

## Contending Patriarchy, Confronting Civilization: The Mother as the Doughty Rebel in Driss Chraïbi's *Mother Comes of Age*

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### Abstract:

Driss Chraïbi, a 20<sup>th</sup> century Francophone Moroccan novelist, is critical of both Islamic and Occidental cultures in his novels. The patriarchal feudal traditions of Morocco along with the dehumanization accompanying the material progress of modern Parisian life become the targets of his attack. This paper focuses on Chraïbi's novel *Mother Comes of Age* (1972), which charts the journey of a Mother (with the assistance of her two sons) from total seclusion and ignorance to knowledge and emancipation. In the process, the Mother has to contend not only patriarchy but also the Islamic civilization, which keeps its women secluded and subjugated and the colonial leadership, which with its imperialist ambitions, is oblivious and detrimental to the interests of the Moroccan women, children and the poor. The paper also argues that as a Francophone novelist, schooled in the French tradition, Chraïbi does not completely escape West fixation in the pattern of liberation he charts out for his female protagonist.

### Keywords: Maghrebi, patriarchy, civilization, Mother, DrissChraïbi

The Islamic civilization, unlike its Western counterpart, has been portrayed in mainstream literature and cinema as one that curtails/abrogates the rights of women, confines them to the four walls of the home, and relegates them to a position secondary to the male. The liberation of the Muslim woman from the clutches of patriarchy and religious orthodoxy has been the professed agenda of the colonial enterprise. The sinister politics of this 'colonial feminism', which continues into the post 9/11 years, has been exposed by postcolonial and feminist theorists like Leila Ahmed, Mohja Kahf, Reina Lewis, Chandra Mohanty and others. Popular western educated writers from Muslim cultures – such as Azar Nafisi, Khaled Hosseini, Tahar Ben Jhelloun and Nawal el Saadawi others – are also taken to task by postcolonial critics like Hamid Dabashi, Amal Amireh, Geoffrey Nash, Roksana Bahramitash and Fatima Keshavarz for their misrepresentation/stereotyping of Muslim cultures and the Western line of modernity they envisage for Muslim women. While this remains a truth, patriarchal oppression and confinement (which has little to do with religious stipulations) are hard realities the Muslim woman has to contend with in her struggle towards self-realization. The Moroccan writer Driss Chraïbi becomes significant in this respect in that he is critical both of Islamic and western societies in his novels such as *The Simple Past* (1952), *The Butts* (1955), *The Crowd* (1961) and *Mother Comes of Age* (1972). It must also be said to Chraïbi's credit