

# Unveiling The Corporeal: The Female Body, Subjectivity and Politics of Visibility in Maryam Touzani's Film *Adam*

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of cinema, the female body has often been a scopic site of pleasure and subjugation. Female filmmakers have long sought to refute the sexist scrutiny of women onscreen and work for healthier cinematic representations of the female body. This article aims to cast light on the different textual and visual tactics and aesthetics employed by the transnational Moroccan filmmaker Mariam Touzani in her film *Adam* (2020) to de-romanticize women and deconstruct the conventional cinematic framework where the female body is restrained to adhere to the patriarchal ideologies. The female protagonists Samia and Abla reflect the determination of the filmmaker Mariam Touzani to provide an understanding of the female body as an organism full of life, emotions, and agency, rather than an erotic, static icon. In analysing the film, the article embraces a feminist discourse to highlight the multifaceted dimensions of womanhood and contemplate the complexities surrounding the female body. *Adam* is a feminist firebrand against the alienating conditions of women and the objectification of the female body.

**Keywords-** Agency, Female body, Haptic aesthetics, Liberation, Music, Visual pleasure.

## I. INTRODUCTION

For most of history, the female body has occupied an apodictic place in the realm of cinema. The cinematic scene had traditionally been reigned by male filmmakers who looked at the female body as a site of extravaganza and desire. Cinema has been emphatic in perpetuating gender divisions and dredging the objectification of women, shrinking them into sex objects and tools of decoration to please and titillate the male audience. As (Joan Copjec, 1989:57) has noted, the female body on screen is often reduced to the status of a mere surface, a screen upon which the male subject projects his fantasies and desires. Dismembered bodies-thighs, young faces, exotic women lying strewn across the TV screen are displayed as scopophilic aesthetic objects not only for the audience but also for the camera, the voyeuristic male characters within the narratives and the male working behind the lens. This parochial visualisation of the female in commercial cinema

dehumanises and depletes her of all agency. The sexualised stimulation of the female body in mainstream films is further exacerbated by shrewd employment and orchestration of a wide range of audiovisual techniques. These technical elements, which include sound design, mise-en-scène, character development, and lighting, are deliberately crafted and utilized based on filmmakers' calculated anticipations of their target audience's visual preferences and desires. Whilst the woman in the narratives may serve as a kind of testament, a place for the fixing of difference and where a story of sexual desire is blown in, she is concurrently relegated to the margin. The female character in film narratives is visible and invisible, desired and disavowed.

Hao (2022: 411) argues that in mainstream films, "women are regarded as a "strange scene". They are encoded as images and with strong visual charm and pornographic appeal and turned into materialized images to meet the subconscious desires of the audience." She also asserts that "while most women in cinema are under

the male gaze, women lost their autonomy and independence". Similarly, Chinyere (2015: 12) contends that women on screen are either portrayed as devoted, traditional homemakers who embody the prevailing gender roles ascribed to women in society, or as sexually dynamic objects whose primary obsession is engaging in romantic relationships with male characters. Indeed, a clear incoherence is seen in the roles attributed to the female characters; if not defined by her physicality and domesticity, the female figure is often passive, sheer faceless, or invisible. Given the symbolic importance of the sexuality and invisibility of women, the film narratives make apparent the extent to which mainstream cinema consolidates the cultural abyss of the patriarchal system.

In Moroccan cinema, the body has long been a contentious subject, reflecting the complexities of a country deeply rooted in cultural traditions and a society marked by religious conservatism. The prevalent norms surrounding the female body are inextricably included within the frame of the Islamic principle of concealment and veiling. Notwithstanding, since the 1970s, many Moroccan filmmakers have attempted to publicise and evoke themes of the body, sexuality, and women in their artistic expressions. Moumen Smihi, in his film *Chergui* (1975), boldly depicted scenes of women bathing in the sea with their wet clothes moulding their shapes, sometimes going so far as to reveal furtively glimpses of their bodies. However, as European filmmakers of that era, Moroccan filmmakers had to grapple with the restrictive censorship practices prevalent in Morocco. Negotiating the proverbial red line was a delicate dance as directors sought to retain the independence of their artistic visions while respecting societal sensibilities and avoiding the outright prohibition of their works. However, it was not until the end of the 1990s with the democratisation and liberalisation that Morocco was experiencing and with the emergence of new cinematic visions and trends that the depiction of the female body, once a taboo subject relegated to the fringes, became more prominent and overt in Moroccan films. Moroccan filmmakers like Abdelkader Laktaa, Nabil Ayouch, Mostafa Derkaoui, Narjis Nejjar, Leila Kilani, Maryam Touzani and many others were able to tear up the prohibitive vision of the body as a site of temptation and a doorway to sins; they dealt with the body with a kind of thinking about life in general and utilised it as a powerful canvas for social commentary and investigating intersections of desire, agency, and societal constraints.

Maryam Touzani whose film *Adam* (2020) is the focus of my analysis in this article, has taken softly to subverting the biased narratives and the long-held cultural assumptions about the female body. Through the characters of Abla and Samia, the film director sought to reveal the female form as a symbol of the inner self and a site resistance, defying societal constraints and reclaiming the power of representation (Ginsberg &

Lippard, 2020). Touzani's transnational identity, as a Franco-Moroccan, allows her to create a nuanced dialogue between the personal and the political, the local and the global navigating the intersections and the complexities of female identity, and challenging the rigid boundaries that often define representations of the female body. Therefore, this article dissects the film's intricate narrative, and textual and visual techniques to unveil how Maryam Touzani has represented the female body and subverted traditional cinematic gazes that relegate the woman to the margin. By focusing on the film's characters' development, narrative structure, and symbolic use of space and imagery, the analysis seeks to uncover the layers of meaning embedded in the film's portrayal of womanhood. The study also situates *Adam* (2020) within the broader context of Moroccan cinema and global feminist film discourse, examining how Touzani's approach contributes to a redefinition of female representation on screen.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This article employs a multifaceted approach to unpack the complex ways in which Maryam Touzani's film *Adam* represents the female body and challenges long-held societal conventions. The research methodology encompasses a close textual analysis of the film's narrative and visual elements and a contextual examination of the work within the broader landscape of Moroccan and global feminist cinema. By closely studying the arcs of the two protagonists, Abla and Samia, the research will elucidate how Touzani centralises the female perspective and creates space for scrutiny of women's lived experiences. This includes an investigation of the film's non-linear storytelling, its use of introspection and silence, and how the narrative disrupts traditional gender roles and expectations. The article highlights the use of music in the film as an evocator of emotions and an extension of female subjectivity. Hence, relying on a qualitative method, the article explores how Maryam Touzani's *Adam* subverts the objectifying gaze that has historically dominated cinematic portrayals of women and their bodies. The article will illuminate how Touzani's work contributes to ongoing dialogues around gender, identity, and the reclamation of the female narrative.

## III. RECLAIMING THE FEMALE AGENCY

Maryam Touzani is a Moroccan French filmmaker whose works have garnered international acclaim for their refined exploration of the female experience and their challenge to traditional societal norms. Touzani's passion for filmmaking was ignited at a young age, as she immersed herself in the rich cultural landscape of her hometown. After completing her studies in English literature at Mohammed V University

in Rabat, she pursued a Master's degree in Audiovisual Communication and Filmmaking from the Sorbonne University in Paris. Touzani's directorial debut, the short film *Until the End of Time* (2008), immediately established her as a distinctive voice in Moroccan cinema. The film's sensitive portrayal of a woman's intimate journey received critical acclaim and set the stage for Touzani's subsequent works, that continue to push the boundaries of cinematic representation. In 2019, Touzani's feature film *Adam* cemented her status as a trailblazing voice in Moroccan and global Cinema. The film has received numerous accolades at some of the world's most outstanding film festivals; it attracted the spotlight at the festival of Cannes for the best screenplay in the festival's *Un Certain Regard* section. Its success continued at the 2019 Carthage Film Festival, where it was awarded the coveted *Tanit d'Or* or *Golden Tanit* for Best Film. It was also awarded the Best Screenplay Award and the prestigious Atlas Award, the latter of which is given to the most significant Moroccan film of the year. The Namur International Festival of French-Speaking Film in Belgium also awarded *Adam* its Grand Prize, underscoring the film's universal appeal and its ability to transcend cultural boundaries. The critical acclaim collected by *Adam* extends beyond the festival circuit, with the film also receiving several notable nominations. At the 2020 *Académie des César Awards*, it was nominated for Best Foreign Film, a recognition that speaks to the film's artistic excellence and its impact on the global cinematic landscape. Additionally, Touzani herself was honoured with the Shangri-La Award for Women's Empowerment, a testament to her commitment to amplifying female narratives and challenging patriarchal structures within the film industry. Touzani's cinematic triumph of exploring female agency and solidarity, and reclaiming the feminine narrative has struck a chord with national and wider international audiences.

The film *Adam* tells the story of two Moroccan women: Samia and Abla, both frozen in existential stasis, delicately transform each other's lives. Abla is a widowed mother living in Casablanca, making a living by running a small home-based bakery. She lives a solitary existence, caring for her young daughter Warda and maintaining a strict routine. Abla's life is deeply marked and traumatized by the loss of her husband, which made her build emotional walls to protect herself and her child from further hurt. Samia is a desperate woman pregnant out of wedlock looking for temporary work and seeking shelter in the big streets of Casablanca. The film opens up with a tired Samia walking on the bustling streets, knocking randomly on doors in search of a job and shelter. Her solitary journey through the urban landscape establishes a sense of deep and raw vulnerability and marginalization. Samia's eyes, brimming with unshed tears, and visage marked by fatigue and distress reflect the depth of her psychological turmoil and the immense pressure she is carrying as a

single pregnant woman in a cultural milieu where single motherhood is often stigmatized. Samia's emotional interiority invites the audience to empathetically engage with the weight of her circumstances. However, Touzani's portrayal of Samia is not one of pure victimhood, but one of fortitude and agency; Despite the obstacles she faces, Samia persistently seeks out opportunities and refuses to succumb to societal expectations. Her journey of determination to find a haven and secure her future directed her towards Abla who after her initial rejection to assist Samia claiming "I don't need help", finally accepts her into her house. Abla takes her autonomy to an almost hard-line level, refusing Samia's help at work until the latter's quiet valour to be useful begrudgingly wins her over with an appetizing batch of hard-to-master *Rziza*, a savoury snack made from long strands of dough.

Abla and Samia's inner struggles unite them and establish an unexpectedly strong bond that transcends societal expectations. Maryam Touzani could create from the sorrow and the pain of both characters, a force, a wellspring of mutual support and empowerment in the face of societal constraints. Touzani repudiates the societal patriarchal scrutiny of unwed mothers and reclaims women as sites of power, rather than objects of shame or disgrace. In several pivotal scenes, the audience bears witness to the harsh, unforgiving gaze of Moroccan society as it is directed towards Samia. Whether it is the disapproving stares of passersby on the street or the outright rejection she faces when seeking employment, the film vividly captures the pervasive sense of shame and ostracization that pregnant, unmarried women often confront within this cultural context. In a punchy scene, where Samia goes to bake bread in the public oven, she is met with harsh judgment and derision from some local women. When the baker offers Samia a chair to rest, one of the women reacts with open disdain, proclaiming that she should not be afforded such consideration as they have been waiting longer:

"What Ma'am? Are you pregnant?" ironically replies the baker.

"Well, it's easy that way! We can get pregnant from the street so that you serve us first" responds the woman in a sharp manner.

The woman's derogatory response, stating that "it's easy to get pregnant from the street," exemplifies the pervasive attitude of moral condemnation towards single mothers. This discomforting interaction underscores how women themselves can become complicit in upholding the patriarchal structures that seek to shame and marginalize those who defy societal expectations. The women's scathing remarks not only demean Samia's pregnancy but also reveal the internalized misogyny that often manifests within insular, conservative communities. Samia is left to bear the weight of the women's scorn in

silence. However, far from being a sign of weakness or submission, Samia's silence in this pivotal moment emerges as a deliberate act of resistance, a refusal to internalize the judgment and vitriol directed towards her. With this strategic use of silence, Samia asserts her right to self-determination and the reclamation of her own narrative. She demonstrates a profound resilience and self-possession that challenges the patriarchal structures that subjugate Moroccan women.

Furthermore, Samia's quiet but steadfast presence in the film serves as a transformative counterpoint to the deep-seated grief and agony that have long weighed upon Abla since the death of her husband. Samia emerges as a figure of hope and renewal helping Abla to break down her psychological defences and negative tropism, and open her heart to the world again. Abla's gradual recovery of her sense of self is incarnated in the subtle yet significant detail of her reapplication of Kohl to her eyes, a ritual she had long abandoned, becomes a powerful symbol of her rebirth; a renewed investment in her happiness and self-worth. Reciprocally, Abla's assistance to Samia gives way to maternal protectiveness; she not only offers practical assistance but also emotional succour. As Samia grapples with the heavy decision to give her baby up for adoption because as she declares "with me, he's doomed", Abla assumes the role of an emotional mainstay and tenderly encourages the young woman to embrace the maternal bond, to love her baby and not to fight against her instinct. Positively, Touzani's refined portrayal of Abla's maternal support for Samia represents a powerful retrieval of the cinematic maternal figure, one charged with a profound sense of agency, empathy and transformative potential. Thoroughly, Touzani's portrayal of these characters moves beyond stereotypical depictions of Moroccan women, offering a humanized perspective. She interrogates the dominant and androcentric biases that seek to relegate women by heroising all female characters in the film, positioning them in the centre of the narrative. Even Abla's young daughter is given a crucial role within the film as she is the one who initiates the redemptive bond that blossoms between her mother and Samia.

Besides, Mariam Touzani provides a positive façade for the notion of an all-female space. In the film, the female-dominated spaces -the house or the bakery in this case- are used to indicate a liberatory task based on bringing into light women's agency and authority which include power and leadership free from the patriarchal gaze. The space represents the power of female support networks where women navigate life's challenges and interactions without the influence of patriarchal norms. Abla, as a mother and the operator of the bakery demonstrates her force and ability to be self-reliant and independent, while Samia's presence brings life to the space: when Samia enters the bakery, the space starts to evolve, becoming a symbolic place of female solidarity and determination. The women in the film have

complete control over their lives and space, make decisions and exercise autonomy. Significantly, the celebration of female empowerment is also demonstrated in the scarce presence of men in the space. The filmmaker tends to render the man absent from the narrative to give more space to women to redefine their identities, enabling them to take centre stage and exercise agency over their lives. The authority of women is exemplified in a scene when Slimani, the only male protagonist flatters Abla, she assertively asks him to leave the bakery. This moment is crucial as it demonstrates Abla's control over her own space and her refusal to be swayed by the male's expectations. In another scene, when Samia tries to convince Abla to give Slimani a chance to get into her life, she assertively responds "Do you think, I need a man?". This reaction underscores Abla's autonomy and independence, resisting the patriarchal notion that a woman's value is contingent upon her relationship with a man.

By depicting women in positions of authority and leadership, the film subverts power structures that have long sought to objectify the feminine experience. Yet, Touzani does not completely erase the presence of men from the narrative; the male subject though physically absent, continues to exert palpable emotional and psychological impact over the lives of the female protagonists. Abla's lingering grief and inability to overcome the absence of her husband serve as a poignant testament to the enduring influence of men on the female experience. Similarly, Samia's transformative journey is catalyzed by the arrival of her baby, *Adam*, whose presence becomes a catalyst for change in the lives of the women around him. Intriguingly, Touzani's decision to title the film, *Adam*, despite the male character's limited screen time, stresses the significance of his presence as a narrative pivot. Therefore, Touzani subtly subverts traditional cinematic tropes, which often privilege male characters as the central axis around which female characters revolve. Instead, she creates a cinematic landscape where female experiences, emotions, and desires take centre stage, while still acknowledging the lingering presence of men in their lives. This calculated approach to storytelling serves as a powerful commentary on the complex interplay between gender, power, and narrative agency in contemporary cinema.

#### IV. SUBVERTING VISUAL PLEASURE

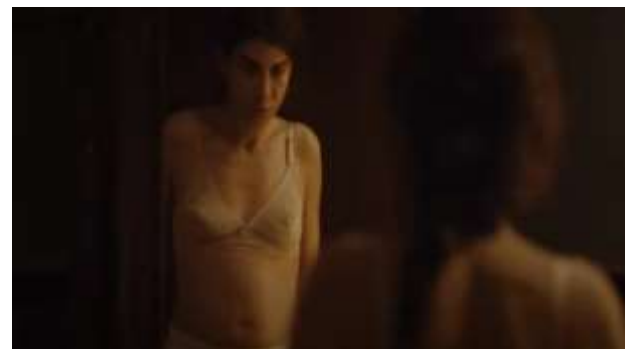
Hollywood cinema or dominant cinema, Laura Mulvey argues is "intrinsically voyeuristic and based on the logic of the male-gaze that positions the female character in the filmic diegesis as an object of what she calls "to-be-looked-at-ness," not only for the spectator but within the film world itself." (Mulvey, 2004: 19-20). This masculine gaze incites two types of

behaviour: fetishism (observing a woman as a spectacle, like a star, a singer or a dancer) or submission.

In stark contrast to the often-sexualized depictions of women in mainstream media, Touzani's camera slows up on the female body with tenderness and respect that invites the viewer to engage with it not as a passive object of male desire, but as a vessel of lived experience and emotional resonance. The film's intimate scenes, such as Samia's breastfeeding sequence or Abla's private moments of self-care, are imbued with a sense of rawness and authenticity, eschewing the gaze of the male viewer in favour of a more introspective and empathetic exploration of the female form. The pregnant body, often fetishized and aestheticized in mainstream cinema, in *Adam*, is portrayed as a natural, powerful state of being. Touzani's camera does not shy away from Samia's pregnant body but treats it with reverence and normalcy. Samia's body serves as a powerful site of affective embodiment that challenges conventional depictions of the female body. Touzani portrays the pregnant body in her film as a performative entity, embodying a strong wave of effect that is visibly concretized. Drawing inspiration from Judith Butler's theory of performativity, we can understand Samia's pregnant body as a site of empowerment and transformation. Pregnancy, with its ever-changing physicality and emotional experience, engenders a palpable affective force that exceeds the boundaries of the individual subject. Samia's body becomes a conduit for forces larger than the self - the life growing with her, the social pressures on her as an unwed mother and the visceral sensations of gestation - Samia's embodied experience resists passive objectification, instead asserting a kind of "unerotic performing" that asserts her agency and subjectivity. Her body is not a canvas for the male gaze, but rather a dynamic expressive vehicle through which Samia navigates and contests dominant cultural values. Her pregnancy represents a rehearsal or "becoming" that symbolizes her quest for self-realization, liberation and refusal to be contained within traditional frameworks of gender and embodiment. Samia's body is a site of assertiveness - she refuses to be an object of pathetic identification, instead, she assumes her status. Her spatial mobility disturbs the public conception of unwed pregnant women. As for Abla, her body is consistently shown engaged in physical labor-kneading, dough, preparing food, carrying trays, taking care of her daughter etc. Throughout the film, Abla's body is shown as functional, strong and productive. She is disciplined in both mind and body, and her virtuous character conjures the notion of a heavenly presence. The representation of the constant and purposeful movement of Abla within her house or the bakery stands in stark contrast to Mulvey's observation of women in classical cinema as passive objects to be looked at. Instead, Abla's physical interactions with her daughter, Samia and the customers emphasize active engagement rather than passive reception. Abla's active body transforms

her own space, traditionally associated with female confinement, into sites of production. Her figure within the narrative showcases her as possessing conduct and attitude that manifests her active maternal role.

Besides celebrating relationships between women and spotlighting their active roles, the filmmaker appropriates the male gaze by redefining voyeurism and 'reversing the look' from 'male/female' to 'female/female gaze'. In different intimate scenes of the female characters, Touzani distorts the traditional curated, Westernized aesthetic of "desired" female representation. As Abla stands before the mirror, slowly removing her clothes, the camera zooms in on her face, capturing the contours of her grief and introspection. The close-up shots of her eyes, in particular, convey a sense of deep sadness and longing. This is not a scene designed to titillate or objectify Abla's body; rather, it is a moment of quiet contemplation, where she is forced to confront herself and how she has lost it in the wake of her husband's death. The use of the mirror as a symbol of self-reflection is significant here. Mirrors have long been used in film to represent the nexus of identity, self-awareness, and performance (Silverman, 1996).



**Figure 1: A shot of Abla gazing at her body in the mirror.**

In this scene, the mirror serves as a tool for Abla's self-discovery, as she gazes upon her reflection, stripped bare of the social and cultural expectations that have defined her as a wife and mother. The mirror's reflective surface becomes a metaphor for Abla's inner world, a space where she confronts the sorrow and neglect that have taken hold of her. So here, Touzani's use of the female gaze is deliberate and empowering. The camera's perspective is decidedly feminine, eschewing the objectifying and voyeuristic tendencies often associated with the male gaze. Furthermore, this scene can be seen as a commentary on how women's bodies are often inscribed with societal expectations and norms. Touzani's depiction of Abla's slow removal of her clothes can be seen as a form of resistance to these expectations, a refusal to be bound by the roles and identities that have been imposed upon women. In this sense, the scene can be read as a feminist statement, one that challenges the prevalent structures that have governed women's lives and bodies.

Again, in contrast to the typical stance in Western feminist film theory, the concept of the look in Touzani's *Adam* is not associated with fetishism or pleasure in looking. Beyond the articulations of looking within the diegesis and between the images and the audience lies an involved female cognisance behind the camera. Touzani with a covert gender consciousness puts her female characters outside the surveillance of the male and reverses its diegetic perspective. In the film, it is a distinctly female surveillance instead which is extended. This alternative gaze is projected in a pivotal sequence where Abla, the film's protagonist, discreetly observes Samia while she sleeps peeking out from her bedroom window. Touzani's deliberate framing of this moment eschews any voyeuristic or sexualized intent, instead imbuing the act of observation with maternal concern and a sense of protective vigilance inviting the audience to emotionally inhabit this moment of tenderness and vulnerability, and empathize with Abla and Samia's emotional state. De Lauretis (1984: 26) argues that such framing creates a "space-off"- a space not visible in the frame but inferable from what the frame makes visible". The concept allows for the possibility of female subjectivity existing outside the dominant male gaze.



**Figure 2: A shot of Abla observing Samia in secret.**

Remarkably, the subversive approach to the gaze is further reinforced by the use of lighting techniques in intimate scenes involving female characters. In the film, the female body is portrayed through low-key or nighttime lighting creating a muted image that complements the depth of the narrative and the tense scenes created through the characters. The interplay of shadows and soft illumination in these sequences imbues them with a sense of mystery and depth, allowing the characters' emotional landscapes to take precedence over their physical attributes. This approach challenges the conventional cinematic trope of reducing women to mere objects of desire, presenting them instead as multidimensional beings with complex emotional experiences. The night-time lighting employed in certain intimate scenes carries symbolic weight, suggesting a sense of privacy and sanctuary for the female characters. These moments unfold in the shadows, away from the prying eyes of the voyeuristic male gaze, creating a safe space for the exploration of female emotional and psychological experiences and

their relationships without the distortions of objectification.

## V. HAPTIC VISUALITY AND THE EXPLORATION OF THE FEMALE BODY

Maryam Touzani, in her representation of the female body, escapes from traditional cinematographic conventions and codes by contemplating a kind of visuality aimed at the diversity of the human senses. She opts for a haptic visuality as a technique to appeal to the audience using multisensory images that make for a more complex spectatorial experience, which has traditionally been restricted to the omnipotence of the spectator's gaze and voyeuristic forms that hegemonic cinema has used exhaustively throughout its history. Laura Marks, a key theorist in this field defines haptic visuality as one that seeks through form to represent other senses that go beyond the gaze (Marks, 2000). For her part, Barker refers to haptic visuality as the ability to involve us emotionally and bring us nearer to the characters' subjectivity (Barker, 2009). Thus, By prioritizing the tactile and experiential qualities of images over the primacy of the distanced, ocular-centric gaze, haptic visuality fosters an intimate connection between the audience and the characters, encouraging a more embodied and affective form of spectatorship. Haptics can be felt in the film *Adam* from the start. In a close-up and eye-level shot, the camera brings us near to Samia's face as she looks for a job; the use of the camera here gives the image a complete, stable quality completely in sync with the subjective expression of the ordeal and the backbreaking moments the character is going through. As a visual element, Samia's body produces a sensorial and emotional viewing experience for the audience through the exhibition of its heaviness. This appeal to the senses is also achieved by projecting lingering images and close-ups using scenes of physical contact. Samia's emotional state and the difficulty of assuming the burden of her pregnancy are all materialized in poetic visuals conveyed in a lavishly haptic way. In one scene, Samia softly massages her belly. The image is meticulously crafted to emphasize the tactile sensations of her actions.



**Figure 3: A Close-up Shot of Samia's Hands Massaging her Belly.**

The camera lingers on her hands as she gently caresses her abdomen, capturing the texture of her skin and the subtle movements of her hands. The close-up shots of Samia's face reflect her burden and emotional turmoil, inviting the audience to share her intimate experience. In another scene, the young daughter Warda touches Samia's belly to feel the movements of the baby. This moment is imbued with a sense of wonder and connection. The camera closely follows Warda's hands as they explore the contours of Samia's pregnant abdomen, and it captures the expressions of curiosity and awe on her face.



**Figure 4: A Shot of Warda Touching Samia's Belly.**

At the same time, the camera turns towards Samia's face immersing us in the emotional state and the sadness Samia handles. The tactile interaction between Warda and Samia highlights the emotional bonds that develop between the characters. This sensorial engagement passes through the camera to connect the audience to feel the scene -feeling the warmth and life beneath Warda's fingertips fostering an effect of affective suture with the viewer.

The touch is implied in the film as a type of non-cognitive communication that it is not possible to transmit via verbal language. In this sense, Samia does not express her sadness with words but with tactility and feelings. In most scenes, the mental and bodily weight Samia is handling is not verbalized but expressed through corporeal language and through the affective bonds she gets with Abba and Warda. It is not thus the language, but the haptic world that takes centre stage in the subjectivity of the characters.

Haptic visuality also appears in the reflection of the female body at work. Numerous close-ups of the characters' hands express the tactile materiality of their work: with focus shots on Samia's hands as she is masterfully making *Rziza*, Warda as she is pouring flour or Abba preparing the pastry dough.



**Figure 5: A Close-up Shot of Samia's Hands Making *Rziza*.**

Those haptic encounters between the characters' bodies and the objects around them are rich with symbolic significance. Tensely, in a scene where Abba is kneading the dough, her gestures beset by precipitancy, ambivalence and denial, are met with Samia's interruption:

We don't do it like that!  
I know my work well! Abba says.  
But you don't know your dough. Samia responds.

Samia firmly takes Abba's hands and asks her to "relax, touch it slowly, feel it, feel it as you knead it". The camera zooms in on the hands of Samia on Abba's hands as they are gently kneading the dough.



**Figure 6: A Close-up Shot of Samia and Abba's Hands Working The Dough.**

This sensual interaction with the dough emphasizes a strong haptic presence in the scene and is laden with metaphorical resonance. The dough represents Abba's inner self, her identity. Samia's guidance is not about mastering the art of pastry-making, but rather, it is an invitation to Abba to develop a more embodied and introspective relationship with herself. It is a conciliatory move to approach her "self", her body with the same sensitivity and attentiveness required in kneading the dough. The act of feeling the dough is paralleled with the process of self-discovery and engagement with the inner emotional landscape. This moment replete with tactile and symbolic meaning, serves as a powerful catalyst for Abba's burgeoning self-

awareness, as she begins to intuitively appreciate the importance of listening to her emotional rhythms and textures, much like the tactile feedback she receives from the dough.

The scene transitions from a sensitive moment of self-discovery into a vibrant tableau of happiness and joy, as Abla, Samia, and little Warda, now attuned to their work, begin to dance and listen to music while making pastries. This shift is pivotal, marking a significant turning point in their lives and the narrative.



**Figure 7: A Shot of Samia and Warda Dancing.**

The music serves as a haptic medium, enhancing the sensory experience and further deepening the emotional resonance of the scene. The filmmaker uses music as an auditory extension of the haptic engagement initially established through the tactile interaction with the dough. Music, much like touch, has the power to evoke deep emotional responses and create a sense of connection and presence. The rhythmic and melodic elements of the music synchronize with the characters' movements, fostering an embodied experience of joy and freedom. The scene represents a moment of communal bonding and mutual support between Abla and Samia. Their shared dance and enjoyment of music symbolize the breaking down of emotional barriers and the creation of a supportive, joyous environment. This communal aspect is important as it reflects the characters' emotional evolution from isolation and sorrow to connection and happiness. Moreover, the act of dancing and enjoying music while working on pastries can be interpreted as a metaphor for the characters' reclamation of their agency and vitality. Music, as a haptic aesthetic, facilitates this transformation by engaging their senses and emotions allowing them to express and celebrate their newfound sense of self and emotional healing.

## VI. MUSICAL EXPRESSION AND THE LIBERATION OF THE FEMALE BODY

Music in the film frequently serves to represent the emotional states of characters, suggest the prevailing mood of a scene, and prompt an appropriate

emotional response from spectators (Smith, 1999: 146–47). By analyzing Touzani's film, it becomes apparent that music is not chosen simply through pleasantness. It is chosen through how the song or the melody can deepen the audience's understanding of the characters and their emotional worldliness. The film *Adam* is a signifier of emotion and the attachment of music as a theme increases the effects the director wants to achieve, that is, she creates a rhyme to the thoughts and complex emotions characters live through. At the outset, the film establishes music as a realm of deep personal significance for Abla. The soulful vocals of the Arab singer Warda, particularly her rendition of the song "*Batawnes Beek*" evoke a profound nostalgia and sense of loss within Abla. This particular musical motif becomes inextricably linked to the memory of her dead husband, serving as a poignant reminder of the emotional wounds that continue to haunt her. Touzani's careful handling of this musical theme reflects a keen understanding of how sound and embodied experience are inextricably intertwined. Music, Smith (1999) argues "acts as an emotional enhancer". The mere act of hearing Warda's voice triggers a visceral response within Abla, transporting her back to a moment of profound personal trauma and grief. The body, in this instance, becomes a site of memory, where the sonic reverberations of the music resonate with the character's very being, eliciting a physical and emotional reaction.

Touzani translates the commensurable relationship between emotions, music, and the body in a very passionate scene: knowing about her story with the memory-evoking song of the singer Warda, Samia forcefully inserts the "*Batawnes Beek*" track into the audio player, compelling Abla to confront the emotional weight of the music. As the haunting vocals fill the space, Abla's body becomes a canvas for the outpouring of her long-suppressed sorrow. The camera zooms in and moves steadily close to her face while Samia grabs her waist forcing her to move with the music. In a cathartic moment, with a look of distinct affliction and enjoyment, Abla's body begins to sway and undulate to the sonic stimulus with tears streaming down her face; her movements are a visceral expression of the emotions that have been churning beneath the surface.



**Figure 8: A Close-up Shot of Abla Dancing on Warda's Song.**



As the music goes On, Aba's body flows in ecstasy, an ecstatic enjoyment which in Lacanian terms is called "*feminine jouissance*" (Lacan, 1972-73). Through this *feminine jouissance* expressed through her body via music and dance, Aba reaches an ecstatic surrender that is emancipatory. This *jouissance* is by no means erotic, but a perfect instantiation of a physical and psychological release.

Hence, one may deduce that music can operate as a somatic trigger, precipitating a visceral response that transcends linguistic or cognitive frameworks. Being aware of the affective potency of music, the filmmaker crafts a cinematic experience that not only sonically evokes the emotional topography of Aba's inner world but also invites the viewer to partake in this embodied journey. The film's innovative use of music weaving together body and emotion thus, constitutes a critical component of its narrative, serving as a thematic thread that knits together the complex tapestry of Aba's emotional experience.

Touzani as a transnational filmmaker, transcends traditional cinematic language using music to communicate female subjectivity and liberation. Her choice of the song *Batwanes Beek* by the Arabic singer Warda tells a lot about the transnational connection that goes beyond just narrative. In *Twenty-Four Frames Under A Buried History of Film Music*, Lack (1997: 174) notes that film music is "a highly coded form of emotional message; its tones and cadences seem to appeal to something 'wired in' to us, triggering the appropriate emotional response to the appropriate moment". Interestingly, Touzani's strategic use of Warda's music elevates the cultural specificity of the Arabic local context, while simultaneously inviting a global audience to empathetically engage with the universality of the human experiences and emotional complexities portrayed in the film. By harnessing the affective power of music, the director crafts a cinematic experience that invites the viewer to engage with the complex interplay of identity, trauma, and the shared experiences of women across cultural and geographical divides.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In the wake of this examination of the film *Adam*, I can affirm that Maryam Touzani has succeeded in fully capturing the multifaceted nature of women's embodied realities, reclaiming their narrative agency and affirming their existence. The film presents a multifaceted exploration of the female body challenging traditional cinematic representations of women and their experiences. Through her adroit combination of haptic aesthetics and the evocative power of music, the director not only challenges the Eurocentric and androcentric biases that have shaped the global film industry but also paves the way for a more inclusive and equitable

portrayal of women's stories and creative visions on the international stage.

The film's use of music, particularly Warda's *Batwanes Beek*, serves as a powerful tool for revealing the female body's capacity for emotional expression. The haptic aesthetics of music, its ability to evoke visceral responses, allows Touzani to move beyond visual representation and delve into the subjective experiences of her protagonists. The scene where Aba surrenders to the music becomes a powerful testament to the body's ability to find catharsis and release through sound.

Moreover, Touzani's feminist intervention extends beyond the strategic deployment of music, permeating the broader visual and narrative strategies employed in the film. By resisting the reductive tropes that have historically objectified and exoticized the female body, the director crafts a multidimensional portrayal of Aba and Samia that celebrates the fluidity and complexity of their identities and lived experiences. The protagonists' embodied journey is not merely a reflection of their subjugation to patriarchal structures, but a testament to their resilience and their capacity for transformation. Touzani's approach to the female body resists objectification and containment, instead celebrating the body as a site of complex emotional, psychological, and spiritual expression. The director's commitment to privileging the female gaze and centring the subjective experiences of her protagonists serves to subvert the male-dominant gaze and challenge some male-centric cinematic narratives.

In a broader context, the film's exploration of the female body is also deeply intertwined with its nuanced representation of masculinity and patriarchal structures. Touzani's approach avoids simplistic binary oppositions, instead recognizes the intricate web of relationships between the male absence and female psychological state and challenges the binary thinking that has often characterized feminist film theory.

By centring the female body as a site of complex emotional, psychological, and spiritual expression, Touzani's cinematic work invites the viewer to engage with a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the female experience, expanding the boundaries of what is possible within the realm of contemporary cinema.

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