Fatimetou Mint Abdul Malik, a Mayor respondent stated that these two women mayors differ both in their political discourse and their political performance. He clarified his point supporting the above view that while Mint Abdul Malik is an example of the elected mayor whose political actions and discourse are influenced by people who voted for her, Mint Hamady is more like a minister whose political decisions are influenced by the governmental policy (interviewee). In other words, the government has more political influence over the actions of Mint Hamady than those of Mint Abdul Malik despite the fact that both Mayors belong to the ruling party. As Ould Oumar pointed out, when the ruling party



decided to have a woman as the Mayor of Nouakchott and the president of the Urban Group, they had two choices Mint Abdul Malik and Mint Hamdy.

Proposing Mint Hamady for this mayoral post was based on the difference between the two female political actors. Mint Abdul Malik is a strong woman that is not easy to be controlled on the negative, meaning to obey the demands of the party without questioning them. Thus, Mint Hamady was the appropriate person especially with her background as a former minister. (Interviewee)

Analytically speaking, based on the assumption that women are more capable of political influence, strong political parties that have more chances to win electoral seats usually prefer to add women in parliamentary lists than in municipal seats because women are more useful for this political area where the party's authority deters their political action. Thus, despite the fact that, in general, women through their municipal performance both as mayors and as councilors show more commitment, political parties still do not give them the chance to access the local governmental sector.

As this section aims at tracing the political involvement of Mauritanian women analyzing the factors that reduces women's political chances as well as evaluating their political performance, the following section focuses on different aspect of the issue which is an analysis of women's presidential electoral experience. Moreover, it shades light on the complex relation between women politicians and feminism.

#### **4. Mauritanian Women's Electoral Chances**

Though women comprise approximately more than half of the voting population, Mauritanian women are underrepresented in electoral positions. As it has been already discussed in the previous chapters, with the implementation of the gender quota, women won more seats in

the parliament, more municipal councilors, and few mayoral posts. However, compared to their voting percentage women are still politically invisible. The previous section discussed two important factors that reduce women's chances in electoral positions taking mayoral posts as an example. These factors are the gendered stereotypical perception of women candidates and their poor access to electoral lists. This section aims at providing more constraining factors taking Mauritanian women's presidential electoral experience as an example.

In this respect, the emphasis is put on the goal of this study, which is to analyze issues related to women's political involvement as well as their political discursive behavior in order to unveil women's actual political presence investigating how Mauritanian women politicians represent themselves and how political parties represent them. In fact, since the study is mainly based on a feminist reading of women's political involvement, there is a need to investigate women politicians' feminist orientation. Thus, the second subsection of this part aims at providing Mauritanian female political actors' stand form feminism.

#### **4.1. Women's Presidential Electoral Experience**

In Mauritanian political history, it has been taken for granted that the presidential candidate should be a male. Thus, women's participation in presidential election is usually on the level of supporting and campaigning for the male candidates. However, in 2003 and 2014 presidential elections two women candidates added their names to the masculine normative scenario for presidency.

The two women that nominated themselves for presidential elections are: Aisha Mint Jedana 2003, who was competing against Ould Taya in his last election before withdrawing him via the 2005 military coup, and Mariem Mint Mulay Idriss, who was competing against Ould Abdel Aziz in the last presidential election in Mauritania 2014. Before analyzing the factors that

led to the overwhelming defeat of these two women, it is necessary to investigate the real reasons standing behind their nomination.

Examining the local context of the 2003 and 2014 presidential election, it can be argued that there are similarities between the two elections. The 2003 election was organized just five months after the bloody unsuccessful military coup. After the 2003 coup, all eyes were directed toward Mauritania; thus, Ould Taya was in an urgent need to regain national and international trust. Consequently, in order for President Ould Taya to draw a democratic face for his governing policy, he worked on including a feminine name among the candidates in the presidential race. In this respect, an interviewee stated that

We were surprised to see a woman's name among the male candidates. At that time [2003], we cannot talk about women's presidential ambition because, as women, we knew that our highest political ambition is to be appointed as ministers or elected as parliamentary members. I was quite sure that presidential race for Aisha Mint Jedana was a lost battle even before it started. I think that President Ould Taya used Mint Jedana to create gender balance in the electoral list. So, her nomination was just a part of the political scenario nothing more than that.

Apparently, the nomination of Aisha Mint Jedana was considered a winning card that Ould Taya used to gain international support especially after the unexpected coup. As it is explained by the above respondent, Mauritanian women during the time of Ould Taya had low levels of political ambitions. During Ould Taya's rule, women's political participation was mainly attached to the stereotypical image of the traditional feminine political actor. This is that women were attached to the non-sovereign ministries and the few women who were elected as municipal councilors and parliamentary representatives reflected lower motivation for electoral

positions. In other words, women showed less political awareness compared with the present time.

Moreover, it is worth considering the political background of Mint Jedana. She was a member of Ould Taya's ruling party, the Democratic and Social Republican Party. Based on her political background it is clear that logically she was not against Ould Taya's policy to nominate herself as a better option for presidency. Therefore, Mint Jedana's competition for the 2003 election was just a political strategy from the ruling party to politicize for the claimed political effectiveness of the President.

Similarly, when examining the context of the 2014 presidential election, it can be argued that once again women were used in the same way they were used in 2003 election. The main opposition parties boycotted the 21<sup>st</sup> Jun 2014 presidential election refusing to admit Ould Abdul Aziz as a democratic president after he seized power from the first elected civilian president in the Mauritanian history Ould Cheikh Abdulahi in 2008 military coup. After the announcement of the electoral boycott, Ould Abdul Aziz decided to go into the election despite the opposition parties' refusal of the dialogue he proposed as a strategy to overcome the political crisis.

Thus, it was necessary for Ould Abdul Aziz to find some opposing candidates; otherwise, it would not be a democratic election. Four candidates were nominated to compete against Ould Abdul Aziz. These candidates were described by the boycotted opposition parties as being fake candidates that Ould Abdul Aziz used in order to democratize his dictatorship regime. The candidates are Birama Dah Abeidi a radical activist, Boideil Ould Houmeit from El Wiam party that lately became one of the parties supporting Ould Abdul Aziz, Ibrahima Moctar Sarr from the Alliance for Justice and Democracy, an African Mauritanian party, and Lalla Mariem Mint Moulay Idriss, an independent candidate.

An examination of the political background of Mint Moulay Idriss shows that though she was politically inactive, she was appointed in different governmental posts such as the Director of the President's Office. In other words, she was very close to the ruling party, the Union for the Republic. It can, thus, be argued that following Ould Taya's strategy, Ould Abdul Aziz used the gender balanced candidate list in order to maintain his regime as to be both nationally and internationally seen as supporting women which would help him in solving the opposition parties' electoral boycott.

This examination of the Mauritanian context characterizing the 2003 and 2014 presidential elections shows that women's entrance into presidential election is just a masculine political strategy to gain international support although the two women were not politically qualified to be nominated as presidential candidates. Both of them had no political experience and their political campaign was not effective when compared to male candidates.

Along with this, it is important to point out that since women logically have no chances to win presidential election, *businessmen* would not offer support for women candidates which resulted in ineffective campaign. It was not only about the poor financial support of women candidates. Examining the content of their political speeches during the campaign reveals that they had nothing to offer to the Mauritanian voter. Thus, the main reasons behind the overwhelming defeat (Mint Jedana gaining 0.5 % of votes in 2003 and Mint Moulay Idriss gaining 0.49% votes in 2014) of the two female presidential candidates can be summarized in the following four points:

- Lack of political ambition and motivation
- Lack of experience
- Lack of financial support

- The Mauritanian patriarchal mentality of the voting population

More significantly, there are women politicians who are more qualified than Mint Jedana and Mint Moulay Idriss, but no one of them has ever proposed herself or has been nominated by her political party as a candidate for presidency. This is due to different factors the most important of which are political parties' distrust of women and the voting population reaction toward women's candidates. Another factor is women's lack of political willingness in a country that women's political participation is still considered unfeminine action. However, it cannot be denied that women's presidential experience met its main goal which is using women for the benefits of the democratization of the ruling mescaline regimes reflecting that Mauritanian women politicians' invisible public presence serves hidden patriarchal agendas.

This subsection and the previous one have tackled women experience with electoral position investigating their political performance as well as the obstacles that hinder their chances in occupying certain position. To this end, the questionnaire included a question which aims to elicit data from respondents about gender and the voting behavior. The table below summarizes the results obtained in this respect.

**Table 12: Gender and the voting behavior**

<b>Item 10. When running for the same political position who do you prefer to vote for?</b>		
Man	Woman	Competence is more important than gender
<b>143 (47.6%)</b>	82 (27.3%)	75 (25%)

As the results in the above table indicate, that the majority of the participants both males and females and from different educational background agreed that they prefer to vote for a man than for a woman. Those who chose competence over the gender of the candidate are mainly

highly educated holding PhD and master degrees. Surprisingly, 48 out of the 82 who preferred to vote for a woman are males, but it was noticed that the majority 45 of them are bilinguals. However, the 27.3% of the whole sample decided to vote for a woman candidate, which might seem unrealistic. This is simply because when checked the responses to Item 2 and 3, it was found that the majority of them do believe that a female cannot be an ideal politician. Reasonably, based on their responses, one can ask this simple question: Is it possible for a person to vote for a female candidate who he/she believes that she does not fit into the characteristics for an ideal political actor?

However, the results in the above table reveal the contradictions surrounding the Mauritanian context, which need further studies on voting behavior. Voting choice is influenced by a number of factors among which party, tribe, regional background and of course gender. As a result, a woman can access an electoral position if she gains party and tribe support which are more important factors than her gender.

#### **4.2. Women Politicians and Feminism**

As it has already been discussed in Chapter Five, the Mauritanian women's movement emerged in the late 1960s few years after independence. However, this movement was a result of the efforts done by the French wife of President Ould Daddah and other few Mauritanian elite women. Their main goals focused on female access to education and economic support for women. Thus, these women did not call for gender equality in the sense that women should have equal rights to public life. In other words, in the Mauritanian history, women have never called for equality in the feminist sense. On the contrary, they called for public involvement; they emphasized that they are neither against men nor calling for equality in the feminist meaning, but they explained that they simply want women to have a say in public life.

Recently, feminist voice has started to emerge with the establishment of new women's organizations such as the Household Women's Association, and the Al- Munassara Group for Mauritanian Women's Political Participation. Despite these feminist organizations, feminism is still labeled as an anti-Islam movement among Mauritians. Therefore, the majority of Mauritanian female politicians take a negative stand on feminism. When asking the female participants in the interview about this negative stand on feminism, one of them said:

I think that Mauritanian women are placed in a paradoxical path. If we fight for our political rights, we will be described as feminists, which is not really good in the society. And, if we just keep quiet and take up whatever men provide, we will not move; on the contrary, we will stay behind the scene. (Interviewee)

Another respondent reveals that

Women who are public active are psychologically dominated by the patriarchal ideology. Thus, you find that women's politicians do not dare to talk about women's issues or to raise their voices calling for gender equality. These negative attitudes toward feminism is one of the main reasons behind the problems that women face in the country. (Interviewee)

Admittedly, the majority of Mauritanian female public actors consider feminism as a radical ideology that is both against Islam and alien to the Mauritanian culture. As Mint Muhamed Leghdaf clarified in the above quote, because women are worried about social judgment, they usually avoid issues which may reveal their feminist tendency. This negative stand on feminism is not specific to Mauritians. It has been recognized that the majority of Arab women do not prefer to be described as feminists. Despite the efforts of Islamic feminists to explain that Islamic feminism is not a western version of feminism, but it is rather the real face of Islam as a feminist religion (if feminism is defined as the thinking that women should have the



rights that Islam guaranteed for them as full human beings). Yet, feminism is still considered a taboo in Arab-Muslim conservative societies such as Mauritania.

Mauritanian women politicians' stand on feminism was quite clear when the majority of them reacted negatively toward the Act against Gender Violence proposed on the parliament 1 January 2017. In their criticisms of the Gender Act, the female parliamentary members expressed their thoughts that the act is a direct translation of the non Muslim western culture. They attacked feminism and feminists as being anti-Islamic activists that want to westernize Mauritanian women. Thus, it was clear from their reaction that they take feminism as one form of "Feminism" with a capital "F".

During the interviews conducted for the purpose of this study, it was difficult to understand what feminine discourse is. The answers that respondents provided for the existence of feminine political discourse were unclear. The lack of feminist awareness among Mauritanian women's politicians determines their political approach. This point will be elaborated more in the following chapter.

This chapter investigated Mauritanian women's political participation. It was divided to four subsections that discussed the circumstances surrounding women's political participation. The next chapter aims at analyzing the validity of women's political participation through the analysis of their political discourse.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Analyzing the Validity of Women's Political Participation**

As presented in the previous chapter, the results obtained from the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire and the exploratory interview reveal that Mauritanian women are mainly used in the masculine political sphere as propaganda tool for the democratization of the domain. However, despite women's access to politics, there are constraints on their access to certain political fields that are considered to be male property. Women are associated with political positions that keep them attached to the stereotypical areas that are culturally supposed to be feminine. The present chapter focuses on the analysis of the validity and effectiveness of women's political participation through the formation of their political discourse. In other words, based on the fact that subjects are constructed through language, analyzing the political discourse that is produced by Mauritanian women helps to better understand the contribution that these women add to the political domain and the way they define themselves in relation to this domain.

As has been explained in the theoretical part, women politicians, generally, find themselves placed into a dilemma in which they are obliged either to unquestionably imitate the masculine dominant discourse or to create their own feminine style emphasizing their difference. Based on the results obtained from the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire and the interviews, which are presented and discussed in the previous chapter, Mauritanian women's political situation is strongly influenced by the patriarchal perception of womanhood because the majority of them are imposed on politics. In this respect, as presented and discussed in the previous chapter, it has been found that it is very rare to notice women politicians with a feminist approach that reflects strong political ambitions.

One of the main aims of this study is to critically analyze the validity of women's political discourse investigating how the feminine identity is expressed or suppressed via this discourse and the effectiveness of their political participation. This main research objective is addressed in this chapter. Therefore, some controversial questions are asked while analyzing the discursive behavior of Mauritanian women politicians. 1) Is it necessary for a woman politician to approach politics from a feminist perspective in order for her to add a feminine touch to the political sphere? 2) Is there a political discourse that can be labeled as a feminine among Mauritanian women politicians? 3) Despite the fact that women are allowed into politics because their presence serves men politicians' benefits, did these women succeed in creating their own style taking a step toward an effective feminine experience in the Mauritanian political sphere? 4) Should women discursively conform to typical gender stereotypes in order for them to be recognized as "real" politicians? These questions are addressed in this particular chapter to testify the main hypotheses of the study.

The aim of the chapter, thus, is to discursively explore the mobilization of women from the private to the public analyzing whether their entrance to politics is a real act or if they are just shadows that guarantee the propagandistic gender balance. This is to say that men promoted women's political participation, but the masculine power dynamics control this political participation inside the walls of patriarchal realm. In other words, though women are quantitatively represented in the political sphere, their oxymoronic qualitative representation is the core of this chapter.

## 1. Man's Talk vs. Woman's Talk

### 1.1. Is There a Feminine Discursive Style?

As it has been discussed in Chapter Two, through religious and socio-cultural mechanisms, patriarchy produces its subjects. Drawing on the Foucauldian perspective of power analysis, it can be argued that patriarchy the juridical power limits the representation of femininity into certain gendered standards through the process of prohibition and punishment. In the Mauritanian context, the feminine subject is constituted as a linguistic subject through emphasizing the dualistic relation between the public discourse which is presumed to be masculine discourse and the private discourse which is assumed to be a feminine type of discourse.

Drawing on the hypothesis that Mauritanian women politicians take for granted the masculine discursive behavior and on the theories of discursive formation, it is also argued that the patriarchal incorrect interpretations of Islam influence discursive passivity among Mauritanian female political actors. Interdiscursively and intertextually religious rhetoric is used for the approval and acceptance of the feminine passive identity. This female passivity is constructed through a long process that starts from childhood. In Mauritania, girls are socialized on the untrue *Hadith* that says “Allah cursed a woman who rises up her voice even if she is praising Him”. Women’s public silence is, thus, reinforced through the claim that from an Islamic perspective a woman’s voice is *awera* and *fitna*. Thus, women should lower their voices and avoid speaking in presence of men, in public. Here the female religious identity contributes to the feminine passivity.

Moreover, being attached to the private sphere Mauritanian women’s language is constructed to meet the needs of their roles as domestic agents. Thus, the verity of Hassaniya

which is spoken by women differs in its word choice, the power marking features, level of formality and politeness, the use of jocks and idioms, and features indicating assertiveness and cooperativeness from that which is spoken by men in public. Language is assumed to determine the feminine ontology underpinned by the psychoanalytic perspective which holds that once women enter the symbolic order, the main signifier that indicates their existence as human beings is to conform to the language of the Father. Therefore, Mauritanian women do not only speak the domestic verity of Hassaniya, but they also acquire the stereotypical concept of femininity which is taken socially as a synonym for ignorance and lack of knowledge.

In the feminine variety of language, women are expected to conform to an important characteristic that is culturally taken as being a requirement of a “*real*” feminine. This characteristic is known in Mauritanian as *levleyih* meaning being funny and having a sense of humor. Thus, women in the Mauritanian culture are discursively enforced to reflect the feminine side of their subjective self by an over use of jocks and expressing their ideas in simple superficial way avoiding deep, complex, and thoughtful form of language which is considered to be masculine. In this sense, generally women’s language is taken less seriously than that of men.

More importantly, in their discourse women should show their lack of knowledge. Even if a woman is knowledgeable about the issue being discussed, she has to pretend that she knew little about it. This occurs mainly in mixed sex conversation. In other words, in order for her to be feminine, the woman has to reflect her lack of knowledge through her discourse. Since knowledge serves power and power is a masculine property, in the Mauritanian patriarchal context only men are expected to have access to knowledge. Pretending ignorance is not the only factor that indicates their poor access to knowledge, but also the fact that when they break up with the ignorance strategy and try to speak seriously, women tend to use more swearing than

men to ensure their listener that they really have enough information to take a stand on a certain topic. They also use special expressions that are used to seek news on the sake of gossip which is taken for granted in the Mauritanian context to be a women's matter.

Significantly, from the respondents' reaction to the questions about the existence of two different varieties of Hassaniya that can be described as masculine and feminine, the majority of them agreed that women speak differently than men.

**Table 13: Gender related variation in Language**

<b>Item 11: Do you think that women use a variety of language different from of men?</b>	
Yes	No
<b>243 (81%)</b>	<b>57 (19%)</b>

As it is shown in the above table, 81% of the respondents believed that women do speak differently from men. However, their reactions to **Item 12** and **Item 13** explain the status of the variety of language that classified as being feminine. The below table summarizes their reactions:

**Table 14: The evaluation of the feminine political discourse**

<b>Item 12: Is there a typical feminine political discourse?</b>			
Yes		No	
<b>99 (33%)</b>		<b>201 (67%)</b>	
<b>Item 13: If your answer to the above question is yes, does the feminine discourse have the same qualities as the masculine discourse?</b>			
Stronger and more efficient	As strong and efficient	Less strong and efficient	Weak and inefficient
<b>5 (5%)</b>	<b>28 (28.2%)</b>	<b>47 (47.4%)</b>	<b>19 (19.1%)</b>

Oxymoronically, the participants responded positively to the existence of a women's language, but when it comes to a feminine political discourse, they chose the "no" option which can be taken as being in itself a contradiction. However, again it should be emphasized that the seemingly contradictory responses hit on the core of our argumentation that the feminine discursive behavior is not expected outside the realms of the private sector. Thus, on the one hand, when the participants were asked about the existence of the feminine discourse, they admitted the existence of this discursive form. On the other, however, when they were asked about a feminine political form discourse, their answer would naturally be 'No' simply because the political discourse is unconsciously assumed as being masculine.

Even the 99 people who admitted the existence of feminine political discourse, the majority of them evaluate it as being less strong and less efficient than the masculine political discourse. Clearly, Mauritanian women, like other women around the world, have their own language which is part of the construction of their social agency. Discursive practices produce what it means to be feminine in the society. However, the main argument is whether the feminine discursive behavior, which is culturally associated with passivity and is taken usuriously, is appropriate for exercising power in the political domain that is shaped by the masculine subject and in what way women politicians construct their identity as feminine subjects via the political discourse they use.

In this respect, there is considerable contestation about whether women should bring their own language into the public domain or they should use the existing language of power. In this context, some feminists, especially the French feminists, believe that women will not be seen as separate and different subjects unless they use their own language. However, one can ironically question if the language that is labeled as feminine or as the language of the private really

represents a form of language that reflects women. Since the private itself is designed by the patriarchal mechanisms of constructions, does not this type of discourse emphasize women's weakness through language?

Obviously, one cannot avoid these problematic questions that are raised when examining the discursive form that women politicians use or should use. However, it can be argued that in spite of the dilemma surrounding the feminine language and its relation to the exercise of power, this form of discourse is the only linguistic possibility available for women. Thus, only through taking this language beyond the realms of the private, women can emphasize their existence as different independent subjects who can go beyond the philosophy of masculine centrality in which the feminine has no existence beyond the private.

Taking into account the psychoanalytical perception, the feminine subject comes into existence only when she confirms to the symbolic order in which the language of the feminine as other forms of representation is imposed on the subject in the process of social agency construction. Thus, the feminine language is really constructed within patriarchal matrix of power relations and is imposed on the female subject in order for her to be recognized as feminine. However, from Butler's performativity perspective, since the gendered subject is constructed through the repetition of the dominant discourse, the feminine language being socially recognized as a form of language that is attached to the private sphere will not contribute to the making of the feminine subject if it is practiced outside the realms of the private. Then, when taking the feminine language to the public sphere, then the act of imitation and repetition is challenged. Thus, the feminine language instead of being a confirmation to the patriarchal power it becomes a form of resistance.



Part of what it means to be a person is gaining social recognition through the confirmation to social expectations. Gender identity is, thus, a very important aspect of social recognition. Despite the importance of imitating the language of power, performing the feminine gender identity is of much importance for women politicians. Thus, women are paradoxically placed in a double bind in which they need to conform to the feminine identity in the same way they need to imitate the masculine discourse detaching themselves from the feminine one. This point will be elaborated in the last section of this chapter. In the following subsections an analysis of the gendered discursive features in stylizing political communication is provided to testify to what extent the Mauritanian politician uses the feminine language in her political discourse and how she discursively constructs her self-image.

### **1.2. Authorizing Political Discourse: Code Choice**

Belonging to a multilingual country, Mauritanian politicians have different linguistic possibilities to express themselves. However, due to power relations between ethnic communities, Hassiniya, which is the dialect spoken by the majority of Mauritians, and Arabic, the official language of the country, are the two main possible mediums of political discourse. Accordingly, as it has been already highlighted in the chapter on Methodology, this study takes into consideration only the political discourse of Hassaniya speakers. To this end, this subsection aims to present the analysis of code choice among women as a linguistic behavior that maintains gendered power. It provides a feminist analysis of the interchangeable use of Standard Arabic and Hassinya in the political discourse of men and women political actors. However, for a better understanding of this analysis, it is important to define code-switching as a linguistic term that is used for this particular subsection.

In this context, Scotton and Ury define code-switching as “the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation or interaction” (1977: 5). In the Mauritanian context, though Hassaniya is derived from Arabic, mixing it with Classical Arabic is considered as being code-switching. There are mainly three possible types of code-switching between Hassania and Standard Arabic: (1) intra-word switching which occurs on the level of the word and can be described as code-mixing, (2) intra-sentential switching when mixing phrases of Arabic into Hassaniya, and (3) inter-sentential switching which occurs at sentence boundaries and it is usually a long switch to Arabic.

To analyze the level of code-switching among female and male political actors, corpus is used on the basis of the analysis of speeches delivered by 20 female MPs and 20 male MPs as well as discourses of 2 female ministers and 2 male ministers in TV broadcast political discussions programs. Though the study does not support adopting male/female comparison approach to discourse analysis, there are certain issues that in order to investigate the feminine independent difference, it is necessary to investigate the masculine. The results are presented in the following charts:

**Figure 24: Arabic-Hassaniya code-switching in parliamentary debates**

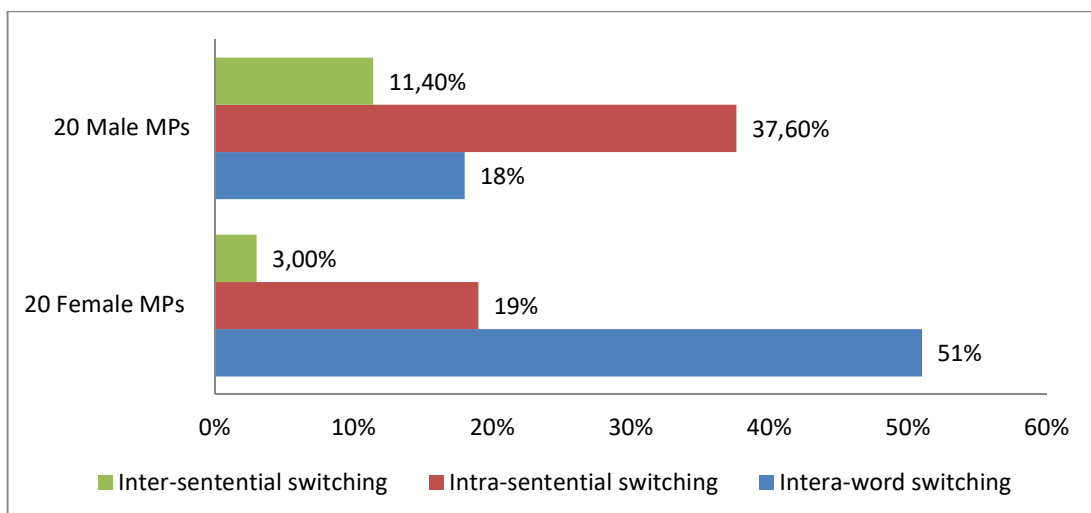
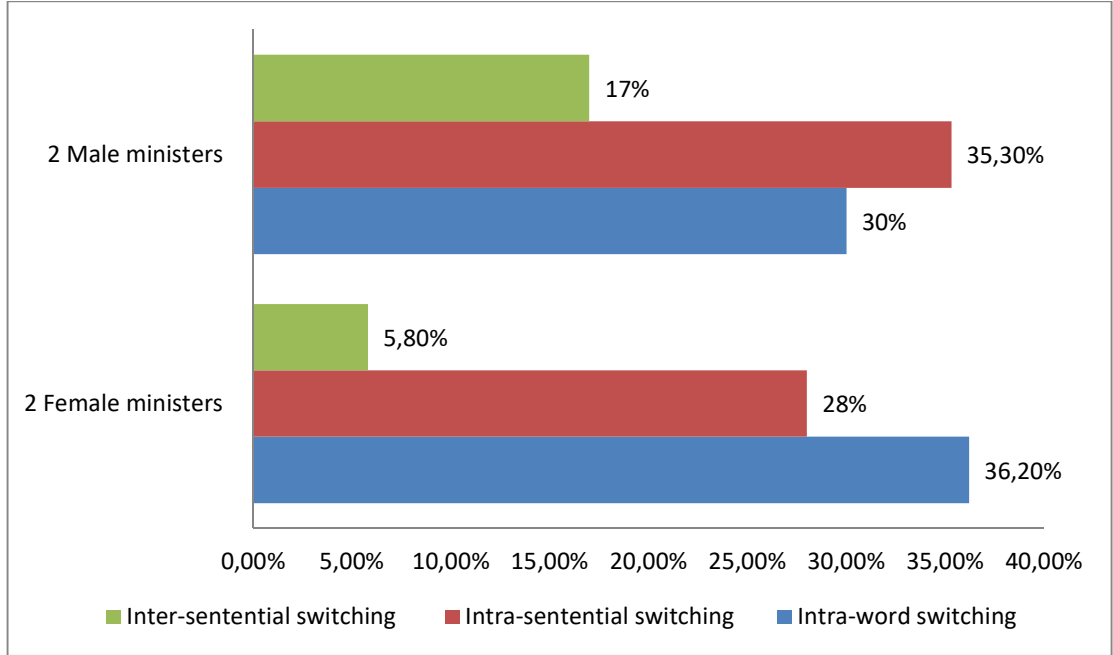


Figure 25: Arabic-Hassaniya code-switching in broadcast political discussions TV programs



As it is noticed in figures 24 and 25 above, women politicians use more intra-word switching than men and fewer inter-sentential switching. Single word switches are more frequent among women than men. In the following examples single word switches are in bold, intra-sentential switches are colored by yellow while inter-sentential switches are in green. The grey color is used when the speaker is quoting.

Example 1:

الاجوبة ال كانت شافية الي تكرموا اعلينا بيها **زماننا في** إطار عمل اللجنة الفنية نختير ايضا ننتهز هذي الفرصة فايك نشكر عمل اللجنة الفنية المعنية كانت بدراسة مشروع القانون و **الشكر موصول ايضا** لرئيس اللجنة ليك انكول اعلنو فعلا ف إطار هاذ العمل الفني كان تسييرو **قيم و جيد** و املي ايضا هذ التقرير الي جانا و اوصلنا اليوم املي مشالله كان شافي او كافي و كان كل المعلومات الضرورية مقيدة فيه [...] نختير نرجع أيضا و انكول اعلنو لم يكن حوار احادي كان نتيجة ل حوار وطني شامل و كانت ذاك الحوار كيف تعلمون مدعوالو كل الاحزاب السياسية الموجودة بما فيها احزاب المعارضة و بالتالي نختير بعد نشكر ذيك الجماعة المهمة من احزاب المعارضة ال حضرت.

*The answers that were provided by our colleagues during the framework of the technical committee were satisfactory. In this opportunity, would like also to thank the technical committee that was concerned with studying the draft law. I would like also to thank the president of the committee for his valuable management. Moreover, the report which we are discussing today is very satisfactory and it contains all the necessary information. [...] Again, I would like to say that it was not unilateral dialogue. As you know, it was a result of a comprehensive national dialogue that all political parties were invited to among which the opposition parties. Therefore, I would like to thank those important parties that participated in the dialogue. (Female MP, 2017).*

Example 2:

نشكر السيد رئيس اللجنة المالية اعل تعامل امعان خلال لجنة المالية ولاهي انكول هون ان ميزانية **السنة الماضية** كان فيها عجز و ذلك ردت اعليه ميزانية ذ السنة كان فيها فائض و ذلك يدل اعل جدية الحكومة و **كذلك التركيز** اعل ميزانية الإستثمار وذاك زين و مهم ان ذ **الميزانية ركزت أكثر على الإستثمار** ايضا املي الميزانية واضحة و كانت **تسود فيها الشفافية** بيه الي مافم اروايه مبرمجة فاطريك كانت اتجين ميزانية فيه **ضبابية في حين أن** هذ الميزانية الحالية قطعن انها ميزانية شفافة و انها وكانت المسائل المبرمج فيها واضحة كلشي مكتوب و ذ كان **مطلب اساسي** عندن و نشكر املي ايضا اعل **الزيادة الملحوظة** اعل ميزانية قطاع الصحة بيه الي قطاع الصحة قطاعا مهم و ذ **الزيادة ال شهدت** مرانيتو شاكرينكم اعليها .

*I would like to thank Mr. Chairman of the Finance Committee for his keenness during the Committee. I would like also to say that last year's budget witnessed deficits, but the budget for year came as an answer for this problem for there is surplus which indicates the government's seriousness and its focus on investment which is very important. Also, the budget plan is clear and highly transparent because the previous budgets were unclear unlike the current one which is well planned. I want also to thank him for the significant increase in the budget decided for the health sector because it is a very important sector. (Female MP, 2016).*

Example 3:

نختير انذكر عن هذا القطاع ال هو موضوع هذ المسألة انو قطاع مهم مائل ال هو القطاع الأهم مكانتو و عنوانو و انذكر ذيك الساعه ان ذ الناس ال عدلت الجمهورية لين جمعت و اختلفت ف بسمن حال اتسميها ما جبرت صيفة اتكد اتجمع اهلها و اتعبر عنها و تعكس تاريخه و هويته كون ذ الصيفة ال هي الإسلام معناه عنو قطاع اعليه عار اكبير بالنسبة لبلد اسمو الجمهورية الإسلامية الموريتانية

*I would like to remind you that this sector [talking about the Ministry of Islamic Affairs] which is the subject of this ministerial accountability is the most important sector. Based on its position and its title and based on the fact that our founding people when they disagreed on what to name the country, they found that Islam is the only thing that unify its people and mirrors their history and identity , this sector means a lot to a country whose name is the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. (Male MP, 2011).*

Example 4:

في ظل تقهر الثقافة و في ظل الإستعمار و سطوة الثقافة الوافدة استطاع هذا الشعب

ونحن ركب من الأشراف منتظم .... أجل ذا العصر قدرا دون أدنانا

قد اتخذنا ظهور العيس مدرسة .... بها نبين دين الله تبيانا

كما قال المختار ول بون رحمه الله ، إستطعنا ان انعدلو تجربتن نحن الحضرية ال نادرة و هذ التجربة عدلت مراكز لنحت العلم من صخور الجبال و من فيافي البوادي ال عادت تجربة نكتنزوها نحن ول يجب ان نصدروها للناس لخر هي سيمتنا الأساسية و يال انحافظ اعليه

*In the time of cultural defeat and under the influence of new colonization and foreign culture, our nation was able to [the speaker quoted a famous Mauritanian poet in two verses talking about the important role that Mauritians play in spreading religion and knowledge through their journeys across the desert] create our own unique urban experience which was the center for sculpting knowledge from rocks of the mountain and. We should transport this experience*

*to others because it is our basic uniqueness and we should also take care of it.*  
(Male MP, 2017)

Examining the above examples reveal that men use more inter-sentential switches (highlighted in green) while women use more intra-sentential switches (highlighted in yellow) and intra-word switches (bolded). The underlined words and phrases are key terms depending on the context of the parliamentary debates; thus, they were not counted as code-switching. At this stage of analysis and interpretation of the examples, it is important to explain the relation between Mauritanian political discourse and standard Arabic.

Arabic is the official language of the country and it has high status due to the Islamo-Arabic identity of the country. Though political discourse should be influenced by the audience (taking into consideration that the majority of the audience are common uneducated Mauritians) as well as the goals that the political actor wants to achieve through their discourse, Arabic remains the most valuable and prestigious linguistic possibility available for politicians. To state it in another way, based on the dichotomous division between public and private, Arabic is hierarchized as the language of the authoritative public and the language of knowledge while Hassaniya, though being spoken both in public and private is generally the language used in the private. Thus, politicians construct a “good” self-image through their use of Standard Arabic in their political discourse.

Interestingly, types of switches noticed among Mauritanian men and women politicians emphasize the problematic relationship between female political actors’ discourse and Arabic. As it is noticed in Examples 1 and 2, the two women MPs use single words switches (as in Example 1) and phrasal switches (as in Example 2). As a tradition in Mauritania, males receive more education in Arabic and Qur’an during their childhood than females. Thus, generally men are more proficient in Standard Arabic due to this patriarchal practice Therefore, from a feminist

perspective, in this line of argument, it can be stated that because of their low proficiency level, the majority of women cannot perform the inter-sentential type of switching, which is a long turn in Classical Arabic, as in Example 4. This can be supported by the results presented in the previous chapter, which have found that the gender quota system paved the way for unqualified women into politics.

However, this conclusion cannot be generalized to the whole target population because when examining the educational background of women politicians, it is observed that among them there are highly educated women. Moreover, the majority of the educated women participants gained their degrees from Francophone universities meaning that it is possible that they are not good Arabic speakers. Another fact that can explain single word switches among women politicians is Mauritanian women's relationship to Arabic. Being the language of knowledge and the public sphere, traditionally in Mauritania women who speak Standard Arabic a lot are stereotypically seen as being unfeminine.

Paradoxically, though their switches are the types that can be considered as low proficiency in Arabic, still these frequent switches can be explained as resistance to the Mauritanian social normalization, where women are unexpected to speak Arabic. As Foucault argues it is true that where there is power there is resistance, but this resistance "is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (1978: 95). Though despite this resistance, women politician reinforce the patriarchal conception that the public woman should be a masculine shadow by these frequent switches to Arabic. To explain the Foucauldian notion of the relation between power and resistance, Butler states that "power not only produces the boundaries of a subject but pervades the interiority of that subject" (1997: 89). Along with this line of thought, even trying to trespass the borders of the discourse that is reserved for masculinity, their

resistance helps power to effectively function instead of helping them escape power relations. In this perspective, Hunt and Wickham argue that “power and resistance are together the governance machine of society, but only in the sense that together they contribute to the truism that things never quite work, not in the conspiratorial sense that resistance serves to make power work perfectly” (1994: 83).

As the findings in Chapter Three presented, this resistance is unconscious since the majority of Mauritanian women politicians do not approach politics from a feminist orientation which would mean that for the majority of them they are “politicians” in its patriarchal sense more than *women politicians* in its gendered identity sense. This is supported by Butler’s (1997) explanation that this occurs when the unconscious side of the psyche turns against the subjection conditions for existence. In other words, the social agent unconsciously turns against the power matrix. From a psychoanalytic point of view, since entering into the symbolic order requires detachment from the real, there is that part of the psyche that resists the subject formation since it exists before the entrance into the space of orders, the symbolic, in our case patriarchy.

However, as Example 3 illustrates, due to their fear to be judged as ineffective politicians, women prefer not to deliver their speeches fully in Hassaniya whereas the male politician who has no inferiority complex can communicate fully in Hassaniya. This is simply because women politicians are placed into a double-bind position, where they cannot fully perform the feminine identity while at the same time they also cannot *fully* imitate the masculine. Despite the fact that there are some women politicians who have high proficiency level in Arabic, the feminine inferiority complex pushes them to avoid speaking only in Hassaniya because it is considered as the language of the private. Thus, switching to Arabic as the only public linguistic choice conforms to the patriarchal norms as a signifier for high image of self-



esteem and political prestige, which cannot be gained without some imitation to the masculine. The following section presents and discusses feminine subjectivity construction through the political discourse preformed by Mauritanian politicians.

## **2. Gendered Discourse and Subjectivity**

*The subject means subject to someone else by control or dependence and tied to his [sic] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to. (Foucault, 1983: 2012)*

As it has been discussed in Part One of the thesis, the individual goes through a constructive process in which both she is tied to a particular identity and recognized by the Other as belonging to this identity. The construction of the self or the subject, to use poststructural terminology, is based on the negotiation of power. As the above quote comprehensively summarizes the Foucauldian approach to subjectivity production, the subject is actively taking part of the process of subjugation by defining him/herself in relation to the power/knowledge schema.

This section aims to provide an analysis of the discursive behavior of Mauritanian women politicians to deconstruct their subjective representation, how they represent themselves as women and as politicians. It also addresses the question of how Mauritanian women define themselves in relation to power.

### **2.1. Representation of the Femininity Identity**

As it is stated in the methodological framework of this study, the results presented in this chapter are obtained from the analysis of 50 political discourses delivered by Mauritanian women politicians in different political settings and 30 political speeches delivered by male political actors. In order to analyze women politicians' representation of their feminine identity,

it was important to investigate how they construct the public subject in their discourse. The following table provides gendered marked words frequency in the examined political discourses delivered by women.

**Table 15: Frequency of gender marker words**

<b><u>Gender Marked Words</u></b>	
النساء و الشباب (women and the youth)	3
النساء و الرجال (men and women)	1
الرجال (men)	24
النساء (women)	13
الشباب (the youth [in its masculine meaning])	11
أولاد موريتاني (sons of Mauritania)	21
الإخوة والأخوات (sisters and brothers)	1
الإخوة (brothers)	11
السيدات والسادة (ladies and gentlemen)	0
السادة (gentlemen)	42
الزملاء والزميلات (colleagues [the feminine and the masculine form])	0
الزملاء (colleagues [the masculine form])	7
الخلطه (people [unmarked gender term])	13

As the results stated in table 15 show, when addressing the public audience which normally consists of men and women, women politicians represent the public individual as being a masculine subject. The occurrence of the expression “gentlemen” 42 times in their addressing the public audience or talking to a mixed sex number of politicians such as in the parliamentary

context is a discursive strategy that metaphorically pushes women beyond the margin of the public sphere. It is noticed that their use of the word “women” 13 times in their political discourse occurs only when they are talking about women as the topic of their political discourse. On the contrary, words indicating the hegemonic presence of men are used by women politicians all the time without being determined by the topic of the political event. Examples 1, 2 and 3 below are good illustrations of these findings.

### **Example 1:**

كال اعلنو لاهي يحبس أهل المعارضة، أهل المعارضة كاع يتفاخرُ بيه الا الحبس [...] وحبسهم ليس بالسهل هذو الرجال القادة العظماء الي أورا هم ياسر من الرجال.

He [meaning President Aziz] said that he is going to imprison the oppositions. Political imprisonment for the oppositions is honorable. But, imprisoning them is not easy because they are *great men leaders* and there are a lot of *men* behind them. (Women politician representing an opposing political party in TV program, 2016)

### **Example 2:**

حوارن هذا الي نحن فيه كل حد يعرف انو اخلك نتيجة لعوامل معينة ضححت فيها رجال يغير سابقك الضحي ذيك الرجال و أتكول انها قدمت إتفاقيات و قدمت أقتراحات و قدمت ياسر و صادق أعليه ياسر من أولاد موريتاني احاني لين يعدل أش رمباية إ فصلها ولد عبد العزيز فالنعمة و إجيبها رافدها و إهم إلبسها للناس.

Everybody knows that the present political dialogue is a result of certain conditions in which *men* sacrificed. But, before these men emphasize their sacrifice and say that they proposed agreements and suggestions on which a large number of *sons of Mauritania* agreed, they are waiting Ould Abdel Aziz to make it [meaning the dialogue points] as a dress which he brings from Nema believing that it fits people [Mauritanians]. (Female MP, 2017)

### Example 3:

شاكرتكم اعل الردود الشافية الكافية ال قدم السادة النواب .

I would like to thank you for the very satisfying answers provided by MPs [using the masculine form representing all the parliamentary members]. (Female MP, 2014)

As the three examples reveal, the generic masculine nouns (men, gentlemen, and sons of Mauritania) are emphasized as a reference which limits the feminine presence in the public domain representing her as an invisible subject. Interestingly, when a woman politician uses a form such as in Example 3 referring to parliamentary members among whom there are women, these women are neglected through the misogynistic emphasis on their male counterparts. This is a direct identification that despite their physical presence, public women are just invisible shadows.

As it has been already discussed in Chapter Three, despite the fact that the Arabic language has a sexist grammatical system that glorifies masculinity over femininity, there are terms and expressions that provide gender neutral possibilities. Examining example 3 which indicates the word 'السادة' (gentlemen), there is also its feminine pair 'السيدات' (ladies). However, the linguistic choices available for women give priority to the masculine form because based on the gendered binary oppositional schema, the public is a masculine property and thus the masculine gains more emphasis. Expressions such as *assyidatu wa assada* is correct Arabic. However, when the speaker insists on referring to representatives saying *al-ssada anuwab* without addressing female representatives, this pushes women politicians beyond the margins denying them presence.

More interestingly, when examining the 50 political discourse delivered by women politicians, it has been noticed a detachment from womanhood present in some women's discourse.

**Example 4:**

A: خلين انعودو اعليات اعل المستوى ولا انعودو اعليات

Let us be qualified women and not women [in its social negative connotations].

[...]

A: خلين لا انعودو اعليات فين اعظامها

Let us try *not to be women*.

B: ذ ماه من كد اعليات ذ اعدلوه الرجال. النقاش السياسي مافيه اعليات ول رجال

This is not because we are women; men also do the same. In political discourse *there should not be men or women*. (Two women politicians during a TV discussion program, 2016)

Examining example 4 reveals that Woman A claims power over the discussion through reminding Woman B that they have to not act as women who are stereotypically said to speak at the same time without respecting turns. From a Foucauldian perspective, since there is no existence outside power/knowledge and since the feminine subject is dichotomously positioned within this power/knowledge schema as a subordinated other, this woman politician constructed her identity as a politician in its masculine sense detaching herself from the stereotypical femininity identity that does support her claim to power.

Moreover, from a psychoanalytic point of view, the feminine identity is constituted based on binary opposition matrix of lack/fullness. Thus, in order for a woman to assume a position of fullness, she has to identify with the phallogocentric discourse. In this sense Woman A conforms to the phallogocentric assumption that women discursive strategies do not match with the political

intellectual context; therefore, she identifies with masculine identity defining this feminine identify aspect as an abject. Paradoxically, it is true that in order for a woman to be recognized as a subject she has to conform to the truth about womanhood. Despite the fact that her detachment from the feminine identity can be analyzed as a complete identification with the masculine identity when she said “let us try not to be women”, it can be argued that she is not defining herself as a masculine subject. On the contrary, she is insisting on defining herself according to her professional identity conforming to the patriarchal norms. According to these norms, women do not belong to the public sphere; thus, the only way to claim power is through the identification with the professional identity and the rejection of the feminine.

In this same way, women politicians detach themselves from womanhood when talking about women’s issues. Example 5 below is a good example in this respect.

**Example 5:**

ماقم شي يضمن الها شي اكبيل لعليات اديرو امره اعل لائحة انواكشوط مثلا كان يجب ان يكون هناك  
إسهام ينطلق من خلفية ان المرأة حلقة أضعف و ان قم شي من الإكراهات.

There is nothing that guarantees political success for **her** [meaning the Mauritanian woman]. **Women** should, for example, put a woman on the top of Nouakchott’s list. The contribution should take into account that **women are the weakest** and that there are other social constraints. (A woman candidate in a TV political program, 2013)

In example 5 above, the speaker addresses women as a separate entity creating distance between women political actors and common women. Using the pronouns “they”, “she”, and “them” is categorizing women as a different social group while constructing women politicians’ identity which is based on sameness/difference thinking. Again, women politicians through the use of these pronouns referencing to common women emphasize their professional identity rejecting

their feminine one which collaborate them with common women and represent them as belonging to women social group. According to the social categorization theory, women politicians when representing common women as an outgroup, they define themselves as an in-group. In other words, they develop a sense of being a part of the political in-group which is socially assumed to be masculine while rejecting the womanhood outgroup. Based on this outgroup/ingroup division, it can be argued that women politicians then do not follow a feminist perspective in which identifying with womanhood is a significant condition.

Another aspect of how Mauritanian women politicians construct their subjectivity is the negative representation of femininity, which is illustrated in examples 6 and 7 below.

**Example 6:**

موريتاني ماني كابلتها تخسر و حد لاهي إخصرها اندور انا هذ لمرية الضعيفة و الله دني انا و هو نجابرو .

I will not let Mauritania be destroyed and anybody who dares to destroy it I, *the weak woman*, will stand in his face. (Female MP in parliamentary debate, 2011)

**Example 7:**

الناس الّ حالن وزراء و الّ كط عاد رئيس موريتاني من الاستقلال إل ظرك مع إحترامي الشديد الهم الّ افم اعليات إكدو إعودو متكاريات أمعاهم فالكفاءة .

People who are now ministers and those who have been presidents from the independence till now – *with my great respect to them—there may be women who are close to them in political competence*. (Female MP in TV political program, 2017).

From a Foucauldian perspective, the subject is constructed through power. According to him, subject construction takes place through the process of confession. As McLaren puts, “One confesses the truth about oneself, and in so doing becomes ensnared in the production of truth, the production of self, and relations of power” (2002: 58). To put it another way, when women

do not only take for granted the misogynist discourse about womanhood but they represent themselves using this discourse, they contribute to their being subjugated by patriarchal power. The examination of example 6 reveals that when the MP woman proved a negative and passive image about herself as being a “*weak woman*”, she identified with the masculine constructed truth about femininity.

Interestingly, example 7, on the other hand, provides another side of women relation to power/knowledge nexus. Knowledge (truth) is linked to the regulatory power that constructed an image of the inferior woman who despite her claim to power through being a public actor she remains incomplete man (using psychoanalytic terminology). Thus, the female MP in example 7 did not emphasize that women politicians can have more political competence than men. On the contrary, she used a politeness form apologizing from men politicians when claiming that there “*may be*” women who are close to them in political competence. In so doing, the female MP is conforming to the normalization process that reinforces the inferior image of woman. Therefore, according to this normalization a woman can never be better than a man and if she claims this superior masculine characteristic (competence), she has to apologize since she is quite sure that by doing so she is violating the patriarchal norms.

The next subsection will provide more elaboration on the representation of feminine identity and subjectivity through the patriarchal mechanism of naming. To borrow a psychoanalytic terminology, there is no existence outside the Other. In other words, the name is one of the numerous mechanisms through which society constructs its subjects. The act of naming is a social system of signs that establish the cultural norms. This is that the human subject comes into being through the recognition of the social name they hold. In other words, the cultural dimension of the name constitutes not only the identity of the subject but also defines



the different possibilities available for the gendered subject. Thus, in order to study the function of naming in the Mauritanian political context, the use of political titles mainly in Parliamentary context and strategies of addressing was analyzed.

## 2.2. Forms of Addressing: Subject Construction

There can never be social existence without linguistic agency, without being constituted within language. The process of the social construction happens through the power of naming. For example, Youdell highlights that “when we name, or interpellate, another we in fact do not describe that person but, rather, contribute to the making of them in the terms of the name we have used” (2006: 75). In other words, this can be explained by Butler’s famous saying “there is no doer behind the deed” which means that despite the intention which may direct the action, it is through the action that it gains its meaning. So, to name is to act; naming presumes its power from the social effect it encourages. Thus, through naming, as it has been already discussed in Chapter Two of the first part, agents are discursively constructed as subjects.

In the 50 political discourses that this study considered as a representative sample of Mauritanian political discourse, it is noticed that the political titles or names that women are defined according to are masculine. The results are presented in tables 16 and 17.

**Table 16: Political titles for both males and females**

<b>Political Titles</b>	
السيد النائب/السيد الشيخ (Mr. Senator/Mr. Representative)	السيدة النائب/السيدة الشبيخة (Mrs. Senator/Mrs. Representative)
<b>52</b>	<b>9</b>
Addressing male MPs without using political titles	Addressing the female MPs without using political titles
<b>12</b>	<b>43</b>

**Table 17: Naming women politicians through addressing strategies and titles**

Addressing Women Politicians	
شاكراً السيد النائب المحترم (Thank you Mr. respectable [the masculine form] MP)	السيدة النائب المحترمة (Mrs. Respectable [the feminine form] MP)
7	6
شكراً النائب الموقر (Thank you distinguished [in the masculine form] MP)	شكراً السيدة النائب الموقر (Thank you Mrs. Distinguished [in the masculine form] MP)
9	3
السيد النائب (Mr. Representative)	النائبة المحترمة (Respectable MP [the whole title in feminine form])
13	5
رئيس حزب بصفتم (As a president [in the masculine form] of a political party)	رئيسة حزب (President [feminine form] of political party)
3	12
معالي الوزير (Your Excellency, Mr. Minister [meaning a woman])	معالي الوزيرة (Your Excellency, Mrs. Minister)
3	16
الأخت (Sister)	4

Tables 16 and 17 above provide the frequency use of political titles and addressing forms. The results presented in these two tables indicate that women are addressed informally 43 using only the name of the woman politician without political title. The bellow is an example of such informal way of addressing.

Example:

رئيس الجلسة: السيد النائب لو سمحتم اتحراو دوركم.  
ميمونة اتفضلي واصلي.

Chairman: **Mr. MP**, please wait for your turn.

**Meymona**, you can continue.

The informal way of addressing women, as in the above example, can be explained as denying women public presence. Women politicians, thus, are constructed as domestic subjects despite their public participation. As it has been discussed in Chapter Two, in patriarchal systems the man has the power to name; thus, a woman is subordinated and denied the right to experience power though she is in the position to exercise it.

More interestingly, women politicians are addressed in a masculine form such as: السيد النائب (Mr. MP in the masculine form) and السيد النائب المحترم (Mr. respectable [the masculine form] MP). As it has been explained in Chapter Three in the Arabic language the feminine form of the word “النائب” (representative masculine), “النائبة” (representative feminine), do not have the same meaning. The feminine form of the word “representative” takes a negative connotation which is “disaster”. However, language changes with the needs of its society. In the English language, for example, there was no feminine form for the word “chairman”, but when women invaded the public space, new forms of the word appeared, chairperson and chairwoman. Despite the use of the masculine form of the word النائب, women politicians do not question or resist the use of masculine forms such as السيد النائب المحترم addressing them. Also, since context determines meaning, political speakers should not insist on using the masculine form of النائب since using the feminine cannot be understood in its negative connotation as long as it is in the parliamentary context.

Interestingly, the 5 times that the word “النائبة” (representative in feminine form) was used was only by two politicians, a male minister and a female MP. This female MP is among the very few women politicians that were observed to approach politics from a feminist perspective. The following is an example.

Example 1:

هون في قبة هذا البرلمان في نائبات تعرضوا للسطو

In this parliament, some *female MPs* were subjected to robbery. (Female MP, 2015).

Such masculine forms of addressing shape the public woman's experience stressing on the masculine identity as the only possibility for public existence. So when a woman such as in Example 2 identifies herself using masculine titles, it means that she is confirming that the public person is a masculine; as a result, her existence as a political actor cannot be assumed beyond the masculine public image.

### **Example 2:**

رئيسة حزب: كسياسي و كمشارك في العملية السياسية ظاهرلي ان الحوار الّ خلك كان في مصلحة موريتانيا.

**Female** president of a political party: as a **politician** [in the masculine form] and as a **participator** [in the masculine form], I think that the dialog was in favor of Mauritanian. (In a TV program 2016)

In the above example, the individual is positioned as a subject through the process of naming or interpellation. Thus, women are represented as political actors only when they are given the masculine titles. The following section presents the use of conceptual metaphors and its relations to the feminine public experience.

### **3. Rhetorical Strategies: Reinforcing Hegemonic Masculinity**

So far, it has been made clear that the political sphere is a domain of power interaction. Once women are in politics, they find themselves in a field, which its discursive strategies are masculine pre-dominant. Women politicians are thus facing a double bind. They have integument enough to deal with the masculine/feminine dichotomy, in which they should keep balance between their feminine and masculine rhetorical strategies.

This section aims at analyzing the rhetorical strategies followed by Mauritanian women politicians, how these strategies construct the feminine public image, and how they represent the feminine identity.

### 3.1. Conceptual Metaphors and the Feminine Experience

As it has been already discussed in Chapter Three, metaphor is “a way of conceptualizing one, usually abstract, thing in terms of another” (Koller, & Semino, 2009: 12). In other words, through the use of conceptual metaphors, the speaker constructs reality through his or her view of the world. In this subsection, women political discourse is analyzed in order to investigate how Mauritanian women construct their feminine identity through the use of metaphors, what types of metaphors they use, and whether they portray the feminine experience through their metaphor use or they just reinforce the hegemonic masculinity via metaphors. Based on the corpus collected for analysis, conceptual metaphoric scope is categorized into four areas: *DOMESTIC*, *WAR* and *AGGRESSION*, *JOURNEY* and *MOVEMENT*, *NATURE*, and *CULTURAL IDIOMS*

. Table 18: Conceptual metaphoric themes in women's political discourse

Metaphor Themes	Frequencies
Domestic	12
War and Aggression	47
Journey and Movement	16
Nature	6
Cultural Idioms	12
Rescue	8
Shame	14
Other	5

Surprisingly, when analyzing the 50 political discourses, it is observed that parliamentary female members use more metaphors than women ministers. This is best explained with reference to the fact that female ministers usually have their speeches pre-written by male political experts unlike female MPs who have more chances in speaking freely. Moreover, women politicians use more metaphors in the parliamentary debates than when in interviews or TV discussion programs.

Looking at the above table, it is clear that Mauritanian politicians use more War and Aggression metaphors in their speeches than the domestic metaphors which mirror the feminine experience. Journey and Movement metaphor is the second in frequency that women politicians frequently use. These two metaphoric themes are attached to the masculine experience in the patriarchal culture. The following are some examples:

**Example 1:**

نختير انسول ولد عبد العزيز انت سفينة موريتاني منين واعد بيها؟

I would like to ask Ould Abdel Aziz, where are you taking the Mauritanian ship? (Female MP, 2016)

**Example 2:**

و انكول انا هون ان موريتاني فيها رجال راشدين نختير اندق ل الناس ناقوس الخطر بيه ما ابك شي اكد  
يندار ماهو تحت ذ العنوان تحت عنوان ان اهل موريتاني ما اتل فيهم رجل بارادتو

I would say that there are no intelligent men and I would like to beat up danger alarm because everything is ensuring that there in Mauritania there is no man of a will.

**Example 3:**

الين نرجعو اعل هيئة النظام الي هي مربط الفرس نجبرو ان ما اعدل شي ينذكر.

When we go back to the authority body which is the horse stall [an Arabic expression which means that something is the most important, is the core of

something] we find that there is nothing done in this regard. (Female senator, 2015).

**Example 4:**

شاكر السيد الوزير الّ كان هو فارس الجلسة .

I would like to thank Mr. Minister who was **the knight of the session**.

**Example 5:**

اولاد موريتاني هوم الّ معول اعليهم و هوم خط دفاعها الامامي .

The sons of Mauritania are those who Mauritania can count on and they are **its frontline of defense**. (Female municipal candidate, 2013)

**Example 6:**

انتام ما اتكد تلو اذراع الدولة.

You cannot **twist the country's arm**.

The above are examples on how women politicians use War and Aggression and Journey metaphors in their political discourse maintaining the dominant discourse of power. In example 1, which is a Journey metaphor, the female politician depicted Mauritania as being a ship and the President is the pilot of that ship. This type of metaphors reinforce the image of the politician as a male figure since in the Mauritanian cultural context men are the ones who lead the journey and who are attached to moving from a place to another. In the same way, in examples 3 and 4 the female politicians used equestrian, which is a masculine domain. In example 2 the speaker used an expression that is related to war and in example 6, the female politician used aggressive words. All these examples maintain the masculine image in politics emphasizing the male experience.

In the above sense, women politicians' frequent use of War and Aggression and Journey metaphors which are taken as being related to the male experience can be explained as a rhetoric

strategy to claim power. Realizing that the public domain is a masculine one, women politicians believe that depicting reality from a masculine point of view will give more credibility to their views as politicians. Drawing on the Foucauldian perspective, since power functions through the process of normalization, women politicians, who have a strong panoptic sense through which they are quite sure that they are socially under evaluation, take for granted that the male experience is the universal experience that should be reinforced in power discourse. Thus, through the use of these masculine conceptual metaphors women politicians conform to the patriarchal logic that does not consider any public subjective existence outside the masculine experience.

Ironically, despite their conscious emphasis on the masculine experience via the use of conceptual metaphors, women politicians sometimes find themselves obliged to shift to the feminine experience. The discursive formation of experience is constructed along the process of normalization; thus, despite the individual engagement into visibility/invisibility in terms of performing her gendered experience, the feminine experience will impose itself as the main social possibility available for the feminine subject. The following are some examples of the use of domestic metaphoric themes.

**Example 7:**

حوارن هذا الي نحن فيه كل حد يعرف انو اخلك نتيجة لعوامل معينة ضححت فيها رجال يغير سابق الضحي  
ذيك الرجال و أتكول انها قدمت إتفاقيات و قدمت أقتراحات و قدمت ياسر و صادق أعليه ياسر من أولاد  
موريتاني احاني لين يعدل أش رمباية إفصلها ولد عبد العزيز فالنعمة و إجببها رافدها و إهم إلبسها  
للناس.

Everybody knows that the present political dialogue is a result of certain conditions in which men sacrificed. But, before these men emphasize their sacrifice and say that they proposed agreements and suggestions on which a large number of sons of Mauritania agreed, they are waiting **Ould Abdel Aziz to make**



**it [meaning the dialogue points] as a [female] dress which he brings from Nema believing that it fits people** [Mauritanians]. (Female MP, 2017)

**Example 8:**

المواطن الموريتاني بحاجة للأمن و العدالة و الأمن ما تنكال للأمن الخارجي تنكال للأمن الداخلي قبل بعد كاع بيه ألى لاهى إبالي كدام دارو سايبك إبالي كدام أديار الناس.

What the Mauritanian citizen is in need for is security and justice. And, security here does not mean external security. It means the internal security before because one **before sweeping other's houses, one should sweep his own house.** (Female MP, 2018)

**Example 9:**

احن فتواصل حريصين ان انقدمو كوكبة تخرج من رحم معاناة هذا الشعب.

In Tawassoul, we are keen to present a constellation of political actors who emerged from the sufferings of this people [using an expressing in Arabic that is directly translation in English as “**emerged from the suffering womb of this people**”]. (Female parliamentary candidate, 2013)

**Example 10:**

أل أحن من الأم كهان عندكم عن ولد عبد العزيز وجماعتو ما بيغو موريتاني!!

That who thinks that he/she has more tenderness than the mother is hypocrite. Do you think that Ould Abdel Aziz and his government do not like Mauritania!! (Female MP, 2014)

**Example 11:**

أخير الكوام من الجباب الجباب عادتو إجيب للمره نكر الدار يغير لمره هي الي أتوزع التوزيع العادل الي إكد يوفر منو و انا بعد انكول ان الرئيس ماه كوام فمجال الصحة.

**That who keeps is better than that who brings.** The **bringer** [a man] brings for the **woman** [the keeper] in the house, but she is the one who will distribute in a fairly and frugally way. I would say that the President was not the keeper in the health sector. (Female MP, 2015)

### Example 12:

انا ولد عبد العزيز مشيتلو اثلث رسالات كتلو ان موريتاني أسرة وحده و أضعيفة و حد لاهي يصلحها ما يصلحها بالعنف.

I sent three messages to Ould Abdel Aziz telling him **that Mauritania is one family** and that family is very weak, so anybody who would like to reform it, should not use violence. (Female MP, 2010)

In the above examples, women politicians use conceptual metaphors that construct reality from the feminine domestic experience. One may question that attaching the domestic domain which is hierarchaly inferior to the public women is reinforcing the patriarchal dichotomy of public/private. However, it is worth mentioning again that the core argument of this study is based on post-structural (French feminists) perspective that women can only free themselves from the dominant patriarchal discourse through reclaiming their existence into power matrix as *feminine powerful* subjects. In the patriarchal structure, women have no role beyond the domestic sphere. To this end, when negotiating the public, women discursively are place into a double bind in which they cannot gain access to power unless they approach the public from a masculine experience or remain salient private subjects. Put another way, through placing their feminine experience into the center of the public male domain, women, thus, given the chance for the feminine subject to access power from a feminine perspective.

Therefore, in examples 7 and 8, the female politicians use metaphors that depict political issues giving examples of women's concerns such as prorating the political dialogue as being a feminine dress that the President designed while in example 8 the female MP gave an image of the country's security as that of cleaning the house. Moreover, in examples 9 and 10, the speakers provided metaphors that mirror motherhood experience. On the other hand, in example 12, the female MP depicted Mauritania as a family. However, in example 11, the female

politician used a metaphor in which she explained the traditional gender relation in which the man is seen as the provider while the woman is the housekeeper.

Example 11 illustrates that despite highlighting the feminine experience the political metaphor, which the study argues should be emphasized; such use reinforces the patriarchal norm which keeps women inside their traditional gender roles. Unlike the domestic metaphors in the other examples which bring the silenced feminine experience into the masculine dominated public sphere, such negative depiction of the traditional female experience as domestic inferior subject serves patriarchal power in maintaining the dichotomous division of the private and public.

In this line of argument, women politicians' use of Rescue metaphors constitutes the public image of the man as the savor.

**Example 13:**

ايها الشباب انتم هم معتصم هذه الأمة.

Young men you are **Mu'tasim for this nation.** [Mu'trasim is an Abbasid caliph who symbolizes the savor in Arab Islamic culture. In his time, a Muslim woman who was imprisoned by a *kaafir* screamed calling his name to save her. He took a whole army only for freeing this woman]. (Female political activist in 2011 Mauritanian Arab Spring)

This gendered metaphoric articulation followed by female politicians normatively contributes to the construction of the feminine identity that is passively presumed in relation to the active masculine subjectivity. Thus, through the reinforcement of the hegemonic masculine active image in their political discourse, women politicians participate in public distrust of the female political actor.

Evidently, despite their depiction of the feminine experience in their domestic conceptual metaphors, Mauritanian women politicians use more metaphors that reinforce the masculine experience as the public *normal* experience.

### 3.2. Interruption and Political Hate Speech

As it has been elaborated in Chapter Five, Mauritania women are placed into a paradoxical social status. Compared to other women in the neighboring Arab and African countries, Mauritanian women are treated in a noble way, especially Moorish women. When it comes to domestic violence, generally speaking no man in Mauritania dares to act violently against a Moorish woman. As the Mauritanian proverb says, “the nobles are those who place women on their heads and the dogs are those who put them under their feet”, meaning that the good men are those who treat women as queens and the bad ones are those who treat them negatively. Based on this noble social status that women enjoy in the Mauritanian society, they are ironically oppressed as being constructed as inferior domestic subjects that despite the high status they have in the private, they are treated as incomplete human beings in public.

Therefore, concerning political hate speech, which is one of the major aspects that this thesis hypnotized, it occurs only two time in the analyzed 50 political discourses. Moreover, when asking the female political interviewees about whether they have been subjected to any kind of hate speech in the political sphere, all of them agreed that they have never experienced gender based hate speech.

#### Hate speech 1:

زينب احن مان جاين هون لتصاويع اسواقه.

Zeyneb we are not here to gossip. (Male MP, 2016)

#### Hate speech 2:

انت اسكتي شوي، انت مانك مهذب اسمعي شوي هذا راجل ما تكدي تدخل بينو امع العلماء ول امع الدولة  
راجل اكبير و شيخ.

You, keep quite. You are **impolite**. This is a **man**. You cannot intervene between him and the scholars or the government. **He is a great man senator**. (Chairman in the House of Senators, 2016)

In the above observed examples, of hate speech was directed to the same woman senator.

In the first example, her male counterpart responded when she interrupted him saying that “*we are not here to gossip*”. This is a direct insult for a woman in a culture that stereotypically associates women with gossip. In this respect, Butler argues that the fact of being linguistically injured by such way of addressing is because the addresser constructs the addressee as a subject positioning her in the patriarchal constructed feminine agency. In the second hate speech, however, when disciplining the woman MP, the Chairman insulted her as being impolite positively evaluating the masculine identity of her male colleague positioning him in a superior status than hers. In other words, the Chairman, as a patriarchal subject, constitutes the feminine identity of the female MP as being an inferior domestic subject, who despite her public presence should not act outside the realms of power relations.

Though the observation of hate speech was limited to these two examples, way of addressing and naming are considered as hate speech. Despite the fact that Mauritanian women politicians do not get linguistically injured when named or addressed in masculine forms due to the fact that as social subjects they conform to patriarchal normalizing process, such way of naming is a form of gendered hate speech that deny any political existence for the feminine subject outside the masculine image.

Interruption and overlap in turn taking are categorized by Lakoff, Tannen, and other Anglo-American feminist linguists as being a gender sign of power via language use. Despite

feminist linguists argument that men interrupt women more frequently to show control and power over the discussed topic while women tend to interrupt in order to show sport for the speaker, Mauritanian women politicians are rarely interrupted by their male counterparts. Again, this is best explained with reference to the fact that Mauritanian men view women as incomplete human beings and thus it is culturally shame on a man to interrupt or quarrel with a woman. The following is an example in which a female MP gave her view on a political issue and the Chairman asked if anyone of the parliamentary members would like to respond to her argument. When a male MP raised his hand to provide the counterargument of her view, one of his male colleagues reminded him of the Mauritanian cultural concept that it is not good to respond to a woman.

**Example:**

برلماني A : انت لاهي اتجاوب امره !

برلماني B : لعليات ما اتل كون حد اجاوبهم هوم عادو وزيرات و برلمانيات!

Male MP A: **Are you going to respond to a woman!**

Male MP B: **No one can keep silent toward women anymore. They became ministers and MPs.** (In a parliamentary debate, 2016)

As the above example reveals, despite their political participation, women politicians according to the socio-cultural patriarchal mechanisms of construction are placed in a paradox as being respected in the sense that they cannot be interrupted or directed to hate speech. However, this respect indicates women's inferiority. As a result, the fact of not being interrupted in the political sphere is a sign of lack of power which makes the Mauritanian context an exception in Anglo-American feminist linguists' theory of interruption.

Moreover, considering women politicians' inferior political actors compared to their male counterparts, they are underrepresented in the media coverage. And, when inviting a women

politician in a broadcasted TV program usually she is interviewed by a woman and if it is a discussion show all the guests will be women. It is rare that you find a woman politician against a male politician in TV program. This reinforces Mauritanian view of women as ineffective political actors and thus inferior to their male counterparts.

It is, also, observed that women politicians take shorter turns in the few broadcasted TV programs that invite male politician vs. female politician. In such programs, women politicians seem to use more hesitation in their discussion and do not stress strongly on their arguments. For example, they frequently use expressions such as “**I think**”, “**this is my point of view and I don’t know**”, and “**as long as I am concerned**”, which have been categorized as indicators for weakness in women language when in mixed sex conversation. Moreover, when discussing political issues, these women usually seek knowledge from men politicians. For example, in a political program broadcasted on France 24 Chanel, a Mauritania woman political activist gave up her turn to the male political actor who was invited for the program representing the opposite vision of hers saying: “I prefer if you [meaning the journalist] gave him the floor first because he knows more”.

Drawing on the above analysis, ironically it can be argued that the observed fewer interruptions from male political actors to female politicians and the fact that women are subjected to few direct hate speech can be considered indirect hate speech by itself. This is that both interruption and direct hate speech are practiced in the Mauritanian culture as directed only toward equals, male politicians reinforce the assumption that women remain in their inferior social status despite sharing with them the same political titles.

#### **4. Making the Private Public: The Mauritania Feminine Discursive Style**

Within the perspective of the public/private dualism, women are socially expected to perform discursive behavior that is associated with the powerless language of the private that is considered inappropriate for public interaction. Thus, along the same line of argument in Chapter Three of Part Two and in the previous sections of this chapter, it has been observed that Mauritanian women politicians use the discursive style that is labeled as masculine. When examining different aspects of their discursive behavior including self-representation, speaking more Arabic than in Hassaniya, and their rhetoric strategies mainly their use of conceptual metaphors that highlight the masculine experience, it becomes clear that women politicians in Mauritania perform their public presence according to social expectations which construct the political actor as a male figure.

However, adopting a deconstructive position, feminists such as the French feminists, Butler, and others seek to question the dichotomous system that provides the distinction between masculine discursive style which is presented as being powerful and the feminine private discursive style which is believed to be inappropriate publically. These poststructural feminists call for deconstruction of the whole system providing new ways of expressions and representations for women separated from the phallogocentric tradition of construction which has given women no option of public representation beyond the masculine subjectivity.

These feminists admit that power relation is the main consequence behind women's position in language. Kristeva, for example, explains that "[i]n a culture where the speaking subjects are conceived of as masters of their speech, they have what is called a "phallic" position" (1981: 166). In other words, men who are identified as being the phallus are the ones who control discourse. Thus, in order for women to occupy the position of the phallic subject,



the position of power, they have to identify with the masculine linguistic behavior. This identification is what the poststructural feminists stand against calling for a celebration of the feminization of language.

The feminized political discourse which is one of the main arguments of this study was not observed in Mauritanian women politicians' discourse in general despite their reference to the feminine identity from time to time because of the pressure of the patriarch double bind. However, the only one whom this feminization of political discourse is noticed in her discursive behavior is a former MP and the current minister of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family, Meymona Mint Taqi. The following are examples from her discourse:

**Example 1:**

انت ادورني انتم الا ساكته و أتم انت اتسوقى أعلى.

You want me to keep quite while you are faking it all [an expression in Hassaniya that is associated with women and the private use]. (2017).

**Example 2:**

انت هامك تتبخلي ذ كامل فمرجن واحد.

You want to cook everything in the same pot [meaning that a person draws conclusion based on one over generalization]. (2017)

**Example 3:**

انا كنت نوخط اعل ذيك البناية وقتي ماشي نشري الحوت يغير ماكنت شاكه أنها روضة أطفال.

I used to pass by that building when going to buy fish, but I have never thought that it was a kindergarten. (2017)

**Example 4:**

هذا المركز امالو مركز كيف اليقوت الأحمر.

This center is just like the red sapphire [a Hassaniya expression that used by women when describing the beauty of something]. (2017)

**Example 5:**

عفوا على العفوية كان يالا أنعود كاريزماتيک و أنعود باقية على المقعد كوزيرة أنا أحب اني انجاوبكم اتوف بطريقتي انا.

Sorry for being spontaneous. As a minister I should have been more charismatic, but I just like to respond in my own way. (2017)

Bringing the private into the public, Mint Taqi used the feminine discursive style in her political discourse. In examples 1 and 4, she used terms that are inappropriate to the public sphere because they are typically used by women in private same-sex conversations. In example 3, Min Taqi identified her domestic identity with her political identity. She used personal reference when she talked about a building that she usually pass by when going to the market which is a domestic deed that women usually avoid talking about in public.

Despite the fact that it possible that one can claim that emphasizing this domestic act reinforces the private image of the woman minister and thus constructs traditional gender roles, it can be argued that, on the contrary, through depicting her domestic activity and supporting her political discourse by this private act that according to the patriarchal structure is inappropriate in public, this female political actor is resisting the normative aspect of the dominant political discourse. Though resistance cannot exceed power circle, brining the private to the public gives women the chance to challenge the traditional binary of private/public and, thus, through repetition the existence of the private will be normalized as another possibility of public discourse.

In example 2, she used a conceptual metaphor that is related to the kitchen supporting her political argument. In example 5, on the other hand, Mint Taqi at the end of a TV interview, she

apologized for speaking in the feminine style explaining that she was quite sure that this was not the way a minister should talk, but that she preferred to speak in her own feminine way. This last comment summarizes the Mauritanian women politicians' negative stand on the feminine discursive style. Though the minister consciously expressed herself using the variety of Hassaniya that was imposed on her as a domestic subject, she was sure that she violated the patriarchal norms and being aware of the social panoptic gaze on her image as a political actor may be affected by such feminine style. This would explain why only one woman politician was observed using the feminine discursive style because adopting this political discursive style is risky in a society that place the effective political actor into a masculine frame.

Practically, the dilemma of whether women approach politics from a feminine political discourse or masculine political discourse is not what really matter but rather if women succeed in leaving a unique mark in the political sphere. According to the survey conducted for this research, participants were asked in the last item, item number 15, to mention women politicians who they think are examples of effective Mauritanian women political actors.

Surprisingly, the majority did not respond to this simple question leaving the answer space empty. Those who responded are only 16 out of the 300 respondents and they all belong to the political sphere. Analytically speaking, ignoring item 15 can be explained to support the hypothesis that acting according to the patriarchal normative discourse of power in which the female political actor tends to occupy political positions that are associated with traditional gender roles, women politicians mark their public presence as invisible.

This chapter presented a discursive analysis of women's political participation. 50 political discourses were analyzed in order to discursively explore the mobilization of

Mauritanian from the private to the public. The following is a general conclusion where the results are generally discussed.

## CONCLUSION

The centrality of the male figure as the dominator of the public domain denied women any right of presence outside the boundaries of men's definitions. Therefore, questioning women's relation to the public sphere in general and politics in particular attracted researchers from different disciplines. Women's political participation has increased worldwide; however, their entrance into the political domain in Arab patriarchal societies has controversial aspects. Women in these societies are constructed as social individuals that conform to the patriarchal assumptions that do not give them any existence outside the realms of the private space.

Patriarchal societies function through the discursive formation, which is constructed in terms of oppositions. In this oppositional system, woman is defined according to a subordinate relation to man. Thus, in order to break this oppositional system, there is a need for problematizing patriarchal discourse that constructs the feminine subjectivity through the different mechanisms of construction. In this respect, women are trapped in a circle of sameness/difference in which men are the norm, the center, and women are defined in accordance with this masculine norm.

Drawing on this line of thought, to challenge the sameness/difference dichotomies, women, as the French feminists propose, have to step outside the role left to them in this system in which they have existence only to reflect man. Thus, since there is no existence outside discourse, deconstructing the patriarchal discourse surrounding femininity and the public is of much importance for the study of women's political participation.

One of the main arguments of this study is whether the feminine discursive behavior, which is culturally associated with passivity and is taken usuriously, is appropriate for exercising

power in the political domain that is shaped by the masculine subject and in what way women politicians construct their identity as feminine subjects via the political discourse they use.

In this respect, there is considerable contestation about whether women should bring their own language into the public domain or they should use the existing language of power. In this context, some feminists, especially the French feminists, believe that women will not be seen as separate and different subjects unless they use their own language. However, one can ironically question if the language that is labeled as feminine or as the language of the private really represents a form of language that reflects women. Since the private itself is designed by the patriarchal mechanisms of constructions, does not this type of discourse emphasize women's weakness through language?

Obviously, it can be argued that in spite of the dilemma surrounding the feminine language and its relation to the exercise of power, this form of discourse is the only linguistic possibility available for women. Thus, only through taking this language beyond the realms of the private, women can emphasize their existence as different independent subjects who can go beyond the philosophy of masculine centrality in which the feminine has no existence beyond the private.

From Butler's performativity perspective, since the gendered subject is constructed through the repetition of the dominant discourse, the feminine language being socially recognized as a form of language that is attached to the private sphere will not contribute to the making of the feminine subject if it is practiced outside the realms of the private. Then, when taking the feminine language to the public sphere, then the act of imitation and repetition is challenged. Thus, the feminine language instead of being a confirmation to the patriarchal power it becomes a form of resistance.

In this theoretical context, the purpose of this study was both to delve into a deeper inquiry about the nuances of the Mauritanian political arena with an effort to dissect the socio-political and cultural agendas that constructed the feminine subjectivity of the female politician and to critically analyze the validity of women's political discourse. In a patriarchal society like the Mauritanian society where women have always been associated with traditional gender roles, women's presence in politics is questionable. Though the country has recently adopted strategies through positive discrimination to engage women into politics, women are still underrepresented. Moreover, the matter is not about the quantity of women's political participation, but rather about the quality of this participation.

Thus, this study dealt with three main issues, gender, discourse, and politics, in order to investigate women's presence in the political domain. The study aimed at delving into a deeper inquiry about the nuances of the Mauritanian political arena with an effort to dissect the socio-political and cultural agendas that construct the identity of the female politician. Therefore, the main foci of the thesis were, first to critically analyze the validity of women's political discourse investigating how the feminine identity is expressed or suppressed via this discourse and, second, to examine the effectiveness of their political participation.

Three main hypotheses were examined in this study: (1) Mauritanian women are imposed on politics because their "physical" presence serves the democratic image of the country, (2) adding unfeminist women into politics is just as that of adding more patriarchal men to power institution, and (3) women politicians depersonalize some aspects of their feminine identity and categorize themselves more with the masculine political leader image.

Due to the fact that the study was based on qualitative and quantitative approach both non-probability sampling and probability sampling were adopted. Concerning the non-

probability sampling, the selection of participants was based on different categorization. The participants were chosen from three major categories, political community, education community, and lay people. Concerning the mechanisms through which the selection was carried, probability sampling was adopted especially convenience sampling. Participants of each category were chosen according to their accessibility.

To this end, the theoretical framework for this study was set with a particular focus on the presentation and discussion of the most relevant theories and studies to the topic and context under study. This theoretical part aims to contextualize the study at the level of theory and research. Second, for the purpose of this study the qualitative and quantitative approach was adopted to data collection and analysis in the sense that the questionnaire and the interview used to collect data included both qualitative and quantitative questions, that is, open ended and close ended questions.

The main approaches to discourse analysis that were adopted during data analysis are critical discourse analysis, Foucauldian discourse analysis, and feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis. 50 political discourse delivered by Mauritanian women politicians and 30 discourse delivered by male politicians were analyzed for this study. The scope of the study was limited to the years 2009 to 2018 (the present time). Data was presented in tables and figures and interpreted and discussed both quantitatively qualitatively with respect to the theories and studies reviewed in the theoretical part.

Yet, some academic researchers have tackled the topic of gender, discourse, and politics, few have brought the three topics together to produce a critical analysis of women's political discourse. There are two main factors that are considered touchstones for the originality of this study. First, the topic has never been dealt with in the Mauritanian context. The second and most



important is that the study does not only analyze female political discourse, but explores the effectiveness of their political performance and the socio-cultural factors that shape Mauritanian women's public experience. This is that the study contributes to the literature on women's discursive behavior, feminine subjectivity, and female public presence.

The study was divided into two set of data, data that was collected with the purpose to investigate the nature of Mauritanian women's political participation through the questionnaire and the interviews, and data that was meant to analyze the validity of women's political participation and which was carried through the analysis of the political discourse under study. The first set of data was presented and discussed in Chapter Three. A number of results were reached from the analysis of the obtained data.

It has been found that in the Mauritanian context women biologically and intellectually are seen as those who cannot fit into the characteristics of effective political leaders. In the Mauritanian mentality, the political leader is a masculine; thus, the majority of participants were satisfied with the inferior political role that women play. This is due to a number of factors, namely the fact that drawing on socialization and patriarchal construction of social agents; women are encouraged to develop a passive relationship toward public issues. Thus, any presence for women in politics even if it is fade and invisible is more than enough for them.

Despite their presence in political parties, women play an invisible role in these parties. When examining the administrative structure of the party, it is clear that the important positions are held by males. When experiencing the political action, Mauritanian women face the limitation of spatial mobility where the space is presumed as being masculine space in which the female body a source of *fitna*, seduction. Women politicians are limited by the devaluated spatial

position they occupy, which causes the majority of them develop a negative sense toward their public presence.

Therefore, women politicians construct low willingness and ambitions and thus their access to the political sphere is mainly to serve political parties. In this respect, the study concludes that women in multiparty system are used as a winning card in the democratization of political parties. Moreover, based on the assumption that women are more capable of political influence, strong political parties that have more chances to win electoral seats usually prefer to add women in parliamentary lists than in municipal seats because women are more useful for this political area where the party's authority deters their political action. Thus, despite the fact that, in general, women through their municipal performance both as mayors and as councilors show more commitment, political parties still do not give them the chance to access the local governmental sector.

More significantly, when examining the type of political position that women occupy in the government, it was concluded that women ministerial experience reinforces the public/private dichotomy. Women are placed into a paradox of negotiating the public through the private division. Women are associated with political positions that keep them attached to the stereotypical areas that are culturally supposed to be feminine.

Women's political participation is constructed under the influence of the cultural view that politics is a masculine domain. Thus, it was found that the 20% gender quota symbolizes women's underrepresentation in politics since the participants were satisfied with this low percentage compared to the number of women in the society. Through their satisfaction with the gender quota, Mauritanian female political elites admit that men are the masters of the public sphere and that it is enough for women to be given this small space within politics. The above

results conform the first hypothesis, which holds that Mauritanian women are imposed on politics because their physical presence constructs a democratic image of the country.

The results of the study have also shown that based on the public/private dualism, feminine discourse is considered inappropriate for public interaction. Thus, participants admit the existence of the feminine discourse only in the private sector. Thus, it has been observed that Mauritanian women politicians use the discursive style that is known as masculine. When examining different aspects of their discursive behavior including self-representation, code choice and code switching, and their rhetorical strategies mainly the use of conceptual metaphors that capitalize the masculine experience, it is clear that women politicians perform their public presence according to the social expectations that shape the public actor as a masculine figure.

To this end, there points that certain points that the study concludes. First, it is observed in women's political discourse an overuse of generic masculine nouns. This discursive practice emphasizes men as reference, which hides the women's presence in the public domain representing them as invisible subjects. Second, as it has been observed in women politicians' detach themselves from womanhood or the feminine identity and instead highlight their professional identity as politicians. The third and most important point in this regard is the construction of negative feminine subjectivity among these women politicians. They do not only accept the misogynist discourse about womanhood, but they also define themselves in accordance with this discourse. Thus, they contribute to their subjugation by patriarchal power.

Moreover, through the masculine forms of addressing, women's public experience is shaped with reference to the masculine identity. In this respect, since the individual is constructed as a subject only through the process of naming and interpellation, these women are recognized as political actors only when they are named in the masculine titles.

These results on the discursive behavior of Mauritanian women politicians confirms the third hypothesis of the study which holds that women politicians depersonalize some aspects of their feminine identity and categorize themselves more with the image of the masculine leader.

The second hypothesis which holds that adding unfeminist women into politics is just as that of adding more patriarchal men to power is partly confirmed. It has been found that the majority of Mauritanian women politicians do not only approach politics from unfeminist perspective, but, on the contrary, they develop a negative stand on feminism in general. The results have shown that the majority of female political actors consider feminism as a radical ideology that is both against Islam and alien to the Mauritanian culture. This is also apparent from the results obtained from discursive analysis of the political discourses under study in which women politicians emphasize the masculine political discursive style and detached themselves from any feminine or feminist self-representation.

Moreover, topic choice reflects the absence of any feminist tendency in part of Mauritanian women politicians. Thus, the lack of feminist awareness among Mauritanian female political actors influences their political invisibility, which confirms the aforementioned hypothesis. In this respect, the feminine political discourse which was one of the main arguments of this study was absent in Mauritanian political discourse due to the aforementioned reasons.

Hopefully this study will contribute to a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding Mauritanian women's political participation and open the door for adopting new strategies that result in real, active, and visible women's political activism. The main argument that the study revolves around holds that in spite of the dilemma surrounding the feminine language and its relation to the exercise of power only through this form of discourse women can challenge their subordination and step outside the dichotomy of sameness/difference which gives

them no possibility of definition beyond patriarchy. Drawing on this argument and the results obtained from this study, it is recommended that to engage women into this real and satisfactory political participation, strategies to raise feminist awareness among women should be followed.

Despite the fact that this dissertation has endeavored to introduce the reader to the paradoxical nature of Mauritanian women's political participation evaluating and analyzing their political discourse, the work is only humble brick in the edifice of research that still needs to be carried out in this domain. Undeniably, as any work there are some limitations in this study. Some of these shortcomings were in time and space especially with the fact that due to documentation circumstances the scope of the study was limited to 2009 to 2018 leaving out a vast number of women politicians. However, the results and conclusions of this study would hopefully be enlightening and insightful for future research on different aspects and issues of Mauritanian women's political participation.

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**APPENDIX**

*The Questionnaire*

In this questionnaire an attempt is made to inspect Mauritanian women’s political participation and effectiveness via their leadership discourse. Your contribution is highly appreciated, and your answers will be used only for academic research purposes.

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**Part One: Questions**

1. Please write the numbers of these adjectives that in your opinion describe men or women in the right box. You can use the same adjective in the two boxes if you think that it belongs to both of them.

*1 Emotional 2 rational 3 quiet 4 outspoken 5 passive 6 active 7 aggressive 8 responsive 9 leading 10 cooperative 11 competitive 12 conservative 13 dominant 14 power 15 weak 16 sensitive 17 independent 18 dependent 19 assertive*

<b><u>Women</u></b>

<b><u>Men</u></b>

2. In your opinion how do you describe the ideal political leader?

.....

.....

.....

3. Do you think that a woman can fit in the qualities you made about the ideal leader?

Yes, Absolutely    Not all of them but some    No, Never

4. What do you think of women's attitudes toward leadership?

Against it    Scared of it    Ready for it    Indecided

5. What do you think of Mauritanian women's involvement in politics?

Strong    Satisfactory    Average    Weak

6. Can a man be a minister of Women Affairs?

Yes    No

7. Can a woman be minister of defense?

Yes    No

8. Can a woman be a minister of Islamic Affairs?

Yes    No

9. Can a woman be a prime minister?

Yes    No

10. When running for the same political position who do you prefer to vote for?

Man    Woman    Competence is more important than gender

11. Do you think that women speak a particular way differently than that of men?

Yes    No

12. Is there a typical feminine political discourse?

Yes    No

13. If your answer to the above question is yes, does the feminine discourse have the same qualities as the masculine discourse?

Stronger and more efficient    As strong and efficient    Less strong and efficient  
 Weak and inefficient



14. As you know there are two municipalities in Nouakchott headed by women, the Municipality of Tevregh-Zeina and the Urban Group of Nouakchott. How do you evaluate women's municipal experience?

.....  
.....

15. Can you name a successful Mauritanian female politician who you think left her mark in the political sphere?

.....  
.....

16. As you know there are two municipalities in Nouakchott headed by women, the municipality of Tevregh Zeina and the Urban Group of Nouakchott. How do you evaluate women's municipal experience?

.....  
.....  
.....

**Part Two: Personal Information**

**1. Gender**

Male  Female

**2. Age:**

Less than 30  30-35  35 -50  over 50

**3. Regional Background**

.....

**4. Spoken Languages**

French     Arabic

**5. Other languages**

Hassaniya     Pular     Soninke     Wolof

**6. Level of education:**

B.A (License)     Master     PhD     Other (specify)

.....

**Thank you very much for the time you devoted**

### *The Interview*

#### **The fixed questions:**

1. Couple of years ago, Mauritanian women managed to gain a quota in electoral politics. Do you think that imposing this quota is necessary to involve women in politics in a society that is not so enthusiastic toward female decision-makers?
2. Doubtlessly, women's political participation has expanded and diversified during the last years. Do you think that women politicians were able to convince the voter of their political performance in legislative and executive positions or they bet on continuation of the support they gained from the quota?
3. That who follows political participation of Mauritanian women finds that women have been absent from high political positions such as the Prime Ministry, Ministries of Justice and Interior and even the presidency of the legislative councils. What do you think are the reasons behind this absence?

4. Compared to men, Mauritanian women are still new to the world of politics. Do you think that the type of political discourse used by men impose itself on women to find themselves representing themselves using the same masculine discourse?
5. Have you noticed feminine political discourses among any Mauritanian woman politician?

**Some varying questions:**

1. In your political experience, have you ever been exposed to any kind of gendered hate speech?
2. You are considered one of the Mauritanian women who have occupied certain various administrative and ministerial posts. Do you think that the social perceptions about the capability of women to become active partners of men in managing the governmental institutions have changed? Have they become enhanced? Or did these perceptions regress?
3. As a social activist, do you think that the Mauritanian society has accepted the women's liberation movements? And do you consider that these liberating movements, -- seen by their opponents as alien to the social values—have impacted the political participation of women?
4. You are one of the few women who have imposed themselves in the Mauritanian political sphere. Do you think that you and your female colleagues have been able to change the stereotypical social perception toward women's political involvement?
5. Criticism is always directed toward government whenever there is a talk about the political underrepresentation of women, but there are those who say that their position in the oppositional parties is not better. They say that the opposition parties rely on women

just as an elector reservoir in return for giving them some promises without being able to integrate them in the leadership bodies of the party that reflect their electoral size and political efforts. What do you think?

6. Based on specialization as a PhD holder in women's studies and based on your political experience as a mayor of one of the most important municipalities of the capital, how do you find the role played by Mauritanian women in the political sector and how do you assess their political performance especially in municipal work?
7. Are you satisfied with the performance of Mauritanian women, whether in opposition or loyalty, and have they, in your opinion changed the social attitudes toward them as partners of men in the performance of national tasks?
8. It is noticed that all the women who occupy the post of mayor in Mauritanian belong to the ruling party. Can this lead to conclude that for Mauritanian women to reach position either by appointment or election, they must have strong support such as that of a ruling party or a powerful tribe?
9. From your position as the vice head of the parliament, how do evaluate the political participation of Mauritanian women?
10. Based on Islamic background, do you think that the current democratic system has been able to guarantee women their rights, which are recognized by Islamic law?

*Links to the political discourses that were analyzed*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uivd94tfOys>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SzwPbVzDISk>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhLmNBhCIUA>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ot71FeGboEY>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDLRH9HeiBw&t=1998s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcIb7TL4x3w>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eIwq-XJYNBY&t=1417s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQJwEY1OY98&t=611s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvs0GuQgqGQ&t=33s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dei3OESidMU>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-dCsJvzj-E&t=166s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w05ZkBXmqPY>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvbLQeSUNWQ>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPCDLSreH\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPCDLSreH_w)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGZUq14SiWM>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=La6RXC15rNg>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=barJG\\_ENQsA&t=234s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=barJG_ENQsA&t=234s)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5daBIUsIYk>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TK4labP4\\_M&t=191s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TK4labP4_M&t=191s)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXdTKIDSgoM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzosTQ-8EPE>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29VslYe026I>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xeKxVKsITPk&t=210s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gz4OIMRT6Ts>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWhYwc1gMyo>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paC0Mh6qras>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AKqmI1LRk8>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nD2\\_apP7kws](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nD2_apP7kws)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4hZwoDZ9U0>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmHmslePzW0&t=114s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEQUOZRt9zU>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGgrjabe2ds>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2Z03oeyHD8>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DehpTbe5Hk>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z28caDWVSio&t=8s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IO3IegfJtwo>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dri9nx1YYuc&t=4s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oAYQLkJK9rI>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PFjZYMpqak>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBQLv2Pi9b8>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZlhMJbHWN0>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYXmsjuJdNM>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4d2FKdaXNXM>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kw4XkeuivDg>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWc71o5sJmk>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5vAyTjwMgE>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqR55JqGJxg>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iiIzGefXNzw>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bmrKqgW40>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSPo1iRNCxo&t=678s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlwInc4gW68>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U\\_iVKOKQNRA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_iVKOKQNRA)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mG\\_4203\\_yo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mG_4203_yo)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHV-liPFkdI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SULFXVCuPx4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLWNHN2GaLY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wX3Lucfw7iI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNGBH2BV0XI&t=278s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LrLRYWfGYoo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZXk56j8kgM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xL8oLTsNL9M>