

Riham Sheble, *American University in Cairo, Egypt*

From Whore to Holy -and Back-: A Comparative Reading of "Lilly, Did You Have to Put On the Light?" a Short Story by Yūsuf Idrīs and *Lila Says* a novel by Chimo

rihshebl@yahoo.com

Two women; bearing a similar name with a Sufi resonance, written by male North-African writers in a post-colonial context; are read and recreated by a woman in this paper. Their sexualities are explored as depicted in the texts and as socially constructed. Although Lilly is in Egypt and Lila in France, their sexual "herstories" are both lived outside the socially-dictated script. This hermeneutical endeavor will employ a Sufi interpretation of the erotic as a way of manufacturing a woman-centered metaphor that defies the literalist reading of the female body, imprisoning it within its procreative and sex-based functions. The difference between sex and sexuality will be analysed in Foucault terms, where sexuality bears the genesis of Knowledge and is an entire state of being. This will be employed to reflect the difference between the women's essence and how they are literally perceived in society. A woman who is labeled "whore" will be shown to be using her sexuality as initiation on the path for spiritual realization of the divine self within and attempting to achieve internal union where she becomes (w)hol(e)y.

Riham Sheble, an Egyptian women's rights activist, is an MA graduate candidate in Arabic Literature at AUC. She has a double BA from AUC and sexuality certificates from the Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Center in Nigeria; San Francisco State University; and Universiteit van Amsterdam. Riham features as personal narrator in a documentary entitled On Their Own, where she tells her story as a circumcised woman. She has worked extensively on the issue of gender-based violence with different organizations, including the Egyptian Task Force for Eradicating Female Genital Mutilation. Riham has featured on numerous women's rights panel discussions and TV programs and contributes to local and international academic journals.