

# **Social Marginalisation in the Saudi Novel between 1990 and 2011**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study deals with and highlights social marginalisation in the Saudi novel between 1990 and 2011 and is important for three main reasons. First, social marginalisation has not been discussed and studied in the Saudi context through Saudi novels, although it can expose many social problems and cultural issues that have caused a big debate in Saudi society. Second, production of the Saudi novel has increased during the study period, showing an unprecedented increase and raising issues and questions never before discussed in the work of previous novelists. Third, the era between 1990 and 2011 caused dislocations in many cultural and intellectual thoughts and produced many social transformations due to two significant events: the Gulf War in 1990 and the 9/11 event in 2001.

This study is based on the analysis and description of the phenomenon of social marginalisation in selected novels and explores it by tracking and employing the most prominent social theories, exploring social phenomena in humanities to help explain many manifestations of social life in Saudi Arabia, such as gender theory, feminism, tribalism and classism.

The research traces the important studies on social marginalisation and those dealing with the Saudi novel alike. It was important to address these in order to define the study limits and explore the areas of the specific social subject that can be analysed and described in the selected novels. It also emphasises that the Saudi novel could evoke and express many sectors of socially marginalised people in Saudi society by employing different styles and techniques in writing. However, it can be said that the Saudi novel could not cover all segments of the socially marginalised people in Saudi Arabia, and therefore the remit of this thesis is determined by the themes found in the selected novels.

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For any errors, mistakes or inadequacies that may remain in this research, of course, the responsibility is entirely my own.

# TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM

## CONSONANTS

'	ء	z	ز	q	ق
B	ب	s	س	k	ك
t	ت	sh	ش	l	ل
th	ث	ṣ	ص	m	م
j	ج	ḍ	ض	n	ن
ḥ	ح	ṭ	ط	h	هـ
kh	خ	ẓ	ظ	w	و
d	د	'	ع	y	ي
dh	ذ	gh	غ		
R	ر	f	ف		

## VOWELS

Long		Short	
ā	ا	a	اَ
ū	و	u	اُ
ī	ي	i	اِ

Doubled	iyy (final form =/i/)	يِّي
	uww (final form =/u/)	وُّو
Diphthongs	ay	يَا
	Aw	وَا

Note:

ṣ = at (in *iḍāfa* phrase)

ال = Al- (for article)

# INTRODUCTION

## 0.1 Rationale for this Research

Research for my MA dissertation entitled “The City in the Saudi Novel” suggested that the emergence of the modern Saudi city has led to the creation of new urban underclasses in the Kingdom. It also revealed that novelists had started to write not only about these marginalised groups but also about the unequal treatment of some traditionally disenfranchised groups within Arab society such as women. It also encouraged me to see certain parallels between contemporary Saudi writers and their nineteenth-century Western predecessors, since both groups produced their work at a time of social and technological transformation in the urban setting, using the novel as a means for exploring complex social issues from varying perspectives and sharing a common belief that this literary form can be a powerful means of exposing inequalities, expressing the suffering of individuals, and giving a voice to marginalised groups. These discoveries encouraged me to focus in particular on studying how contemporary Saudi novelists portray socially marginalised individuals and groups, those who by definition are excluded to a greater or lesser extent from full participation as citizens in Saudi society.<sup>1</sup>

This period of social transformations began in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1990, with the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussain’s Iraqi forces triggering the First Gulf War in 1990 whilst at the beginning of the third millennium, the 9/11 attacks on

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<sup>1</sup> According to Bayat, in religious and ultra-conservative societies such as Saudi Arabia, the concept of marginality needs to be extended beyond the traditional categories of the economically or socially disadvantaged to include those who find themselves “marginalised” on account of their political or ideological beliefs, for lifestyle choices or due to gender. For this reason, even prominent or prestigious people in Saudi Arabia can experience social marginalisation. In this context taboo subjects would include women’s rights, intellectual freedom, and greater participation in the political process. See Asef Bayat, 'Marginality: Curse or Cure?', in *Marginality and Exclusion in Egypt and the Middle East*, ed. by Ray Ayeb Habib Bush (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2012). pp. 19-20.

the USA led to a realignment of political and economic relationships among countries in the West. These events and their aftermath in the period 1990 to 2011 affected many aspects of Saudi life. This period also witnessed the dawn of a new era in civil and human rights awareness in the Kingdom, accompanied by an increase in ideological and religious conflicts. At the same time, technological developments such as satellite TV, digital media and the Internet began to have an enormous impact on Saudi society, giving people unparalleled access to information. In addition, it was also precisely during this era that the Saudi novel came of age, reaching a stage of maturity where it seemed ready to take new risks, addressing topics which were previously considered taboo subjects related to the darker side of human existence. Saudi novelists passed through the fear barrier and revealed a willingness to tackle culturally sensitive topics. For all these reasons, the current study focuses on works which were written and/or published in this period.

## **0.2 The Approach Taken in this Study**

Recent times have witnessed the emergence in the field of Literary Studies of interdisciplinary approaches<sup>2</sup> which engage with narrative works using multiple perspectives, combining more traditional textual analysis with theoretical elements drawn from diverse disciplines including Sociology, History, Politics and Economics. It can be argued that this interdisciplinary approach has proved particularly fruitful in this case for two main reasons. The first of these relates to the fact that the novel has proved to be an incredibly flexible literary form. Unconfined by rhythm or rhyme like poetry, it has a capacity for accommodating multiple forms of discourse and

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<sup>2</sup> According to Kenneth Womack, the editor of the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*: ‘the hallmark of research today is “interdisciplinary” exploring “the interconnections between literary study and other disciplines, ideologies and cultural methods of critique” ([http://www.psupress.org/journals/jnls\\_ILS.html](http://www.psupress.org/journals/jnls_ILS.html)).

polyphony of voices. Writers have therefore used the novel to address some of the taboo or culturally sensitive issues which social scientists in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia would find difficult to deal with directly given that they face pressure from social, religious and political constraints. The particular focus of the novels studied here, social marginalisation, is a concept which is employed across many different disciplines including education, psychology, politics, sociology, and economics, and novelists are often influenced by ideas from these fields. Theoretical concepts from Marginality Studies have been explored in an attempt to identify key issues and the ways in which authors choose to reflect on these.

Secondly, like the Social Sciences themselves, the modern novel arose in the late nineteenth century in the wake of the Industrial Revolution during a period of unparalleled social transformations in Western societies which were to spread throughout the world. While social scientists attempted to make sense of the shifting patterns of social relationships within the rapidly developing industrial cities, novelists provided a personal perspective on life in the modern metropolis, offering their own insights into the effects, both positive and negative, of the great social transformations which they and their fellow citizens were experiencing. An interdisciplinary approach is particularly useful when attempting to fully understand the multiple social and personal realities reflected in the text and the complex interactions between these.

The more novels I read, the more I became persuaded that this literary form can indeed provide a useful means of making sense of and understanding social phenomena and individual experiences in the Saudi context. Indeed, Azade Seyhan has argued that literature has a unique role to play in this respect, telling “stories of lives that history forgot to record, [serving] as a guide to moral agency and

responsibility”, it can “offer alternative or novel insights into history, generate an awareness of fundamental human predicaments, record or recover silenced voices...’.<sup>3</sup> However, as I read I also grew to appreciate the importance of understanding that these narratives cannot be seen merely as a mirror held up to reflect what happens within Saudi society and amongst its social classes. Rather they act as a particular types of lens through which these social realities, processes and events have been viewed. For the novel expresses the personal feelings and needs of the writer in particular and the social changes occurring in society in general. Novels therefore only tell part of the story.

The ideas of Pierre Macherey, the French literary theorist, are useful in this context. Macherey argued that although the words on the page may seem to provide an obvious meaning to the reader, this should not be accepted at face value. For in addition to obvious surface meaning of a novel, readers need to be aware of the gaps, silences and contradictions which also exist in the text. Terry Eagleton explains Macherey’s ideas as follows:

For Macherey, a work is tied to ideology not so much by what it says as by what it does not say. It is in the significant silences of a text, in its gaps and absences, that the presence of ideology can be most positively felt", it is these silences which the critic must make “speak”. The text is, as it were, ideologically forbidden to say certain things [...] the author [...] is forced to reveal his gaps, what it is unable to articulate. Because a text contains these gaps and silences it is always incomplete. Far from constituting a rounded coherent whole it displays a conflict and contradiction of meanings and the significance of the work lies in the difference rather than the unity between these meanings.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A.Seyhan, Why major in literature-what do we tell our students? *Proceedings of the Modern Languages Association*, 117 (3) 2002, 510-512. Seyhan’s piece was written at least partially as a response to the events of 9/11.

<sup>4</sup> T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp.34-35.

Eagleton also makes it clear that the critic's role is to "make the silences speak". In practical terms, this means in the works which were analysed for this study, while some authors may choose to foreground a particular form of marginalisation in their work, and focus on representing this in their novel, nonetheless in the narrative background, there may be other, possibly more telling, details relating to social marginalisation. Seemingly inconsequential details – snapshots of the urban landscape, fragments of dialogue, the briefest of encounters, a glimpse or a sideways glance between characters, the silenced voices to which Azade Seyhan refers – these elements are often overlooked during an initial reading of a text, but become meaningful on later analysis.

The reader must first examine what is present, the explicit ideas and arguments presented, before it is possible to spot any gaps or silences. Combining this technique of close textual critical analysis with a thorough knowledge of the socio-historical, political and economic context of a novel, then allowed me to recover these traces from the chosen texts and to realise that these hidden stories and silenced voices can provide further valuable and sometimes unexpected insights into the experience of marginalization and to the links which exist between different forms of marginalisation in Saudi society.

### **0.3 The Contribution of this Study**

Although novelistic output increased significantly in Saudi Arabia between 1990 and 2011, the number of critical studies employing an interdisciplinary approach to analyse these novels remains small. To the best of my knowledge, to date none of these studies have focused specifically on the time period selected, the novels chosen

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for analysis and the approach employed. This study is ground breaking in terms of its focus on social marginalisation and the novelistic representation of topics considered sensitive or taboo within Saudi society, including the treatment of female domestic workers, foundlings, and the *Bidoun* (stateless peoples).

#### **0.4 Research Questions**

The present study, entitled “Social Marginalisation in the Saudi Novel between 1990 and 2011”, will endeavour to answer the following research questions:

- What are the main issues of social marginalisation in Saudi novels?
- Which segments of Saudi society are described as “marginalised” in Saudi novels?
- How have Saudi novelists described social marginalisation through characters, place, time and language?
- How have Saudi novelists employed dialogue and other elements of writing techniques to express social marginalisation?
- Which Saudi novelists have most often addressed the subject of marginalised populations in their novels?

#### **0.5 Difficulties Faced by the Researcher**

As a researcher, I faced two specific difficulties when conducting this research. The first of these relates to language, since of the large number of Saudi novels selected for analysis in the current study, only four of the novels originally published in Arabic have been translated into English—namely, *Fikhākh Al-Rā’iḥah* (*Wolves of the Crescent Moon*, 2003) and *Al-Qārūrah* (*Munira’s Bottle*, 2010), both by Yousef



Al-Mohaimeed, *Al-Ḥizām (The Belt)*, 2003) by Ahmed Abodehman, and *Banāt Al-Riyadh (Girls of Riyadh)*, 2008) by Rajaa Al-Sanea. These translations have been used when they were judged suitable for the purposes of this thesis.<sup>5</sup> However, in all other cases I myself was obliged to translate the extracts used here. Since Saudi novelistic discourse is often figurative and rhetorical, filled with neologisms, regional and local vocabulary, allusions and socio-cultural subtleties, this was a time-consuming and often daunting task. It required consulting multiple linguistic resources in both Arabic and English in an attempt to render the degree of exactitude or ambiguity contained in the language used by the Saudi novelists. However, I believe that in most instances the sense of the original Arabic has been successfully transferred into English and gives non-Arabic speakers access to material which was previously unavailable.

The second difficulty relates to finding reliable sources of in-depth information about some of the issues dealt with in the novels which are still considered to be culturally sensitive or taboo in Saudi society. For reasons previously outlined, resources in this area relating to social marginalisation or injustice produced by Saudi academics are very limited and may be subject to self-censorship whilst those from official sources may not be wholly reliable for various reasons. Thus, in addition to using non-Saudi sources for statistical data, this study has drawn on journalistic articles and interviews, YouTube clips and Internet resources including

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<sup>5</sup> On occasion, the particular rendering of a specific word or phrase by the translator proved unhelpful or confusing in the context of the argument of this thesis. In his study, Al-Ghamedi analyses the problems posed by ideological bias in literary translations of contemporary Saudi novels into English. See N. A. Al-Ghamedi, *The Contemporary Saudi Novel in English Translation: Four Case Studies* (unpublished PhD thesis, Monash University, 2012).

personal web pages, publishers' websites and blogs, in both Arabic and English as a useful course of information.<sup>6</sup>

## **0.6 Overview of the Thesis**

This **Introduction** establishes the general context for this study, its rationale, objectives and importance. It also presents the questions to be addressed by this thesis and outlines the content of the chapters which follow.

**Chapter One** focuses on the concept of marginalisation as a social phenomenon and is divided into three main parts. After outlining the main causes and types of social marginalisation, the first of these parts briefly examines why four key issues—namely, capitalism, poverty, racism and immigration—have proved to be such influential factors in creating marginal identities around the globe. The second part of the chapter identifies the types of social marginalisation most frequently discussed by the Saudi novelists who feature in the later analytical chapters of this thesis. The third and final part focuses specifically on those sectors of Saudi society that could be considered marginalised due to a range of factors.

**Chapter Two** begins by reviewing the literature on social marginalisation which addresses this issue from a Social Sciences perspective, exploring the key concepts and issues which are related to this topic in the context of the contemporary Saudi novel. It then assesses the contribution to the Saudi cultural scene of previous critical studies which have focused on the contemporary Saudi novel. The chapter then

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<sup>6</sup> According to Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom around the world, millions of Saudis visit YouTube on a regular basis for alternative information on current affairs that differs from the Kingdom's official media and some blogs in Saudi Arabia have become instrumental in shaping the political landscape in the country. For further information, see <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2012/saudi-arabia> [accessed on 12 /06/2014]

clarifies the methodology used in this research and justifies why this has been chosen. Finally, a rationale is provided for the period covered by this study (1990-2011), and the representative sample of contemporary Saudi novels selected for analysis. The chapter concludes by defining the research gap that this study seeks to fill.

**Chapter Three** serves to contextualise the literary texts chosen for analysis and is divided into two main parts. It begins by presenting an overview of the main social transformations which took place in Saudi Arabia in the period from the outbreak of the First Gulf War to the aftermath of the events of 9/11. The second part examines some of the controversial issues which have emerged among both educated elites and the general public in Saudi Arabia since 1990—namely, censorship, terrorism, the growing influence of the religious police, and calls for women’s rights.

**Chapter Four** analyses the representation of social marginalisation of Saudi women in the public and private spheres in the selected sample of novels, examining how debates about women’s right to drive, employment, and marriage have been depicted by both Saudi male and female novelists using different textual strategies and literary techniques.

**Chapter Five** focuses on the issue of social marginalisation due to ethnicity. It begins by examining the continuing centrality of the concept of the tribe and of Bedouin identity in the Arabian Peninsula, tracing its historical origins and exploring some of its more recent manifestations in Saudi society. It presents and examines the representation of Bedouin, *Bidoun* and foundlings, all destined to remain on the margins in a society which places enormous value on the ability to trace someone’s lineage and origins as a means of not only validating identity, but also assessing someone’s social status and ultimately their worth as human beings. It also discusses

the techniques of literary representation which some novelists have used to give a voice to silenced minorities and marginalised individuals within the selected texts.

**Chapter Six** examines the representation of the final group of marginalised people, namely foreign workers. The chapter begins by outlining those factors which have influenced the flow of foreign labour to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and which also help account for the varying degrees of social marginalisation which these omnipresent non-Saudi workers experience as they go about the tasks which Saudi citizens consider too dirty, dangerous or demeaning to perform for themselves. Particular attention is paid to the novelistic representation of female domestic workers and later sections also explore the literary treatment of non-Saudi Arab workers and Westerners in the Saudi novel during the period in question.

The **Conclusion** reviews the main findings of this research and makes a number of proposals regarding future research in this area.

# CHAPTER ONE

## **Marginalisation as a Social Phenomenon**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the concept of marginalisation as a social phenomenon and is divided into three main parts, the first of which discusses in general terms some of the main causes and types of the phenomenon of social marginalisation, briefly examining the reasons why four key issues, namely capitalism, poverty, racism and immigration, have proved to be influential factors in creating marginal identities around the globe. The second part of the chapter identifies some of the most common types of social marginalization which have been discussed by writers, categories which will feature again in the analysis of Saudi literature which follows in later chapters of this thesis. The third and final part, however, focuses specifically on the case of Saudi Arabia, presenting some of the main sectors of Saudi society that may be considered to be marginalised due to a range of factors. The marginal groups which are identified and briefly discussed at the end of Chapter One will be considered in greater depth in the analysis of the chosen literary texts which will reveal more about these categories.

### **1.2 Defining Social Marginalisation**

Given that marginalisation can be said to relate to all aspects of economic, political and social life, it is perhaps not surprising that in recent decades, there has been a significant increase in academic interest in the topic of marginalisation, especially in the field of humanities and literature. Zhang, Wu, and Sanders (2007) believe there is

an obvious reason for this popularity, namely: “Marginality studies have become imperative in a world which is increasingly being divided into haves and have-nots”.<sup>1</sup> This present study focuses on how a number of marginalised groups and individuals are represented in fictional texts written by Saudi authors and as the review of relevant research will show,<sup>2</sup> many writers have acknowledged the close relationship which exists between the two fields of Sociology and Literature.

It is not possible here to offer a simple definition of marginalisation for as several academics have noted, it is a difficult concept to pin down. For example, Cullen and Pretes (2000) noted that the meaning of marginalisation changes as one moves from one reference point to another, and that our understanding of this concept depends on what reference point is used”.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as Billson emphasised in her study “No Owner of Soil: Redefining the Concept of Marginality”, social marginalisation overlaps with both cultural and structural marginalisation and that any attempt to distinguish among these depends on whether the linchpin of marginal status rests in cultural differences, individual roles, or location in the social structure.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Dunne considers that although terms such as ‘marginal’, ‘marginality’, ‘marginalise’ and similar derivatives are currently found in sociological literature with some frequency, they tend to be used as descriptive labels and are often redundant terms

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<sup>1</sup> Heather Xiaoquan Zhang, Bin Wu, and Richard Sanders, *Marginalisation in China: Perspectives on Transition and Globalisation* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub. Co., 2007), p. ii.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapters four, five and six.

<sup>3</sup> Molina, Kristine M, *A Multiple-Group Path Analysis of the Role of Social Marginality on Self-Rated Physical Health among U.S. Latina/o Adults: An Intersectional Perspective*, (2011), p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Cunnigen and Myrtle G. Glasco, 'Marginality, Power and Social Structure: Issues in Race, Class, and Gender Analysis', in *Research in Race and Ethnic Relations, Volume 12*, (Emerald Group Publishing, 2005), pp. 3-8 (6) Janet Mancini Billson, 'No Owner of Soil: Redefining the Concept of Marginality', in *Marginality, Power and Social Structure: Issues in Race, Class, and Gender Analysis*, ed. by Rutledge M. Dennis (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), pp. 29-48 (p. 30).

for other concepts.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, this part of the study will not attempt to define social marginality or to examine in depth how it interrelates with other types of marginalisation, rather it will outline some of the main reasons for social marginalisation and go on to describe the different forms that it may take.

### **1.3 The Causes of Social Marginalisation**

Whilst recognising, as Billson notes, that social, cultural, and structural marginalisation are interrelated, here the study will attempt to address these aspects separately, returning to consider their complex interconnections at a later stage of the thesis.

#### **1.3.1 Capitalism**

As stated previously, Billson identifies three types of marginality, namely cultural, social and structural and the third type is considered by many scholars to be an inevitable result of capitalist economic systems.<sup>6</sup> As an economic system, Capitalism has been blamed for contributing to the increasing levels of social marginalisation throughout the world. Chomsky, together with Petras, Veltmeyer, Potter and Pilge, has argued that as: “Capitalism extends its reach, bringing more and more people into its system; more communities are dispossessed of lands, livelihoods, or systems of social support”.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it could be said that it would be more likely to find

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<sup>5</sup> Robert J. Dunne, 'Marginality: A Conceptual Extension', in *Marginality, Power and Social Structure : Issues in Race, Class, and Gender Analysis*, ed. by Rutledge M. Dennis (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), pp. 11-27 (p. 11).

<sup>6</sup> Billson, pp. 29-48 (p. 31).

<sup>7</sup> Rutledge M. Dennis, 'The Age of Marginality', in *Marginality, Power and Social Structure : Issues in Race, Class, and Gender Analysis*, ed. by Rutledge M. Dennis (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), pp. 3-8 (p. 6).

groups of marginal people in Capitalist societies like Saudi Arabia<sup>8</sup> than in Socialist ones since the latter usually pays more attention to group than to individual rights. Indeed, marginalisation in capitalistic systems could be considered to be a consequence of a skewed process of redistribution of resources.

In his work examining what he refers to as advanced marginality, Wacquant posits that the capitalistic economic system was responsible for creating the wave of ‘modernisation’ which produced advanced economies which, in turn, led to the rise of a new regime of urban marginality.<sup>9</sup> One of the central features and causes of this contemporary form of social marginalisation is poverty.

### **1.3.2 Poverty**

Those with limited economic resources usually live in a marginal position.<sup>10</sup> It has long been held that poverty as an issue is relevant not only to those interested in economics but also in the fields of politics, culture and sociology since it affects them all. Burton and Kagan note the links between “economic dislocation and social marginalisation”<sup>11</sup> while in her work, Gillies explores how poverty impacts on cultural life, connecting rates of illiteracy among the poor with the fact that some low-income parents do not place sufficient emphasis on education as a route out of poverty, with the consequence that their children also fail to value this.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Tim Niblock and Monica Malik, *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 12. The two authors contend that the Saudi economic system is a capitalist one.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Featherstone, review of Loïc Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), pp. 373-374.

<sup>10</sup> However, social marginalization may also affect rich individuals who are unable to fully integrate into their communities due to certain traditional ideas.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Burton and Carolyn Kagan, *Marginalisation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Val Gillies, *Marginalised Mothers Exploring Working-Class Experiences of Parenting* (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 1.



Although Milbourne's central research concern was rural poverty, he confirms that "recent writings on poverty in Britain and the United States [...] have given a great deal of attention to mapping out multiple deprivations at a fine spatial scale within different cities".<sup>13</sup> His use of the phrase 'multiple deprivations' also points to the fact that even in some of the most developed nations including the UK and America, there is an urgent need to know the various causes of marginalisation, poverty being just one of these.

### **1.3.3 Racism**

There are many causes of racism which is one of the main reasons for social marginalisation in many nations. Here, however, two areas of the many possible will be highlighted: skin colour and religious ideology. Racism not only affects undeveloped countries which suffer widely from the effects of poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and injustice but also exists in developed societies where there is widespread awareness of human rights, the United States being a case in point.

Black people have suffered for a long time due to segregation in many societies but Wacquant argues that this marginalisation due to race is particularly acute in the case of the United States<sup>14</sup> where they tend to occupy marginal places within white communities. Wacquant alerts his readers to the need to consider the reasons for this, pointing to: "The legacies of different urban histories and modes of 'sorting' of

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Milbourne, *Rural Poverty: Marginalisation and Exclusion in Britain and the United States* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Featherstone, pp. 374.

population”<sup>15</sup> together with economic and geographical factors such as welfare and physical space.

To understand the causes of racism, therefore, it is necessary to consider not only the role played by human history in its formation but also identity. According to Dennis, the relationship between marginality and the identity is a logical one for the simple reason “that we tend to live our lives in and through ‘identity shelves’: males-females; dominant-non dominant”.<sup>16</sup>

Like other causes of marginalisation, racism may be linked to religious ideology. It can be argued that racism dismantles the structure of society and in the process creates marginal and central places among segments of the same society, a division which can prove dangerous when it leads to conflict. In her work about the social construction of Uighur Muslim women in Chinese society in which she reflects on her own experiences, Obol illustrates how race, religion and culture interact to help produce a distinct identity and the role which upbringing plays in the formation of this notion of being different from others in society due to religious beliefs:

I became aware of these differences as a young child. I can remember my parents telling me, “We are not Chinese and we should always remember who we are.” We were brought up believing our cultural and religious identity made us who we were and we were constantly reminded not to forget that.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, racial and ethno-religious differences can create boundaries between people living in the same country and can transform minorities into marginalised groups.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 373

<sup>16</sup> Rutledge M. Dennis, 'The Age of Marginality', in *Marginality, Power and Social Structure : Issues in Race, Class, and Gender Analysis*, ed. by Rutledge M. Dennis (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), p.6

<sup>17</sup> Sadat Obol, 'Marginalizing the Majority: Migration and the Social Construction of Identity among Uighur Muslim Women in China', in *Marginality, Power and Social Structure: Issues in Race, Class, and Gender Analysis*, ed. by Rutledge M. Dennis (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), pp. 191-206 (p. 201).

This can have grave implications when being a member of these small communities brings the risk of psychosocial-ideological threats. The first of these is the definition of one's identity by others: the ideological definition of one's identity as 'marginalised' can be in the interest of the dominant social groups.<sup>18</sup>

Obol describes marginalisation as a complex process in which one form of marginality (e.g. gender) can become subordinated to other forms (e.g. race and/or religion).<sup>19</sup> In their article examining women of colour within the academic environment, Sotello Turner also comments on this process, calling it "living with multiple marginality", in reference to the problem of being doubly marginalised by virtue of being female and black.<sup>20</sup> Dunne also asserts that pure forms of marginality are difficult to find because marginality is not absolute but is part of a flux and flow since another dialectic is at work, that of social integration and social distance.<sup>21</sup>

Reconsidering Robert Park's concept of marginalisation (which first appeared in his 1928 work *Human Migration and the Marginal Man*),<sup>22</sup> Deegan claims that Park and his followers were not working with the concept of a marginal person. They assumed that the hegemonic view of white, able-bodied, capitalist, and heterosexual men was the standard, 'normal' experience. Within a competitive society, however, only a small number of white men fit the image of capitalist success, political power, youth,

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<sup>18</sup> Burton and Kagan, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Obol, 191-206 (p.199).

<sup>20</sup> Caroline Sotello Turner, 'Women of Color in Academe: Living with Multiple Marginality', *Journal of Higher Education*, 73 (2002), 74-93 (p. 67).

<sup>21</sup> Dennis, (p. 7).

<sup>22</sup> Dunne, (p. 11).

heterosexuality, and health that is idealised. The marginal person is, therefore, the most typical person in American life.<sup>23</sup>

Deegan found that the structural forces shaping ‘marginal women’, such as race, age, physical ability, ethnicity, religion, class, and sexual preference, tend to be emphasised.<sup>24</sup> According to Deegan, the marginal woman as “other” is cross-cultural. She exists in both modern and non-modern societies, although the experience of women throughout the world varies widely.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes, women’s marginalisation is considered to be a result of their position in patriarchal society, especially when those societies are considered to be developing nations.<sup>26</sup>

### **1.3.4 Immigration and Alienation**

There is an Arabic saying: “Oh stranger: behave well!” which warns incomers of the need to ensure they conform to the societal norms of the native population.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, this serves to highlight the marginal position that immigrants live in as part of a minority which often has limited access to material resources in comparison with other citizens. When immigrants find themselves away from home and living among other communities, they often experience a feeling of marginalisation which Park (cited in Obol, p.192) characterises “as a state of limbo between at least two

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<sup>23</sup> Mary Jo Deegan, 'Transcending "the Marginal Man": Challenging the Patriarchal Legacy of Robert E. Park', in *Marginality, Power and Social Structure: Issues in Race, Class, and Gender Analysis*, ed. by Rutledge M. Dennis (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), pp. 207-230 (p. 220).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207-230 (p. 218).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207-230 (p. 219).

<sup>26</sup> Dunne, pp. 11-27 (p. 19).

<sup>27</sup> This is similar to the English proverb: “When in Rome, do as the Romans do”, advising those who find themselves in an alien culture or new situation of the need to adapt to this by emulating the behaviour of the natives.

cultural life-worlds”<sup>28</sup>This is sometimes referred to as alienation but, as Deegan notes, this term has a specific meaning for Marxists who restrict its use to “proletarian workers in a bourgeois society”.<sup>29</sup>

However she takes issue with this usage, arguing that: “Marxists err in oversimplifying the sources of alienation. Experiential distance from the self-arising from material deprivation is only one of the myriad ways of being marginal in today’s world”.<sup>30</sup>

Billson concurs with Deegan’s opinion that there are many different ways in which one can experience the feeling of ‘alienation’ or being marginalised and adds that this experience is not limited to those who are immigrants finding themselves between worlds. Rather, she prefers to broaden the concept, observing that:

Any time a person (or group) feels caught between two identity-providing orientations, but is not allowed to embrace the preferred role – or either role (because of structural or social limitations) – he or she is in a marginal situation.<sup>31</sup>

This part of the chapter has briefly outlined some of the general causes of marginalisation according to expert opinion. Other causes of social marginalisation of specific relevance to the case of Saudi Arabia will be considered in the final part of this chapter.

## **1.4 Types of Social Marginalisation**

As the previous discussion has shown, social marginalisation has many causes and often these are interconnected. In this part of the study, however, an attempt will be

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<sup>28</sup> Obol, pp. 191-206 (p. 192).

<sup>29</sup> Deegan, p.220

<sup>30</sup> Deegan, pp. 207-230 (p. 220).

<sup>31</sup> Billson, pp. 29-48 (p. 33).

made to categorise some different experiences of social marginalisation into a number of types. Some relate to the length of time for which the condition of marginality persists; others to the personal, geographical, political, cultural or economic circumstances which affect how the marginalisation is experienced. Given that it could be argued that novels deal with the representation of experiences, lived or imagined, it is hoped that this may prove to be a fruitful perspective for approaching the later analysis of marginalisation in contemporary Saudi writing.

#### **1.4.1 Temporary and Permanent Marginalisation**

The feelings of marginalisation experienced by people may fluctuate over the course of their life. For instance, children may feel less marginalisation as they get older, whereas single mothers may feel more socially excluded as their children grow up. Indeed, this state of what Burton and Kagan call “interim marginalisation”<sup>32</sup> might eventually disappear completely for the individuals involved. These writers illustrate this concept with a specific example, referring to the case of Manchester which lost its traditional industrial base as a result of neoliberal economic policies which closed down many factories there in the aftermath of the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the former Soviet Union. This could be categorised as a kind of interim marginalisation since those who lived through those times suffered from the capitalism system that excluded them.<sup>33</sup>

The same writers note, however, that for certain groups, sometimes referred to as minority groups, marginalisation is a permanent condition which can limit their opportunities to participate fully in the wider community and to make a social

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<sup>32</sup> Burton and Kagan, pp. 3-8 (p. 6).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-8 (p. 4).

contribution. They identify some specific groupings for which marginality is usually life-long and will, to a great extent, determine their lived experience. These include those who are born with severe physical or mental disabilities or those who are born into particularly marginal ethnic groups that tend to suffer from systematic discrimination or “are often at the receiving end of negative public attitudes”.<sup>34</sup>

According to Burton and Kagan, this list includes the Roma (more commonly known as Gypsies) in Europe, the indigenous peoples of Australasia and the Americas, and people of Afro-Caribbean descent in Britain.<sup>35</sup>

#### **1.4.2 Voluntary or Enforced Marginalisation**

Social marginalisation of one kind or another affects numerous groups and individuals throughout the world, but reactions to this experience can vary greatly. Some respond with total acceptance of this condition, viewing it as their inescapable destiny in life. For others, belonging to a socially marginalised group may make them more determined to claim their human rights than someone who feels individually marginalised. Yet others may reject any notion that marginality has to be the dominant feature in their life and use all means possible to rise above any limitations which society may seek to impose on them. Therefore, when considering the ways in which social marginalisation is experienced from the point of view of the marginalised individual or group, it is possible to talk of marginalisation being voluntary (or self-imposed) or enforced.

In her work which focuses on the Uighur community, a Muslim minority in China, Obol examines the concept of voluntary and enforced marginalisation. She argues

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<sup>34</sup> Deegan, pp. 207-230 (p. 221), noted that this term was coined by Louis Wirth (1945) in reference to the awareness of social inequality.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-8 (p. 6).

that for the Uighur minority, migration was a “voluntary form of marginalisation”,<sup>36</sup> a tactical decision taken by a group who firmly believed in their ability to thrive in an alternative location and protect their own culture and customs. However, the experience of change for the indigenous majority was very different, as the arrival of a group of powerful immigrants felt like “a completely enforced imposition of marginality”.<sup>37</sup> As Obol puts it, “In essence, they [the indigenous Chinese majority] do not move to their marginal status, rather, their marginal status moves to them and is forced upon them”.<sup>38</sup>

There is a further dimension to voluntary marginalisation as some people actively seek out the experience of social marginalisation of their own volition. Sometimes this may be for the purposes of ‘seeing how the other half lives’ in the name of education/entertainment. For example, in 2009, Banks-Smith reported on five British celebrities who ‘swapped their lavish lifestyles’ and were filmed spending 10 days living as homeless people on the streets of London.<sup>39</sup> There is a long-standing tradition of artists and writers choosing to pursue lives of voluntarily imposed social marginalisation.

### **1.4.3 Marginalisation in Developed and Developing Countries**

It is relevant to briefly distinguish between the experience of social marginalisation for citizens in developed and developing countries. In the former, civil society organisations can use their humanitarian role to help the needy, destitute and marginalised obtain their human rights. However, in developing nations or in those

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<sup>36</sup> Obol, pp. 191-206 (p. 194).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Nancy Banks-Smith, 'Last Night's TV: Famous, Rich and Homeless, Jack the Ripper: Tabloid Killer - Revealed, and Coronation Street', *The Guardian*(London, 2009).



states that are governed by dictatorships, since such organisations cannot play any prominent role, socially marginalised groups find it much more difficult to make their voice heard.

In Europe, it is recognised that marginalisation encompasses many segments of society. For instance, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has defined the marginalised individuals and minorities in the following terms:

We mean those segments of the society who, due to a variety of reasons, are silenced within the democratic process, or at least are significantly constrained in voicing and pursuing their claims through it. These include individuals who belong to ethnic, religious or national minorities, immigrants who may or may not be citizens of a state, as well as those seeking political asylum. It also includes individuals whose rights are curtailed because they are in confinement conditions, displaced or imprisoned. It can also encompass persons who are at a disadvantage because of their political beliefs or who are socially stigmatised because of their sexual preference and identity.<sup>40</sup>

The ECHR definition of marginalised people has been in force since the 1990s, and lobbying by human rights organisations has led to governments in various European countries making serious attempts to address issues affecting the marginalised.<sup>41</sup> For example, in France, one of the most developed European countries, medical coverage was extended, emergency aid programmes strengthened, and assistance programmes activated to make them into springboards towards training and employment. Some recipients of State benefits were allowed to work whilst still receiving aid for a pre-set period.<sup>42</sup> “This is the route taken by the United States in

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<sup>40</sup> Dia Anagnostoo and Evangelia Psychogiopoulou, *The European Court of Human Rights and the Rights of Marginalised Individuals and Minorities in National Context* (Leiden: M. Nijhoff Publishers, 2009), p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity, 2008), p. 276.

the aftermath of the ghetto uprisings of the 1960s and in reaction to the generalisation of social insecurity over the ensuing two decades”<sup>43</sup>.

In contrast, relatively little has been done to address marginalisation in developing countries and only a few civil society organisations have arisen out of a “sense of marginalisation, injustice, and exclusion”. They provide essential social services in the case of a void left by the State, and they act as a conduit for exposing injustices and abuses of political and economic power. Civil society organisations can also provide development activities to improve the lives of marginalised people.<sup>44</sup> In developing nations particularly, the marginalised may be exploited by others to engage in illegal acts such as drug dealing, theft and murder. Of course, this also happens in developed nations but more is being done there to prevent this.

The previous sections have provided a brief general overview of the causes and types of social marginalisation and the final part of the chapter will now concentrate on the specific case of Saudi Arabia, focusing on the particular nature of marginalisation in Saudi society.

## **1.5 Social Marginalisation in Saudi Arabia**

Every country has its own socially marginalised groups. Some of these groupings may be found in other nations but a number will be the unique product of a set of particular economic, socio-historical and cultural circumstances.

In Saudi Arabia, one of the largest of the petroleum exporting countries, economic factors are not the only reason for the presence of marginalised groups and

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Heather Xiaoquan Zhang, Bin Wu, and Richard Sanders, *Marginalisation in China Perspectives on Transition and Globalisation*, Ashgate Pub. Co., Available at: (2007) <<http://site.ebrary.com/id/10211120>>p. 242 [Accessed on 03/03/2012]

individuals. There is a wide range of people in Saudi society, who find themselves marginalised due to a number of diverse causes. These include those marginalised by racism or gender, those who are mentally or physically disabled, those who are poor, foreign immigrants (especially labourers), foundlings and those who do not belong to any tribe. This discussion begins by considering sectarianism which can be considered one of the main reasons for social marginalisation in Saudi Arabia.

### **1.5.1 Sectarianism and Religious Minorities**

Two key religious minorities –the Shiites and the Sufis– represent dissenting opinion to mainstream Sunni Islam in Saudi Arabia, which marginalises them in relation to both the government and the majority of Saudis. Since the Sufis in Saudi Arabia have been less vociferous than the Shiites in terms of claiming their rights, their problems have not presented the same socio-political dimensions as those of the Shiites. In addition, Saudi Shiites are accused of belonging to another state, Iran. Therefore, in this section the focus will be the Shiite religious minority as an example of a group which faces social marginalisation due to their religious doctrine.

Historical narrative of Shiites puts them on the oppressed side. One of the two most well-known schools in the Shiite sect always makes a link between justice and the coming of Imam Mahdi, so they believe that no real justice is possible until this event occurs. Al-Ibrahim and Al-Sadiq state:

Al-Madrasah Al-Ikhhārīyyah (The Telling School) has considered the absence of the Imam as the reason for their inability to achieve social justice. Thus, participants in the political life, in its wider meaning, have no right to lead people and enforce legislation and requirements during the Imam's absence. So, Al-Madrasah Al-Ikhhārīyyah (The Telling School) considers the

presence of the Imam as the main condition for governing the country and recognizing it as an Islamic country.<sup>45</sup>

These feelings of injustice make people ready to accept any changes and to endeavour to find out how to demand and obtain their human rights in any way possible. Belonging to a marginal group can increase feelings of isolation. Sen emphasises that:

Identity can also kill and kill with abandon. A strong and exclusive sense of belonging to one group can in many cases carry with it the perception of distance and divergence from other groups. Within-group solidarity can help to feed between-group discord.<sup>46</sup>

This is essentially the case of the Shiite minority inside Saudi Arabia, where such feelings are compounded by the Saudi government's long-standing lack of concern for Shiite needs. According to Ibrahim, "Since the 1970s, Shiite areas have been suffering from the lack of suitable infrastructure and the basic public services".<sup>47</sup>

In Shiite opinion, the Government needs to act to achieve political and social integration by:

Expanding Shiite presence in government institutions, in particular in national and local councils including the Majlis al-Shura and Regional Councils; lifting remaining restrictions on Shiite religious rituals and practices, specifically by allowing construction of mosques and community centres (Husseiniyyas) and the production, printing, and circulation of religious materials within their communities.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Bader Al-Ibrahim and Mohammad Al-Sadiq, *Al-Hīrak Al-Shī'ī fī Al-Sāūdiyyah [Shiite movement in Saudi Arabia]* (Beirut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing, 2013), p. 48 [original text in Arabic; translation by the researcher].

<sup>46</sup> Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence* (London; New York; Toronto [etc.]: Penguin, 2007), pp. 1-2.

<sup>47</sup> Foaad Ibrahim, *Al-Shī'ah fī Al-Sāūdiyyah [Shiites in Saudi Arabia]* (Beirut: Dar Alsaqi, 2007), p. 8 [original text in Arabic; translation by the researcher].

<sup>48</sup> 'The Shiite Question in Saudi Arabia', *Albawaba* (London, 2005), p. 1.

Such claims by Shiites suggest that they feel marginalised by both the government and Sunni Muslims. The representation of this issue in selected novels has not been addressed clearly. It can be seen that there are some signs inside the texts but they are not enough to reveal how the experience of Shiite marginalisation has been reflected in the literary production of Saudi Arabia. In the study period, there is lack of representation of this issue in the Saudi novel. Therefore, there will be no in-depth analysis of this issue for that reason. However, it was very important to mention it and discuss it theoretically and this can help for further studies in the future.

### **1.5.2 Women in Patriarchal Society<sup>49</sup>**

The main point at issue in this context is equality, with some Saudi women demanding equal rights with men but the mainstream opposing this based on the teachings of certain scholars and some interpretations of Qur'anic texts such as "And the male is not like the female".<sup>50</sup>

Discussion about this issue has widened to include many other issues concerning women's life inside Saudi society, for instance, discussions of female employment, women's right to drive a car and to travel, calls for a female identity card in addition to some rights for women that Islam itself asks to be applied within Muslim communities.

Many of those who defend women's rights in Saudi Arabia claim that men appear to use certain Islamic texts to maintain social traditions, suggesting that many people are more interested in maintaining customs and traditions than they are in following

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<sup>49</sup> Amelie Le Renard prefers not to use the term "patriarchal" when referring to Saudi girls because she wants to avoid breaking privacy. See, Amīlī lūrūnār, *Al-Nisā wa Al-Faḍāāt Al-'āmmah fī Al-Mamlakah Al-'arabiyyah Al-Sāūdīyyah [Women and public spheres in Saudi Arabia]*(Beirut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing, 2013), p. 27.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Muntada Al-Islami, *The Holy Qur'an: Sūrah ālī Imrān,*'Ayah: 36 (Jeddah. Abul-Qasim Publishing House, 2012), p. 49.

what is required by their religion. As a consequence, they believe that any efforts to change this situation for women will be viewed as an attempt to reject Islam. Le Renard states “Any issue relevant to women’s position, activities or visual appearance will be quickly generalised and transformed into a matter of ‘choice’ between ‘Islam’ and ‘Westernisation’”.<sup>51</sup>

This exaggerated fear of “westernisation” has a tendency to make people oppose any changes to the status of women, even if those changes would be for the better. As this study will discuss in detail in chapter four, ‘Social marginalisation of Saudi women due to gender’, following the Gulf War, women’s issues in Saudi Arabia became a major talking point for all concerned parties, including academics. Reflecting on a demonstration by Saudi women demanding the right to drive in the aftermath of the Gulf War, Crenshaw noted that this had an unexpected impact on American women:

Ironically, the presumption of cultural superiority on the basis of criticisms of Saudi men's patriarchal treatment of women lent rhetorical legitimacy to patriarchal ideology in the U.S. Direct comparisons of the status of Saudi women and U.S. women served to minimise complaints about inequality by U.S. women. Much was made of how Saudi men would react to U.S. women soldiers given their attitudes toward Saudi women.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, the topic of Saudi women’s rights has been a key concern for the government involved in the reform process, especially during the reign of King Abdullah who “chose to pursue a more moderate policy on women in Saudi society than had his predecessor.”<sup>53</sup> This can be taken as a clear indicator of the

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<sup>51</sup> Amelie Le Renard, *Al-Nisā wa Al-Faḍāat Al-āmmah fī Al-Mamlakah Al-arabīyyah Al-Sāūdiyyah* [Women and public spheres in Saudi Arabia] (Beirut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing, 2013), p. 451.

<sup>52</sup> Carrie Crenshaw, 'Women in the Gulf War: Toward an Intersectional Feminist Rhetorical Criticism', *Howard Journal of Communications*, 8 (1997), p. 229.

<sup>53</sup> Congressional Quarterly, *The Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2007), p. 427.

government's views regarding the status of Saudi women and how to improve this, an unspoken recognition that there has been a lack of attention paid to this issue previously.

### **1.5.3 Social Classes in Saudi Arabia**

When talking about Saudi social classes, it is important not to underestimate the role played by tribal allegiance.<sup>54</sup> Due to the influence and control this exercises over people's behaviour and perceptions, it has major implications for social marginalisation. To a large extent, Arab culture is devoted to the importance of the tribe in human existence and many traditional Arab stories tell of how the tribe has served as a source of strength for its people. In some Arab countries, tribal influence has lessened with the passage of time. However, in Saudi Arabia, the tribe still plays a major role in people's life, strictly regulating aspects of human relations such as marriage. The composition of the population in Saudi Arabia is tribal with the royal family belonging to the tribe of Al-Saud which itself is composed of several classes. A small selection of examples will serve to demonstrate the significant ongoing impact of tribal life in Saudi culture.

The largest poetry competitions in the world take place in the Arab Gulf countries, where valuable prizes are given to winners. These televised competitions include *The Million's Poet*, broadcast on the United Arab Emirates television network Abu Dhabi TV and The Millionaire Poet Channel. In this show, performing poets usually boast about their genealogy and tribes to obtain their support in the popular vote.

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<sup>54</sup> This topic has been well documented and extensively dealt with in the following work: 'Abdullah Al-Ghadhāmī, *'Al-Qabīlah wa Al-Qabā'iliyyah: Hawiyyāt Mābād Al-Ḥadāthah'* [*The tribe and Tribalism: Identities aftermath the era of Modernity*] (Beirut: Al-Markaz Al-Thaqafi Al-Arabi, 2009), [Original text in Arabic; translation by the researcher].

Genealogical boasts also frequently feature in the annual Camel Beauty Competition, one of many social events sponsored by the Saudi government which celebrate tribal allegiance.<sup>55</sup>

Many tribes in Saudi Arabia also have a special day of celebrations when they gather together with other members of their tribe from all over the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. During these gatherings they usually discuss issues of importance intended to support the tribe and maintain its strength and unity including, for example, paying legal fees for members who are arrested for murder. Numerous websites have been established on the internet specifically for the purpose of reuniting members of the same tribe.

These expressions of solidarity help to highlight and strengthen the role of the tribe in the community. At the same time, however, they serve to marginalise those other individuals and groups that do not belong to a tribe who may experience a sense of social alienation. Living in an atmosphere charged with tribal rivalry, it becomes difficult for those without a tribal affiliation to feel a part of Saudi society or classed as social equals.

Several non-tribal groups in Saudi Arabia may be exposed to social marginalisation due to this issue. The terms used to designate these groups are the names by which they are commonly referred to in the community, although some of these would be considered offensive. Some of the groups are to be found only in certain areas of Saudi Arabia for reasons which will be clarified below.

The first of these groups take the name Al-'Abd or Al-Khaḍīrī<sup>56</sup> literally meaning 'the slave'. Although in the past slavery did exist, on November 7th 1962, King Faisal

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<sup>55</sup> See <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/variety/2013/12/21/Saudi-Arabia-Camel-competition.html>



(then Prince Faisal), issued a ministerial decree which included his reform programme known as the Ten-Point Resolution. One of those important points concerned abolishing slavery and releasing slaves. However, both of these names are still heavily used especially by tribal members. Some researchers differentiate between Al-'Abd and Al-Khaḍīrī, but others do not, including Al-Dakhīl in his work on Wahhabism, especially when addressing the subject of the independent cities.<sup>57</sup> However, in general terms, Al-'Abd is generally used as a term of abuse while Al-Khaḍīrī is used to differentiate between tribal and non-tribal people. As a term, Al-Khaḍīrī is common in the Najd area but does not exist in Al-Ḥijāz or other regions of Saudi Arabia.

Other sectors of Saudi society also suffer from the same problem which makes them feel marginalised. One such group are *Hajj* settlers, composed of nationals from every country where Islam is practiced, who represent a large part of the population of the region of Al-Ḥijāz. Originally *Hajj* pilgrims from different areas, they settled and obtained Saudi nationality, but are still viewed as lower class outsiders by tribal members. This means they are not allowed to marry anyone with tribal connections. When this does happen, the wedding is a small scale affair and the couple are subjected to harassment. Divorce on the grounds of unequal social status in Saudi Arabia is considered to be a controversial issue. In 2011, a Medina judge forced a man to divorce his wife because of the difference in their social status. The incident began when the woman's brother-in-law and his cousins broke into the couple's home, beat up the man and kidnapped her. Although they have two children aged 3

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<sup>56</sup> The concepts and groups discussed in this part of the chapter will be of key importance to the analysis of the selected novels to be considered in later chapters, when further explanation of terminology and its use will be explored.

<sup>57</sup> Khālid Al-Dakhīl, *Al-Wahhābīyyah baīn Al-Shirk wa Taṣaddó Al-Qabīlah* [*Wahhabism between Polytheism and Cracking of the Tribe*] (Beirut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing, 2013), p. 277. [Original text in Arabic; translation by the researcher].

and 5 years old, the couple were forced to divorce by the court with no thought for what may happen to them.<sup>58</sup>

Lack of equality in social status may be one factor causing divisions within a community, destroying a sense of responsibility for others and weakening social ties. Other social marginalised sectors face a similar or possibly worse fate, including *Bidouns*<sup>59</sup> and foundlings who have been abandoned as children.

The issue of *Bidouns* is one of the most important contemporary socio-political problems in the Arab Gulf states, where this name (literally meaning ‘those without’) reflects the reality of their position. They are descendants of the ancient nomadic Arab tribes who lived in the desert areas of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq and East of Arab Gulf.<sup>60</sup>

As a result of changes in the aftermath of the Gulf War, efforts began to reform the Bidouns’ positions. Although they are found in nearly all the Gulf States, they still suffer from the lack of rights to live in dignity as others. They have no opportunity of obtaining government jobs. Their level of health care provision is less than that offered to documented nationals and they face social discrimination within the community. For example, they are not allowed to marry tribal members and do not

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<sup>58</sup> Abdullah Falāḥ and Abdullah Al-Ghonmī, *Ḥokm Jadīd Yufarriq Bayn Zawjayn Li ‘adam Takāfū’ Al-Nasab* [A new judgment enforces a couple to accept the divorce due to their unequal ethnicities], (Saudi Arabia: Alwatan, 2013), p. Online Newspaper. Available at: <[http://www.alwatan.com.sa/nation/News\\_Detail.aspx?ArticleID=47261&CategoryID=3](http://www.alwatan.com.sa/nation/News_Detail.aspx?ArticleID=47261&CategoryID=3)> [Accessed on 07/04/2013]

<sup>59</sup> The official name of these people in other countries is stateless people. They estimated two millions of population in Saudi Arabia, see: 'Al-Bidūn Al-Sāūdīyyūn Tuḡālibūn bi Al-Jinsiyyah' [Saudi Bidoun are demanding citizenship], (2013). Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oylyj1DpfDY>> [Accessed on 07/05/2013]

<sup>60</sup> Fāris Al-Waqayyān, 'adīmū Al-Jīnsīyyah fī Al-Kuwaīt: Al-azmah wa Al-Tadāyāt', [Kuwaiti Bedoons Movement], (2008). Available at: <[http://www.kuwbedmov.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=174%3A2010-05-28-11-07-25&catid=52%3A2010-04-11-11-16-07&Itemid=78&lang=ar](http://www.kuwbedmov.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=174%3A2010-05-28-11-07-25&catid=52%3A2010-04-11-11-16-07&Itemid=78&lang=ar)> [accessed on 07/05/2013]

have official birth certificates, so they live on the margins of society throughout their lives.

“Foundlings”, or those who were abandoned at birth and do not know the identity of their parents, also face a hard life in Saudi society. Whilst the government does offer them assistance, by providing free accommodation, State benefits and good health care, they still face social stigma and discrimination, remaining marginalised. Not surprisingly, some even prefer to hide their foundling status. They live their life without any relatives while others boast of their tribal links. In a TV interview, one foundling explains what life is like for those like him and how it can lead to personal tragedy and he covers his personality and says:

I am a foundling. I am considered to be a mistake of people who do not fear God. I have taken drugs. I was exploited sexually. I have been arrested many times. I'm saying this to let people know how we live as foundlings, inside the accommodation or outside. Some foundlings have nervous breakdowns. Society does not accept me. For instance, it is hard to go to a family and ask them to let me marry their daughter. The first question they would ask me is: “Who are you?” And when they know who I am, they would say: “Sorry, We do not accept you”. We came into this life as foundlings, and were brought up in State orphanages without knowledge, no parents and no uncles, so how are we to respond to people when they ask us: “Where did you come from?”<sup>61</sup>

He summarises the issue in his own words. Although the government provides assistance, it is clear that foundlings are suffering in Saudi society and experience a difficult situation at the level of social life. Given the strength of tribal traditions in Saudi Arabia, it is very difficult for foundlings to gain social acceptance and this is particularly the case regarding the issue of marriage.

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<sup>61</sup> 'Risālah mīn Laqīṭ Lī Al-Mujtamā [A Message from a Foundling to the Society]', (2010). Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4fZEJvbsxw>> [Accessed on 12/05/2013], (Original text in Arabic; translation by the researcher).

### 1.5.4 Foreign Workers<sup>62</sup>

According to the most recent statistics (2010) regarding foreign workers in Saudi Arabia, there were some 8.429.401 workers who constituted 31.1% of the total population. These figures reflect only official resident workers with permits whereas many more work illegally. Ibtihāl Al-Mukhālid believes that although slavery officially ended in 1962 in Saudi Arabia, foreign workers represent a new form of slavery, basing her opinion on their lack of human rights and the fact that they are doubly exploited by agents and others.<sup>63</sup>

Domestic workers make up a significant part of the foreign workforce. This phenomenon emerged in the 1970s in Saudi Arabia, due to a number of reasons including the high income of Saudi citizens. Many domestic workers suffer from human rights violations and are exploited due to their weak position. The organisation Human Rights Watch has reported cases of both physical and psychological abuse of domestic workers carried out by employers and, in some cases, agents:

Examples of abuse included beatings, deliberate burnings with hot irons, threats, insults, and forms of humiliation such as shaving a domestic worker's head. Food deprivation was a common abuse. [W]omen [...] reported rape, attempted rape, and sexual harassment, typically by male employers or their sons, and in some instances, by other foreign workers whom they had approached for assistance.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> This term refers to non-Saudi individuals who are economic migrants.

<sup>63</sup> Ibtihāl Al-Mukhālid, 'Al-Rriq fī Duwal Al-Khalīj: Al-Sa'ūdiyyah Namūdhajan' [Slavery in the Gulf states: Saudi Arabia as an example] ', (Al-Maqal, 2012).

<sup>64</sup> Nisha Varia, *"As If I Am Not Human": Abuses against Asian Domestic Workers in Saudi Arabia* (New York, NY [etc.]: Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2008), p. 4.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

This chapter began by highlighting some of the causes and types of social marginalisation in general. It then focused specifically on the issue of groups who are marginalised in Saudi society due to various factors, including gender, class, status or nationality. The analysis chapters will examine the representation of some of these marginalised groups and their experiences in the Saudi novel and some of the ideas mentioned here will also be developed in greater depth later. Other marginalised sectors that feature in Saudi fiction will also be considered. Now, it is important to focus on reviewing the literature relating to social marginalisation in the Social Sciences and then consider previous critical studies of the Saudi novel which have addressed two important aspects of marginalisation commonly represented in Saudi novels: gender and social issues, and that will be in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Literature Review of Social Marginalisation and the Previous Studies of the Saudi Novel

#### 2.1 The Literature Review of Social Marginalisation

Recently, especially in the last twenty years, there has been clear interest in the concept of marginalisation in many fields. Most scholars attribute a negative meaning to the term. According to Bayat, marginalisation is somewhat equated with a state of powerlessness or as characterised by life chances inferior to those in the world of the “mainstream”. In this sense, the term signifies a structural process through which certain groups or entities become “marginalised” from the “centre” against their will.<sup>1</sup>

Marginalisation is a complex condition of disadvantage as a result of vulnerabilities that might come from unfavourable environmental, cultural, social, political and economic factors. Gurung and Kollmair confirm that marginalisation is societal, focused on “human dimension such as demography, religion, culture, social structure (e.g., caste, hierarchy, class, ethnicity, and gender), economics and politics in connection with access to resources by individuals and groups”.<sup>2</sup>

Gist distinguishes cultural marginality from social marginality. Cultural marginality refers to the marginal or peripheral position of a group with respect to the beliefs, traditions, social organisation, patterned behaviour, and systems of values that distinguish it from other groups or communities. Social marginality refers to the position of groups as indicated by the interpersonal or intergroup relationships with

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<sup>1</sup> Bayat, p. 14

<sup>2</sup> Ghana S. Gurung and Michael Kollmair, *Marginality: Concepts and Their Limitations* ([s.l.]: Dialogue, 2005), p. 10.

one or more groups, and to the attitudes and images, which tend to shape these relationships.<sup>3</sup>

Bayat dates the origin of marginality to early twentieth-century urban studies when the term was associated with the history of and debate over the transition to modernity<sup>4</sup>. However, Perlman claims that the term was coined by Robert Park, of the prominent Chicago School of urban sociologists, in 'Human Migration and the Marginal Man' (1928). He considers the marginal man as a cultural type. In the field of psychology, Stonequist (1930) claimed that the marginal man displays a “double personality”.<sup>5</sup>

Nineteenth-century industrialisation transformed western countries. Since that time, thinkers compared the urban industrial environment to the rural environment. Tonnies famously contrasted the *Gemeinschaft* (village or small town community) to the *Gesellschaft* (the metropolis). Emile Durkheim had opposed 'mechanical solidarity' to 'organic solidarity'. Max Weber counter posed 'traditionalism' against 'rationality'; and Marx distinguished 'feudalism' from 'capitalism'. However, Marxism described the urban poor as the “Lumpenproletariat”. This term was not simply a misunderstood expression of anger or prejudice against a segment of the urban people. For Marx, the “Lumpenproletariat” was a concept which derives from the political economy concept; it consisted of people who, unlike the working class, did not produce surplus or earned wages.<sup>6</sup> Marxism claims that the marginal people were

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<sup>3</sup> Noel P. Gist, 'Cultural Versus Social Marginality: The Anglo-Indian Case', *Phylon* (1960-), 28 (1967), 361- 375.

<sup>4</sup> Bayat, p. 15

<sup>5</sup> Janice E. Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality: Urban Poverty and Politics in Rio De Janeiro* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 89-90.

<sup>6</sup> Hal Draper, 'Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution', (Monthly Review Press, 1990), cited in Ray Bush and Habib Ayeb, *Marginality and Exclusion in Egypt* (London: Zed Books, 2012), pp. 17-18.

pushed by the structural workings of capitalism to spend a life doing work, not of their own choice but only to survive.

However, in capitalism, marginalisation means that the poor people are not marginal but marginalised. Actually, they are integrated into society, but they are excluded by culturally closed social systems. So, critics such as Janice Perlman, Manuel Castells and other scholars of Latin America have insisted that marginality in its famous meaning was a myth.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, marginalisation under capitalism is not what Marx had in mind. Capitalism has focused on wage earners who were economically exploited. Up to this point, marginal peoples in both Marxism and capitalism are the poor who have been marginalised by the larger system of the political economy. Thus, they have created special structures in order to survive in urban cities.

These people have created their own places and use them as a dangerous world in terms of using illegal ways to achieve their targets against the regimes and obtain their wages which suits their situation inside the urban arena. In this context, Bayat tends to believe that marginal domains are not all torment and subordination; they can also be opportunities for the exertion of power. They could also be alternative social arrangements for people who cannot afford the 'normal' and the 'mainstream', because the marginal spaces are less expensive.<sup>8</sup>

This raises an important question: What factors could contribute to marginality?

Many factors have a deleterious effect on people's lives. For example, people with poor livelihood options (lack of resources, skills and equal opportunities) have

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<sup>7</sup> Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2, Living and Cooking* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), cited in Bush and Ayeb, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Bayat, p. 21.



restricted participation in public decision-making, less use of public space, a lower sense of community and low self-esteem.<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, the most marginalised areas are in ‘developing countries’<sup>10</sup>, where marginality primarily manifests itself as a result of spatial disadvantages.<sup>11</sup> In addition, marginality can be exaggerated by “non-democratic regimes, corrupt officials, dualistic economics, religious fundamentalism, ethno-linguistic tribalism, and sectarianism”.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, social marginalisation may come from cultural marginalisation where intellectuals, artists, and elites are feeling that they do not fully enjoy their rights in society.

When Reem Saad was researching marginality in Egypt, she examined the mostly subjective marginality of groups of intellectuals and artists and found that they operate within a framework characterised by lifestyle choices. These choices may deviate from the norms and cultural practices of social groups of similar social standing. She claims that this does not result in social exclusion or rejection.<sup>13</sup> However, feeling at home on the margin for those groups may cause 'negative integration' that divides society into classes.

Every area has a special case of marginalisation. As a consequence, everyone has a different qualification to overcome his or her marginalisation. In the Arab world,

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Brodwin, *Marginality and Cultural Intimacy in a Transnational Haitian Community* (Milwaukee, WI: University of Wisconsin, UWMilwaukee, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, CLACS, 2001), pp. 2-5.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Leimgruber, *Between Global and Local: Marginality and Marginal Regions in the Context of Globalization and Deregulation* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 294-295.

<sup>11</sup> Jørgen Elm Larsen, 'Spatialization and Culturalization of Social Policy: Conducting Marginal People in Local Communities', in *Area-based Initiatives in Contemporary Urban Policy Conference* (Copenhagen, 2001), pp. 17-19.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence M Sommers, Assefa Mehretu, and Bruce W Pigozzi, 'Towards Typologies of Socio-Economic Marginality: North/South Comparisons', *Marginality in Space—Past, Present and Future: Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of Cultural, Social and Economic Parameters of Marginal and Critical Region* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 1999), pp. 7-24.

<sup>13</sup> Reem Saad, 'Margins and Frontiers', cited in , p. 98.

there are many marginal movements against the mainstream. So, when Mahmood Esmail was trying to explain the most famous opposition movements in Islamic history, Egyptian history and European history he called these movements “the Marginals”.<sup>14</sup> However, social marginalisation does not mean only political opposition, but it includes all the movements which have emerged from a sense of injustice and exploitation. This means that scholars have addressed social marginalisation in light of their own experiences.

The relationship between literature and society has been discussed by many thinkers and critics in both fields. Indeed, Marxism has not only discussed the relationship between literature and society, but also has a clear conception of what this relationship should be, both in our present communities and in future ‘classless’ societies. Wellek and Warren, authors of *Theory of Literature* cite De Bonald; “Literature is an expression of society”. They wonder:

What does this axiom mean? If it assumes that literature, at any time mirrors or expression life is even more ambiguous. A writer inevitably expresses his experience and total conception of life; but it would be manifestly untrue to say that he expresses the whole of life- or even the whole life of a given time – completely and exhaustively. It is a specific evaluative criterion to say that an author should express the life of his own time fully, that he should be ‘representative’ of his age and society.<sup>15</sup>

This is particularly true of the novel, the form of literature which is generally expected to reflect wholly individual matters and innovating reorientation. If literature is a reflection of the real life and an expression of the author's experience,

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<sup>14</sup> Mahmood Esmail has written three books on the subject of marginalisation, as follows; Al-Muhammashūn fī Al-Tarīkh Al-Islāmī, (*The Marginalised in Islamic History*), 1<sup>st</sup> ed, Cairo: Ru’yah, 2004; Al-Muhammashūn fī Al-Tarīkh Al-Miṣrī, (*The Marginalised in Egyptian History*), 1<sup>st</sup> ed, Cairo: Ru’yah, 2008.; Al-Muhammashūn fī Al-Tarīkh Al-ūrūbbī, (*The Marginalised in European History*), 1<sup>st</sup> ed, Cairo: Ru’yah 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (1956), p. 90.

its forms are different in terms of the ability to transfer social phenomena to the readers. Watt, author of *The Rise of the Novel* discusses realism and the novel genre, and confirms that the novel, depending on its characteristics, can be defined as a diversity of social speech types.<sup>16</sup> Thus, social marginalisation should be an interesting subject for marginalised novelists to explain their needs and to raise their voices.

Once again, marginalisation is “a condition of socio-spatial structure and a process in which components of society and space in a territorial unit are observed to lag behind an expected level of performance in economic, political and social well being compared with the average condition in the territory as a whole”.<sup>17</sup>

So, wherever this territorial unit is found with the same description in any society, marginality will be found too. With this condition, social marginalisation exists in Saudi Arabia. However, social marginalisation can include other segments of the society.

## **2.2 Studies on the Saudi Novel**

The first comprehensive independent study is *Fann Al-Riwāyah fī Al-Mamlakah Al-Arabiyyah Al-Sa'ūdiyyah bayn Al-Nash'ah wa Al-Taṭawwur*, (The genre of the novel in Saudi Arabia between Inception and Development), by Muhammad Al-Sayyed Deeb.<sup>18</sup> In this study, the author defined the parameters of the history of the Saudi novel. This book examines the educational, social, emotional, historical and political Saudi novel. In addition, it gives some examples of the Saudi novel in the period

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<sup>16</sup> Dorothy J Hale, *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), p. 484.

<sup>17</sup> Gurung and Kollmair, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Al-Maktaba Al-Muhammadiyah, Cairo, 1989. It consists of 414 pages.

covered by the study which is between 1930 and 1989. What Deeb fails to do is to draw a distinction between the novel and the short story. At the end of the study, he speculates on the future of the Saudi novel.

Although this study has provided an analysis of the aesthetics of novel writing as well as monitoring the historical Saudi novel, it is worth to say that there is a factor which diminishes the importance of this study at the moment, it was published in 1989, and many more novels have been published since then.

In 1991, Muḥammad Al-Shanṭī wrote *Fann Al-Riwāyah fī Al-Adab Al-‘Arabī Al-Sa‘ūdī Al-Mu‘āṣir*,<sup>19</sup> (The genre of the novel in contemporary Arabic literature in Saudi Arabia). In the introduction, Muḥammad Al-Shanṭī tried to avoid some of Muhammad Dīb’s methodological mistakes, when he mentioned the difference between the short story and the novel in literature and gives them the same judgment on their structure. He also showed the relationship between social transformations and the novel. There is an important part in this study which is about numbers of those novels which are written not about the phenomenon of social changes directly but about the alienation that results from these changes.

There are also other important studies on the Saudi novel which appeared in 1998: *Al-Riwāyah fī Al-Mamlakah Al-‘Arabīyah Al-Sa‘ūdiyyah bayn Al-Nash’ah wa Al-Taṭawwur 1930-1989*, (The Emergence and Development of the Saudi novel (1930-1989): An Historical and Critical Study), by Sulṭān Al-Qaḥṭānī.<sup>20</sup> This study attempts to explain the reasons for the appearance of the Saudi novel in the 1980s. The most important part of this study is about the beginning of the artistic Saudi

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<sup>19</sup> 1st ed. Nādī Jāzān Al-Adabī, 1990. It consists of 378 pages.

<sup>20</sup> Originally a Ph.D. thesis submitted to Glasgow University in 1994, its classification number at the British Library is DX 87583 and also it is published in Arabic in 1998 by Sharikat Al-Ṣafaḥāt Al-Dhahabīyah Al-Maḥdodah, Riyadh.

novel and pioneer novelists in the 1980s, where Sulṭān Al-Qaḥṭānī analysed some novels and linked them with social changes in Saudi Arabia. For example, when he tried to address the village atmosphere in Saudi Arabia in *Al-Wasmiyyah* which was written by Abdul Aziz Mashri, he linked the actions in this novel to the nature of Mashri's village. In his study Al-Qaḥṭānī states that Mashri was the first Saudi writer who addressed the issues of Saudi society in an artistic manner and a good novelistic style. He thought that Saudi novels were going to see major improvements in the near future and he also believed that Saudi novelists will write in other kinds of genres (romance and realism), because Saudis have attained higher educational levels and have been exposed to many other cultures.

After this study, many researchers have studied the technical and social aspects of the Saudi novel. The best-known studies on the social aspect of the novel-writing will be discussed below, arranged according to their chronological order.

In his study, *Al-Baṭal fī Al-Riwāyah Al-Sa'ūdiyyah*, (The Protagonist in the Saudi Novel), Ḥasan Al-Ḥāzmī, claims that the social dimension is one that interests most Saudi novelists. He also described the role of social class in the technical construction of the novel such as: educated, poor, rich, labourer and villager. He also explores the problem of social alienation for the protagonist and cites some Arabic proverbs to the effect that urban life alienates people from their homeland. A similar study is conducted by Nāṣir Al-Jāsim and is titled, *Ṣūrat Al-Baṭal fī Riwāyāt Ibrāhīm Al-Nāṣir*, (The image of the protagonist in Ibrahim Al-Nasir's novels).

In 2004, Ḥasan Nu'mī published his book *Raj' Al-Baṣar, Qirā'āt fī Al-Riwāyah Al-Sa'ūdiyyah*, (The Return of Vision, Readings in the Saudi Novel).<sup>21</sup> In this short

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<sup>21</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Published by the Cultural Literary Club in 2004, Jeddah, it consists of 178 pages.

study, the author highlights the main issues related to the Saudi novel in the 1990s, identifying four principal features. The first point is that many Saudi novelists were raised in villages and then moved to cities. Novels by writers such as Abdul Aziz Mashri, Abdo Khāl and Abdul Hafidh Al-Shammeri, for example, fall into this grouping and idealise village life. Secondly, Nu‘mī notes that there is a big gap between the novelists of the 1980s and those of the 1990s, with the latter being more interested in the artistic and technical sides of the novel. A third common feature which Nu‘mī comments on is setting. According to him, place in the Saudi novel serves as a setting for containing the action but does not generate this. In other words, distinctive local features specific to the Saudi environment are not used to help create the plot. Finally, Nu‘mī claims that there is absence of the oil topic as a major issue in the Saudi novel in the 1990s, despite the massive changes which have happened in the Saudi community because of its oil economy.

In 2006, Ḥasan Al-ḥāzmī published his second book about the Saudi novel, *Al-Binā’ Al-Fannī fī Al-Riwāyah Al-Sa‘udiyyah*, (The Artistic Structure of the Saudi Novel),<sup>22</sup> analysing novels published between 1990 and 1998. He described the relationship between characters and social life. In addition, he addressed the strong social and psychological effects of the place on the characters. Although this study is structurally sound, it is an ambitious attempt to contain all of the elements of the novel structure with giving many examples of novels without depth of analysis. The author was, perhaps, interested in talking about them and giving many examples, making his study far removed from focusing on some artistic aspects in the modern theory of the novel like “Polyphony” and “Discourse Analysis”.

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<sup>22</sup> Originally a Ph.D. thesis in 752 pages, it was published in 2006.

The first conference focusing on the novel in Saudi Arabia was held in 2004. The proceedings were published under the title of *Al-Riwāyah bi Waṣfihā Al-Akthar Hudhūran*, (The Novel as being the most prominent).<sup>23</sup> Most of the papers in this conference emphasised that this period witnessed the coming of age of the Saudi novel which spread widely and became the most prevalent literary genre in recent years in Saudi Arabia in comparison to poetry which has lost its historical place of prominence, although it still remains important in popular culture.

Although the majority of the papers presented there addressed the strong relationship between the social transformations witnessed by Saudi society and their place in the novel, one entitled “Al-Madīnah fī Al-Riwāyah Al-Sa‘ūdiyyah”, (The City in the Saudi Novel), by Ḥasan Al-Ḥāzmī, was one of the most important contributions as it addressed the issue of social transformations more directly. It argues that the novel is an art/genre of the urban communities which were affected by the era of industrialisation. Therefore, it can be considered as an early attempt at monitoring the different social classes which are mentioned in the Saudi novel.

In the same conference, Muḥammad Al-Shanṭī’s paper “Ittijāhāt Al- Riwāyah Al-Sa‘ūdiyyah fī Al-Ḥiqbah Al-Akhīrah, (Recent Trends of the Saudi Novel)”, referred to the spatial dimension of the novel, confirming that place and setting is an important element for studying the Saudi novel.

Whilst these papers raised important questions, none of them talked about the theme of social marginalisation in particular. However, critical studies of the novel began to focus on other aspects of the novel such as the social, cultural and artistic sides, and also began dealing with themes and issues as a background of the analysis. There are

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<sup>23</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Published by Nadi Al-Qaseem Al-Adabi in 2004. It consists of 416 pages.

now a number of studies which solely address one main topic in the Saudi novel. These are discussed in the following sections.

### **2.2.1 Studies which address the Saudi Feminine Novel**

There has been an increase in the number of women writers in Saudi Arabia in the recent years. These writers use the novel as a means to speak out against social taboos and against the marginalisation of women, which led many segments of society, especially the young, to writing and reading Saudi novels as one of the main vehicles of expression of public opinion and especially the kind of social marginality women suffer from. The feminine novel usually discusses needs and rights of women and many studies have tried to address and analyse the important subjects in the Saudi feminine novel. One of these is *Al-Riwāyah Al-Nisā`yyah Al-Sa`ūdiyyah: Khib̄āb Al-Mar`ah wa Tashkīll Al-Sard*, (The Saudi Feminine Novel: Woman Discourse and Narrative Formation), by Sāmī Juraidī,<sup>24</sup> which examines the significance of the feminine narrative discourse and the social implications of Saudi women's discourse. The author wanted to explain, from the beginning of his book, how to deal with women's marginalisation as a controversial issue in Saudi Arabia. In the acknowledgment section of his book, Juraidī reveals the real name of his mother, while in many areas in Saudi society it is considered a taboo and a form of shame to let the readers/public know your mother's name. He addresses the feminine novel by discussing the impact of social, psychological, political and spatial dimensions. The most important finding is that Saudi women writers cannot talk openly about their society, which makes them create characters and actions in alternative places outside their communities.

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<sup>24</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Dār Al-Intishar Al-Arabi. Beirut. 2008. It consists of 383 pages.



*Ṣūrat Al-Baṭal fī Al-Riwayah Al-Niswiyyah Al-Sa'ūdiyyah*, (The Image of the Hero in the Saudi Feminine Novel), by Mansūr Al-Muhawwīs,<sup>25</sup> is one of the most important books in this context because it tries to find out more about the opinion of women about the man in women's writing. It examines cultural patterns of the image of men in the feminine novel. It also refers to the cultural awareness of women writers. It also considers the aesthetic composition of man's image by addressing the elements of character, time and place.

In 2009, The literary club in Riyadh published *Al-Riwāyah Al-Nisā'iyah Al-Sa'ūdiyyah, Qirā'ah fī Al-Tārīkh, wa Al-Mawḍū', wa Al-Qaḍīyah, wa Al-Fann*, (The Saudi Feminine Novel, Readings in the History, the Theme, the Issue and the Art), by Khālīd Al-Rifā'ī.<sup>26</sup> In this study, the author attempts to address four aspects of the Saudi feminine novel: the history, the theme, the issue of woman in the novel and the genre of the novel. Because this study has addressed all of these aspects, it suffers from some confusion regarding to mixing between the themes and the issues. For example, he talked about the theme of love twice; in the chapter (the emotional novel), and in the separate issue of love in another chapter. Nonetheless, it is considered as a serious attempt to improve the study of literary criticism and to investigate the many reasons behind women's writing in the field of the Saudi feminine novel.

In the same year, Muhammad Al-'Uwayn published a book about women's writings in Saudi literature, *Kitābāt Nisā'iyah Mutamarridah*, (Rebellious Feminine

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<sup>25</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Mu'assasat Al-Yamāma Al-Thaqāfiyya. Riyādh. 2008. It consists of 480 pages.

<sup>26</sup> Originally a M. A. Thesis, it is published by The Literary Club in 2009. Riyādh. It consists of 503 pages.

Writings), by Mohammad Al-‘Uwayn.<sup>27</sup> The book contains a collection of the author’s different views about the rebel writings of Saudi women in both of the novel and the short story genres in Saudi literature. The author added, in his book, many examples about rebellious writings.

There has been much criticism of rebellious writing with the appearance of the novel *Banāt Al-Riyād*, (Girls of Riyadh) by Rajaa Al-Sanea. The big debate focussed on the extent to which the novel depicts women's needs and their marginalisation. John Sains says: “The public identified with the plight of the characters and started a real dialogue about Saudi women. Some, on the other hand, considered the novel a negative image of Saudi women and demanded that nothing be written about the negative side of the society”.<sup>28</sup>

All of these books reflect to which extent critics and academics feel the significance of this topic in following women’s needs and images about their situation in Saudi Arabia. The feeling of marginalisation usually leads to the attempt to discover it and explain the needs of marginalised people especially in a conservative community like Saudi Arabia, which can be considered as being very sensitive when dealing with women-related subjects. Therefore, any writing which is trying to break the taboo deserves to be taken into account in social studies.

Moreover, in 2007, the Dialogue Group<sup>29</sup> issued *Khiṭāb Al-Sard, Al-Riwāyah Al-Nisā’iyyah Al-Sa’ūdiyyah*, (The Narrative Discourse, The Saudi Feminine Novel)<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Mohammad Al-‘Uwayn. *Kitābāt Nisā’iyyah Mutamarridah*, (Rebellious Feminine Writings, 2009), Riyadh. It consists of 471 pages.

<sup>28</sup> Sains John, *Love, Arabian style; Girls of Riyadh attempts to show another side of Saudi life by a Saudi writer in a way that is not judgemental*, writes Stephen Clare after an exclusive interview with the author. Available at: <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/423278045?accountid=142908>, 2007> [Accessed on 25/05/2012]

<sup>29</sup> It is a group of intellectuals and critics. They are interested in cultural and literary issues in Saudi Arabia and most of them are members of a literary club in Jeddah.

It contains a collection of papers which are presented in the “Jeddah cultural literary club” in meetings of some people interested in novels such as academics and novelists. What makes this book more important is the fact that it was an early attempt in Saudi Arabia to analyse the Saudi Novelistic Discourse. However, there are only three papers in this collection which were more related to the topic of social phenomena.

The first of these by Siḥmī Al-Hājirī is entitled *Al-Khiṭāb Al-Muḍādd fī Riwāyat ‘Ghadan Sayakūn Al-Khamīs’*, (The Counter-Discourse in the Novel *Tomorrow, will be Thursday*). In this study he selected a representative sample of novels written by Saudi women and analysed the elements of the novelistic discourse inside it. He also based his study on the hypothesis that women's writing was seen as a challenge to the common trend in Saudi Arabia, when they write against the taboos in the closed society of Saudi Arabia. At the end of his paper, he talked about the experience of women's writing in a patriarchal society and how it becomes different both in the form and the content.

The second paper, “*Walā‘ Al-Khiṭāb Al-Unthawī Al-I bdā‘ī fī Riwāyat Adam Yā Sīdī*, (Social Patriarchy of Creative Feminine Discourse in the Novel *Adam oh Master*)” by Fāṭimah Qāsim addressed two subjects: Social Patriarchy and Literary Patriarchy. She emphasised, however, that there are many Saudi feminine novels which do not tend to be rebellious towards the instructions of the patriarchal society.

The third of these papers by Ḥasan Nu‘mī is entitled “*Khiṭāb Al-Īqṣa’ wa Al-Iḥlāl fī Al-Riwāyah Al-Nisa’iyyah Al-Sa‘ūdiyyah*” (The Discourse of Exclusion and Substitution in the Saudi Feminine Novel). In this context it is the most clear critical attempt to address the Saudi feminine discourse and the difference between it and the

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<sup>30</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> ed, Published by Nādī Jiddah Al-Adabī in 2007, Jeddah. It consists of 694 pages.

content of the novel as the novel could be one of many forms that express the dimensions of the Saudi feminine discourse. He also talked about giving more significance to the marginalisation instead of the trend in the novel-writing.

### **2.2.2 The Social Aspect in the Saudi Novel**

Three academic studies two of which were written in 2006 and one in 2011 have confirmed the strong relationship which exists between the social aspects of people's life in Saudi Arabia and the Saudi novel, and focus on it as a big issue in the critical analysis of novels.

The first study is *Şūrat Al-Mujtama' fī Al-Riwāyah Al-Sa'ūdiyyah Al-Mu'āshirah, 1980-2003*, (The Image of the Society in the Contemporary Saudi Novel, 1980-2003), by Ibrāhīm Al-Dughairī.<sup>31</sup> This study focuses on highlighting the images which were drawn by Saudi novelists in expression of their communities. It also analyses the elements of these images to better understand the minute details of Saudi society. The second study is *Al-Qiyam Al-Khuluqīyyah fī Al-Riwāyah Al-Sa'ūdiyyah, Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah*, (Moral Values in the Saudi Novel, an Analytic Study), by Abdul Malik Al-Shaykh.<sup>32</sup> This study reviewed some moral Islamic values through addressing the continuity of generations, the conflict of civilisation and dealing with the other. It also tried to find strong relationships between the moral values and the structure of the Saudi novel since its beginning in 1930. The third was *Al-Naz'ah Al-Ījtimā'iyyah fī Al-Riwāyah Al-Sa'ūdiyyah*, (The Social Trend in the

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<sup>31</sup> Originally a Ph.D. Thesis submitted to Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University in 2006. Qaseem. It is not published yet.

<sup>32</sup> Originally a Ph.D. Thesis submitted to Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University in 2006. Riyadh. It is not published yet.

Saudi Novel), by Ḥifẓ Al-Raḥmān Al-Īṣlāḥī.<sup>33</sup>The author has followed the history of the Social Novel and its correctional functions since its early beginnings. He talked about the cultural background and mentioned some issues that have changed Saudi society over seventy years such as: scholarship to study abroad and how did the Saudi students deal with the alienation felt while on residing on foreign soil. He also spoke at length about female education in Saudi Arabia and its influence on women's perceptions of men, forced marriages, and forced divorce because of the difference in social classes.

There is an unambiguous relationship between the Saudi novel and social changes in Saudi Arabia. One cannot deny the impact of social transformations on the novel. However, much of the research conducted so far has been descriptive. None of them have addressed the phenomenon of the social marginalisation which is one of the main reasons behind the novel writing. In other words, no one has covered the aspect of the social marginalisation as a motivation to novel writing and as a reason of drawing the general atmosphere and the characters inside the novel.

As we have read, Studies of Saudi women and Saudi society are the closest to the subject of social marginalisation. Therefore, the need to study them is even further.

### **2.3 Methodology**

As previously explained in the Introduction, the methodology used is an interdisciplinary one. The aim, following Macherey's ideas about critical reading, was to recover hidden stories and silenced voices from the texts in order to provide valuable and sometimes unexpected insights into the experience of marginalization

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<sup>33</sup> Originally a Ph.D. Thesis submitted to the Academic of Islamic Studies in University of Malaya. New Delhi. It is published in by Jadawel in 2009. Beirut. It consists of 400 pages.

and to the links which exist between different forms of marginalisation in Saudi society. This was accomplished by combining the technique of close textual critical analysis examining aspects such as characterisation, language, and narrative technique with a thorough knowledge of the socio-historical, political and economic context which forms the setting for each novel.

In some instances, other forms of non-academic discourse have been drawn upon to illuminate the experience of marginal groups, including autobiographical accounts. Thus, in Chapter Four, entitled “Social Marginalisation of Saudi Women Due to Gender”, in the section on women driving, reference will be made to the autobiographical book *Al-Sādis Min November 1990: Al-Mar’ah wa Qiyādat Al-Sayyarah* (The Sixth of November 1990: Women and Driving Cars) by Al-Manea and Al-Shaykh as they were involved in demonstrations calling for women’s right to drive in Riyadh in 1990. Also, Chapter Five, entitled “Social Marginalisation Due to Ethnicity”, makes reference to the book *Sa’ūdi Wa Lākin Laqīt* (He is a Saudi but he is foundling), an autobiographical account by a genuine Saudi foundling which addresses the topic of Saudi foundlings throughout many aspects of life.

In Chapter Six, entitled “Social Marginalisation of Foreign Workers”, novels by foreign writers about Saudi society are also used to form a point of comparison with Saudi novels which deal with the phenomenon of the social marginalisation of foreign workers in Saudi Arabia and determine to what extent the Saudi novel has been able to reflect this reality and express the suffering of foreign workers, a silent majority.

For the translation, the study will depend on the researcher’s translation unless the novels have already been translated and published. Four translated novels are included in the chosen samples. The first of these is *Fikhākh Al-Ra’iḥah* (*Wolves of*

*the Crescent Moon*), by Yousef Al-Muhaimeed, translated into English in 2007 by Anthony Calderbank. The second Yousef Al-Muhaimeed's *Al-Qārūrāh (Munira's Bottle)*, was also translated by Calderbank in 2010. *Al-Ḥizām (The Belt)*, by Ahmed Abodehman, was originally written in French in 2000 and published as *La Ceinture*. The author himself translated the work into Arabic in 2001; Nadia Benabid translated the novel into English in 2002. Finally, *Banāt Al-Rīyaḍ (Girls of Riyadh)*, by Rajaa Al-Sanea, was translated into English in 2008 by Marilyn Booth and the author herself.

The study also focuses significant attention on transliteration to explain the Arabic sounds and help non-Arab readers pronounce them correctly, especially with names of characters and places. However, it does not transliterate the names of the selected novels' authors because they have been translated into English and written about in many other studies, review studies and news items, as if they were English names. The authors of the selected novels are identified the first time that they are mentioned within a footnote, not in the main body, to avoid interrupting the analysis and interdependence of ideas through the discussion. The discussion then refers to the page of the first mentioned, as required.

It is important here to also provide a rationale for the choice of the start and end date for this examination of the Saudi novel. In his article, "The Problem of Literary Generations: Origins and Limitations," Marius Hentea, quoting Robert Wohl, argues that "historical generations are not born; they are made". Hentea notes how particular historical or cultural events can be used to set boundaries and limits which demarcate one generation of writers as being different and distinct from another. He illustrates his point by citing a recent example:

The next spurt of generational thinking has cropped up with the nascent study of '9/11 literature,' [...]. This generational impulse will only grow stronger as the twenty-somethings whose formative years were marked by 9/11 and the subsequent American military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq grow into maturity.<sup>34</sup>

This study of the representation of social marginalisation in the Saudi novel in the period between 1990 and 2011 does not attempt to claim that the authors whose work is examined here can be formally identified as a literary generation. However, it does argue that there are good reasons for choosing the sample of novels selected for this study. This is due to the fact that the experiences and ideas of all their authors and the critical discourse which accompanied them were shaped by a particular set of key historical events and sociocultural transformations which have deeply impacted on Saudi society.

As the contextual chapter will explain, two key historic events have directly impacted on the authors of the novels studies here, since they triggered far-reaching changes not only within Saudi society but also within the region as a whole and in international relations between the western countries and the Arab world. The first was the Gulf War in 1990, and the second was the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers in the USA in 2001.

The end date for the study, 2011, is also a highly significant one for the Middle East as region, since it marks the start of the events which became popularly known as the Arab Spring. Whilst it is true that Saudi Arabia did not see the degree of transformation which took place in other Arab countries, including Tunisia, Egypt,

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<sup>34</sup> Hentea, Marius, 'The Problem of Literary Generations: Origins and Limitations', *Comparative Literature Studies* 50 (4) 2013: 567-588, 567.



Libya, Syria and Yemen, nonetheless, it was affected by those events due to its geographical proximity with some of these countries. It also has strong political and economic ties with them in addition to sharing a common religion (Islam), language (Arabic) and identity (Arab).

According to Hentea, in addition to historical events, a number of different discourses help to construct the concept of a literary generation, and he highlights how together with the work of academic critics, literary journalists, commercial publishers and even translators contribute to the creation of a literary generation.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, regardless of the exact impact of the Arab Spring on Saudi writers, the discourse surrounding Arabic literature written in the wake of those events will inevitably impact on how texts are read, reviewed and analysed which suggest that this is an apt point at which to end this study.<sup>36</sup>

## 2.4 Limitations of the Research

As noted above, the present study focuses on the period between 1990 and 2011, covering a little over two decades. However, the study does not cover all Saudi novels written during this time; rather, it focuses on representative novels which best depict that period with its changes, such as the following:

- 1- *Mudun Ta'kul Al-Ushb* (Cities that eat the grass), by Abdo Khal, 1998
- 2- *Al-Firdaws Al-Yabāb* (The Barren paradise), by Layla Al-Juhani, 1998
- 3- *Al-Ḥizām (The Belt)*, by Ahmed Abodehman, 2001
- 4- *Saqf Al-Kifāyāh* (The Roof of Enough), by Muhammed Alwan, 2002
- 5- *Lam A'udAbkī* (I no longer cry), by Zaynab Hifni, 2003

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<sup>35</sup> Hentea, Marius, 'The Problem of Literary Generations: Origins and Limitations', *Comparative Literature Studies* 50 (4) 2013: 567-588, 567.

<sup>36</sup> The briefest of interview searches already reveals dozens of journalistic articles and reviews of Arabic literature written by English writers which are referring to 'a revolution in Arabic literature' and 'the Arab Spring generation'.

- 6- *Fikhākh Al-Rā'ihah* (Wolves of the Crescent Moon), by Yousef Al-Muhaimeed, 2003
- 7- *Al-Qārūrah* (Munira's Bottle), by Yousef Al-Muhaimeed, 2004
- 8- *Mafāriq Al-Ātamah* (Crossroads of Darkness), by Muhammed Al-Muzaini, 2004
- 9- *Banāt Al-Rīyaḍ* (Girls of Riyadh), by Rajaa Al-Sanea, 2005
- 10- *Malāmiḥ* (Features), by Zaynab Hifni, 2006
- 11- *Jāhiliyyah* (Ignorance), by Layla Al-Juhani, 2007
- 12- *Al-Rīyaḍ November 90* (Riyadh in November 90), by Saad Al-Dosari, 2011

There are three key reasons for the study rationale in choosing the samples of the novels selected for this study. First, this study uses a chronological period, 1990 to 2011, which is very important in the contemporary history of Saudi Arabia, as outlined above. Second, the study uses a set of representative novels as they all deal with issues relating to social marginalisation. Some novels might just include one character representative of a particular class; in other novels, the whole novel deals with social marginalisation. However, all are related to social marginalisation. Finally, the group perceived to be most marginalised within Saudi society is women, and I made sure to include female writers within the Saudi novels chosen so the literary voice of women is represented within that category.

This study uses 1990 as the start date of the research period, and the list of the selected novels starts in 1998; this is reasonable as social phenomena such as social marginalisation need more time to be expressed and recorded in literary creative writing. However, a number of Saudi novels addressed sensitive subjects and tried to break social taboo before that date. According to Hasan Nimi, the 1990s were a time

of major transformations in the history of Saudi society and these affected the novels produced since then.<sup>37</sup>

In the era between 1990 and 2011, two great events took place which contributed to changing life for Saudi people. During the same era, the Saudi novel began to flourish, reflecting the controversial issues which emerged at this time. Therefore, in order to contextualise the novels to be studied and analysed, it is important to consider this historical background and trace the transformations which took place in Saudi society, especially in the aftermath of the Gulf War. This period will be addressed in the next chapter.

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<sup>37</sup> Nimi Hasan, *Al-Riwāyah Al-Sa`udiyah: Wāqi`uha Wa Tahawwulātuha* (Al-Riyād: Wizārat Al-Thaqāfah Wa Al-`lām, Wakālat Al-Wizārah Lil-Shu'un Al-Thaqāfiyah, 2009), p. 30.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Social Transformations in Saudi Arabia in the Post-Gulf War Period**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

After discussing the causes and types of social marginalisation and focusing on the case of Saudi Arabia in the first chapter, this chapter will address the social transformations which took place in Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of the Gulf War in order to understand the circumstances which resulted in the marginalisation of several social categories in the country. The general aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how these transformations greatly increased opportunities for freedom of speech and facilitated demands for human rights. This background information, covering the events of the period from 1990 and 2011, serves to contextualise the novels which will be analysed in later chapters, for it will be argued in this thesis that studies of this kind are required to provide an overview of social developments which are reflected in literary phenomena and influence the artistic elements of such texts.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part deals with the main social transformations which took place in the period in question and considers why this period is viewed as the dawn of a new era in civil and human rights awareness in Saudi Arabia, the growth of ideological and fundamentalist conflicts and the impact of technological developments on Saudi society. The second part examines some of the controversial issues which have emerged among both educated elites and the

general public in Saudi Arabia since the start of the Gulf War namely censorship, terrorism, the growing influence of the religious police and calls for women's rights.

### **3.2 The Gulf War and its Immediate Impact**

War often serves as an important turning point when speaking about the history of nations. It can create significant changes at its outset, for the period of its duration and also after it has ceased. These changes usually become manifest in the lifestyle of people and can greatly influence their traditions and their way of life, both positively and negatively. In addition, war can alter people's ideas and their perceptions of everything around them. The Gulf War, as one of the most important global events in recent history, has had profound influences, not only on the internal affairs of the Gulf States themselves (including Saudi Arabia) but also on the relationship between those countries. It also impacted significantly on their relationship with other major international powers involved in that conflict such as the United States. For the purposes of this thesis, the focus here will be solely on social transformations in Saudi Arabia which arose in the aftermath of the Gulf War.

The Gulf War produced what could be termed a "culture shock" in Saudi society because it created tensions between the Saudi people and their own government<sup>1</sup>. This was further compounded, almost a decade later, by the cataclysmic events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. Fifteen of the perpetrators of the attacks on The World Trade Centre were Saudi citizens, which had a direct impact on Saudi society in the period of social change relevant to this study. Some of the key features of the social

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<sup>1</sup> Daryl Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 219.

transformations which occurred in Saudi Arabia during the two decades following the Gulf War are explored in the following sections.

### **3.3 A New Era in Civil and Human Rights Awareness**

During the first year of the Gulf War, the Saudi government was preoccupied with how to defend itself from a possible Iraqi attack, meaning that the regime lost its focus on other important aspects of internal security, such as monitoring opposition movements among the elites and the general population. There were many criticisms of the regime's policies by certain opposition voices but the main issue at that time was the use of foreign armies to fight against the Iraqi regime, which had revealed how unprepared the Saudi Government was to defend the country against foreign attacks, making all levels of society, particularly the people involved in politics, seriously rethink the future. Due to the "uncertainty and flux [which] permeated Saudi society during the Gulf War"<sup>2</sup> some attempts had to be made by religious scholars and intellectuals to explain 'the truth' to the general public and to provide advice to the ruling regime. Nevertheless, these attempts were considered a flagrant threat to the internal security of the state, and they were interpreted by the Government as dangerously undermining the State. Thus, the response of the Saudi government was to quickly arrest some members of the opposition and to dismiss others, who were mainly lawyers and academics, from their jobs.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Joshua Teitelbaum, *Holier Than Thou: Saudi Arabia's Islamic Opposition* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Clive Jones, 'Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War: The Internal-External Security Dilemma', *International Relations: The Journal of the David Davies Memorial Institute of International Studies International Relations*, 12 (1995), p. 36.

Two letters were presented to King Fahd at that time concerning reforms. The first appeared in May 1991 and took the form of a petition entitled *khitāb Al-Matālib* (Letter of Demands). It was signed by some 400 intellectuals, mostly from Islamic universities such as Imam University in Riyadh. This letter focused on new topics for debate in Saudi society, including reviewing the qualifications of the members of the Consultative Council, fairer distribution of wealth, and the extent to which the media should serve Islamic principles and oppose westernisation policies, such as whether or not women should be allowed to drive.<sup>4</sup> The second letter, entitled *Nasīḥa* (Advice), was a manifesto signed by 109 religious scholars (*Najdi Ulama*) and academics in July 1992. This paved the way for the establishment of The Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights on May 7<sup>th</sup> 1993.<sup>5</sup>

These events cast a shadow over all sectors of Saudi society and particularly women. In the context of the reform appeal, some groups of women tried to take the opportunity to exercise their right to drive, which was seen as a reckless venture which breached tradition and went against all the rules and regulations of conservative Saudi society. According to Crenshaw, some 70<sup>6</sup> Saudi women risked serious prosecution when they dismissed their drivers in the parking lot of Safeway's store in Riyadh city and proceeded to drive to the centre of town in protest against the prohibition against females driving.<sup>7</sup>

At the core of the issue of women driving was one of the underlying concepts of the new awareness about women's rights in the aftermath of the Gulf War. One reason

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<sup>4</sup> Teitelbaum, pp. 32-33.

<sup>5</sup> Jones, p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> Ayshah Al-Manea and Hissah Al-Shaykh in their book '*Al-Sādis Min November 1990: Al-Mar'ah wa Qiādat Al-Sayyārah*' [*the Sixth of November: Woman and Driving the Car 1990*], mention that the number of women who participated in this event was 47. This issue will be discussed with more depth in the chapter on 'Social Marginalisation of Saudi Women Due to Gender'.

<sup>7</sup> Crenshaw, p. 229.

for this demand and the risk taken by those 70 female drivers in Riyadh was the feeling that the Gulf War represented a suitable opportunity for women to achieve equal rights with men. However, this feeling among some educated women and their supporters was not shared by the majority of Saudi people at that time, leading to a huge debate in Saudi society about this matter. In addition, there were other controversial issues in connection with the belief that “Women in every field are subordinate to men”.<sup>8</sup> For instance, in the field of education there is still an ongoing debate regarding the position of women in Saudi educational institutions, particularly regarding co-education, since gender segregation is an essential component of the education policy in Saudi Arabia.

With regard to the economy, there were calls to address the problem of the high unemployment rate which reached an approximate figure of 13 per cent in the aftermath of the Gulf War, a figure which prompted the Saudi Government to allocate around 34 per cent of the total expenditure to the defence sector (in its fifth Five-Year Plan covering 1990-1995).<sup>9</sup> However unemployment was expected to remain high for a long time for two reasons. The first was due to the budget deficit brought about by spending on the armed forces which had participated in the Gulf War and the second is related to Saudi’s chief source of economic revenue: “Following what became known as the ‘Gulf War to liberate Kuwait’, crude oil prices entered a period of steady decline until, in 1994, inflation-adjusted prices reached their lowest level since 1973”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Amani Hamdan, 'Women and Education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Achievements', *International Education Journal*, 6 (2005), p. 48.

<sup>9</sup> Congressional Quarterly, p. 428.

<sup>10</sup> James L Williams, 'Oil Price History and Analysis', *WTRG Economics*, May (2008), p. 9. Available at: <<http://www.nclack.k12.or.us/site/default.aspx?PageType=19>> [Accessed on 15/11/2011]



### 3.4 The Emergence of Ideological and Fundamentalist Conflicts

As the land of the two Holy Mosques, Mecca and Medina, Saudi Arabia has long been regarded as the main pilgrimage destination for Muslims from all over the world. It is commonly held to be the protector of the rule of Islam and *Sharī'ah* and has a solid reputation among Muslim communities on the basis of this commitment. Therefore, many Muslims strive to live in, or at least near, to Mecca and Medina. For this and other reasons, Saudi Arabia has been the focus of attention for the Islamic world since it was established. Thus, it is not surprising that Saudi Arabia is interested in Islamic Science and in the application of this to everyday life.

Interest in applying Islamic religious principles to political affairs had not been a contentious issue prior to the Gulf War but, following the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces in 1990, the need arose to explain Islam's attitude towards this. From that moment on, people in Saudi Arabia began to hear a range of divergent opinions on a variety of subjects, from asking for aid from foreign armies to internal political affairs. As a result, the Saudi community began to split into several factions and various schools of thought. The main ideological schools of thought who influenced public opinion at that time were: The Muslim Brotherhood, Neo-Wahhabism, *Al-Qaeda* and Shiite fundamentalism.<sup>11</sup>

Many historians believe that the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood was introduced to Saudi Arabia in the 1970s by members of the Egyptian Islamic Brotherhood, who had been forced to leave their homeland after facing harassment and persecution from President Jamal Abdul Nasser. Members of the Egyptian Brotherhood, who came to the Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, as teachers, brought with them two

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<sup>11</sup> Jones, p. 42, and Teitelbaum, p. 3.

key concepts of their movement: *Jihad* (fighting against enemies of Islam) and *Al-Da'wah* (the call to Islam). At that time, most of them were teaching in religious universities such as Imam University and Umm Al-Qura University. Their students liked and welcomed these ideas and attempts to disseminate them among different sectors of society where met with a large degree of success.<sup>12</sup> It was inevitable that this movement would begin to exercise a wider influence, particularly in the wake of the Gulf War, when conditions were ripe for applying the concept of *Jihad* in particular and the advocacy of political participation in general, especially as the Muslim Brotherhood was well versed in both these subjects.

Many books had been written in similar circumstances by members of the Muslim Brotherhood during their time in Egypt, providing them with a valuable precedent regarding ways of dealing with such historical events. However, Dore Gold stresses that the movement's theories were not entirely applicable to Saudi Wahhabism,<sup>13</sup> especially regarding obedience to the ruler. Directly after the Gulf War, there was an escalation of the dispute between those who were influenced by the Brotherhood and those who were followers of Wahhabism. As a consequence, the Saudi government was able to regain influence over public opinion through the resurgence of what came to be termed as 'Neo-Wahhabism'.<sup>14</sup>

Two other related movements began to gain in popularity: *Al-Qaeda* and *Shiite* fundamentalism. The aims of Al-Qaeda began to emerge in the early 1990s when Saudis started to hear about this organisation following the return of Arabs from the

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<sup>12</sup> Congressional Quarterly, p. 128.

<sup>13</sup> Dore Gold, *Hatred's Kingdom: How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2003), pp. 54-55.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, p. 32.

Afghan conflict. Many people sympathised with their call to *Jihad*.<sup>15</sup> According to Parker, many of the followers of this organisation were from Saudi Arabia due in part to Osama Bin Ladin's Saudi background and also perhaps as a result of the formative influence of hard-line *Wahhabis* in Saudi Arabia.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, this organisation quickly became known in Saudi society in the period after 1990.

Before discussing the influence of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, two significant events should first be highlighted, namely the Riyadh bombings in 1995 and the Al-Khobar bombing in 1996, both of which were the consequence of Islamic opposition to the Government. It was believed that those who carried out the Riyadh bombings had been influenced by Afghan jihadist ideology whilst those responsible for the Al-Khobar bombing were followers of *Shiite* fundamentalism.<sup>17</sup>

All of these events contributed to create an environment suitable for social transformations in both the ideological and the religious spheres in Saudi Arabia following the Gulf War. However, Al-Qaeda was considered to be the most dangerous of all the religious movements in Saudi Arabia. As an Islamic fundamentalist movement, it first began recruiting actively in Saudi Arabia in 1996 and the government's initial response was slow and naive. The vast majority of Saudi volunteers who had trained in Afghanistan arrived in Saudi Arabia from 1990 onwards.<sup>18</sup>

The first attack by the Saudi branch of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula took place in May 2003. After that, the Saudi Government once again used Neo-Wahhabism to

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 99.

<sup>16</sup> Congressional Quarterly, p. 129.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman, *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs* (Washington Square, N.Y.: New York University Press, 2005), p. 277.

<sup>18</sup> Hegghammer, p. 117.

protect the younger generation from the ideology of Al-Qaeda. As Parker notes: “Growing international criticism also contributed to the religious elite adopting a more moderate approach in their politics as well as their cooperation with the Government”<sup>19</sup>. International relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States began to deteriorate in the wake of the cataclysmic events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, prompting the Saudi Government to look elsewhere for economic allies, particularly to Asian states such as India, China and Japan.<sup>20</sup> This economic alliance will undoubtedly bring in new cultural influences as a result of the importation of goods and the establishment of new companies which will, in turn, prove to be another significant source of social transformations in Saudi since the Gulf War and, in particular, following the 9/11 events.

### **3.5 The Impact of Technological Developments on Social Transformations in Saudi Arabia**

It is evident that technological change in Saudi Arabia was not a direct consequence of the Gulf War (as indeed is the case for a number of other changes in Saudi society) but rather a result of globalisation, which has swept the whole world. Technological development is nevertheless one of the most important features of the post-Gulf War period with the advent of digital technology in the form of satellite channels and the Internet being responsible for most far-reaching changes. This section will consider some important technological milestones, addressing in further detail those pertaining directly to social change.

Whereas previously, cassette tape has been a key means of rapidly and quickly disseminating ideas, the advent of the fax machine in the post-Gulf War period

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<sup>19</sup> *Congressional Quarterly*, p. 427.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 434.

meant that it became increasingly problematic for the Saudi Government to control the growth of opposition to its policies in many parts of Saudi Arabia. The impact of the cassette was waning with the advent of new technology, particularly the Internet.<sup>21</sup>

Many ideological conflicts developed following the appearance of the Internet in Saudi Arabia in 1994. One of the most important websites was *Al-Sāhāt Al-Arabiya*, which had 80,000 Arab members, the majority of whom were from Saudi Arabia. It has hosted many Islamists who have adapted readily to this new technology in an attempt to compensate for their lack of representation on satellite channels.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, it is important to mention that the population of Saudi Arabia had already been looking for alternative media sources during the Gulf War as they believed that the official Saudi media were neither sufficiently professional nor accurate in reporting news of the Gulf War, possibly due to censorship by the regime, as Champion observes: “Among the most dramatic examples of censorship by complete omission is the [Saudi media’s] failure for five days to report the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990”.<sup>23</sup>

Champion has stated that on more than one occasion in the 1990s, the Saudi Government attempted to influence public opinion by taking control of technologically advanced satellite media, Radio and Television (ART) and the Orbit Communications Corporation.<sup>24</sup> They also established the *Al-Arabiya* channel in an attempt to divert attention away from the *Al-Jazeera* channel about which the Saudi Government felt uneasy. The channel was also intended to promote “what they felt

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<sup>21</sup> Abdulaziz Al-khidhr, *Al-Saūdiyyah: Sīrat Dāwlah wa Mujtama* [Saudi Arabia: The Biography of a State and a Society] (Beirut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing, 2011), p. 250.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 429-430.

<sup>23</sup> Champion, p. 265.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

was the need for Saudi Arabia and its Western allies to counter Iran's growing influence in the Middle East and what certain commentators and politicians have called 'The *Shiite Crescent*'".<sup>25</sup>

### **3.6 Controversial Issues in the Cultural and Intellectual Arena**

Many controversial issues have emerged among educated elites and the general public in Saudi Arabia since the start of the Gulf War. The emergence of such issues could be said to be a natural result of the overall changes which have occurred in people's political, economic and social lives. Thus, many writers and academics have sought to promote feelings of responsibility for dealing with such issues by discussing them extensively. The most important issues which appeared in the writings of this era and continue to be discussed in various media are explored in the following sections.

#### **3.6.1 Censorship**

Censorship is usually seen as being of crucial interest among writers as it affects their right to express their views, beliefs and desires fully and prevents them from being able to contribute to debates in their chosen fields. The educated elites bear the brunt of the resistance against censorship so they can put forward their opinions clearly on whatever subject they wish. Writers usually try to show people how censorship limits their freedom of speech. They use various forms of writing including novels, poems, plays and articles, to communicate their ideas to all strata of society and to attempt to portray the danger that censorship represents to the

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Cochrane, 'Saudi Arabia's Media Influence', *Order*, 1 (2007), p. 9. Available at: <[http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20071001153449\\_AMS3\\_Paul\\_Cochrane.p df](http://www.arabmediasociety.com/articles/downloads/20071001153449_AMS3_Paul_Cochrane.pdf)> [accessed on 20/11/2011].

thoughts and attitudes of people who might otherwise believe that censorship “can be productive”.<sup>26</sup>

In the case of Saudi Arabia, two specific factors help the regime in its attempts to impose censorship on the Saudi society, namely, people’s concerns about pornography and material offensive to Islam, together with the fact that Saudi Arabia is a monarchy in which the royal family is sensitive to criticism and opposition views, and consequently will not permit these.<sup>27</sup> In this respect, Saudi society seems to host a dictatorial regime, as Huda Yehia argued in her comparative study on translation, culture, and censorship in Saudi Arabia and Iraq, in which she explored similarities between these two countries.<sup>28</sup>

### **3.6.2 Terrorism**

Terrorism is an important subject in Saudi Arabia’s political arena, especially following the events of 9<sup>th</sup> September 2001, when people started to talk about young Saudi men who had participated in the US attacks, and groups from Afghanistan that entered the Arabian Peninsula during that time to carry out other bombing operations inside Saudi Arabia itself. Many analysts have examined what motivated these actions. Like other governments, the Saudi administration started a debate concerning ‘religious terrorism’ on the grounds that: “Religion is a motive force for the catalysis of terrorist campaigns and that, moreover, religious zeal sustains a terrorist movement over extended periods of time, allowing it to survive considerable

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<sup>26</sup> Barbara Leckie, *Culture and Adultery: The Novel, the Newspaper, and the Law, 1857-1914* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> T. C. Boas, 'Weaving the Authoritarian Web', *Current History -New York Then Philadelphia-*, 103 (2004), p. 440.

<sup>28</sup> Huda A. Yehia, *Translation, Culture, and Censorship in Saudi Arabia (1988-2006) and Iraq (1979-2005)*, (2007), p. 1.

adversity”.<sup>29</sup> The term ‘religious terrorism’ has been spread by the media as a controversial issue, and people speak about it widely. In addition it continues to feature in numerous academic studies, newspaper articles, and in all aspects of life.

A serious discussion emerged about the interpretation of terrorism. Many people denounce terrorism, but sympathise with the plight of those Muslims whom they feel are forced—as a result of desperation—to commit such militant acts. Others point to the hostile governments that have utilised unwarranted, brutal force against civilians which amounts to state terrorism. However, this has not distracted the Saudi regime from its war on terrorism. According to Abdullah Ansary, the Saudi government has:

Embarked on a very aggressive counterterrorism campaign: arresting thousands of people, questioning thousands of suspects, dismantling Al-Qaeda cells and killing or capturing their leaders, seizing large caches of arms, extraditing suspects from other countries, and establishing joint task forces with global partners, including the United States.<sup>30</sup>

### **3.6.3 The Rise of the Religious Police (Hay’atu Al-amr bi Al-Márūf wa Al-Nahyī ‘an Al-Munkar)**

Saudi’s Religious Police, also called the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, (Hay’atu Al-amr bi Al-Márūf wa Al-Nahyī ‘an Al-Munkar) is one of the most prominent elements of the Salafist call and the Wahhabi trend in Saudi Arabia. The Commission existed before the Gulf War and did not face strong criticism and due to government support, was able to improve its efforts. After the Gulf War, the Commission was reactivated due to popular support from the *Sahwa* movement in Saudi Arabia which tried to re-explain the concept of the call to Islam.

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<sup>29</sup> Jean Elizabeth Rosenfeld, *Terrorism, Identity and Legitimacy: The Four Waves Theory and Political Violence* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), p. 71.

<sup>30</sup> Abdullah Ansary, 'Combating Extremism: A Brief Overview of Saudi Arabia's Approach', *Middle East Policy*, 15 (2008), p. 111.



In addition, the *Sahwa* focused on the Commission as a feature not found in other societies that might help to overcome the perceived crises besetting other states. Therefore, the majority of Saudi society encouraged the Commission to proceed with its tasks.

However, as the Internet grew, criticism of this Commission emerged, primarily among anonymous commentators. Little by little, journalists began to talk about the negative role of the Religious Police, focusing on two key incidents:

The first concerned a fire in a girls' school in Mecca on 11 March 2002, which resulted in 50 casualties and 11 deaths. At the time, the Commission was accused of not allowing the girls to leave the school out of fear that they would mix with boys without wearing the proper *hijab* covering. However, the Commission issued a statement saying it did not prevent the girls from exiting the school during the fire and said it had evidence to prove this.

The second concerned the death of Salmān Al-Hārisy which occurred while the Commission chased him through Riyadh.

Both incidents helped to raise public concerns about some of the Commission's actions.

### **3.6.4 Women's Rights**

With the growth of satellite television and the Internet, women's rights have become an important subject which is openly discussed, especially following the events of September 2001, which encouraged people to talk about Saudi women in other societies. As telecommunications technology has advanced, the restrictions on women and men mixing have become less rigid and somehow irrelevant. Women

have become able to speak virtually to foreign men who are not family members by using modern electronic communications and the Internet.

Three key topics have emerged in this area. The first concerns women's education in Saudi Arabia which was affected by the biggest event in its recent history—namely, the integration of the Ministry of Education of Boys and the General Presidency for Girls' Education. As Amani Hamdan assumes, some demands was raised through the media to integrate the General Presidency for Girls' Education integrated with the Ministry of Education after a fire in March 2002 in an elementary girls' school in Mecca which resulted in fifteen dead young girls.<sup>31</sup> Many religiously conservative people feared that this would be the start of co-education, ending single-sex schooling.

The issue of women's employment in mixed workplaces continues to attract controversy not only inside Saudi Arabia but also outside it, according to the British newspaper *The Telegraph* of February 9<sup>th</sup> 2012: "From Thursday, only female staff will be able to sell women's lingerie in Saudi Arabia, ending decades of awkwardness in the ultra-conservative Muslim kingdom where women are expected to don black cloaks at all times out of the home".<sup>32</sup>

As noted previously, the Riyadh protest against the prohibition against females driving re-ignited the broader debate concerning women's rights and Islam. Since then, the topic of women driving cars has continued to be debated in the media and in all circles of society. As part of the Women2Drive campaign, Saudi girls now post

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<sup>31</sup> Hamdan, p. 44.

<sup>32</sup> 'Men Banned from Selling Lingerie in Saudi Arabia', *The Telegraph* (2012). Available at: <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/saudi-arabia/8993690/Men-banned-from-selling-lingerie-in-Saudi-Arabia.html>> [accessed 04/02/2012]

video clips of themselves driving cars on YouTube, leading to arrests and trials for violating government law.<sup>33</sup>

Various aspects of women's rights have therefore proved to be an issue of major concern in contemporary Saudi society during the period under discussion, attracting media attention and prompting popular debate. Various aspects relating to women's rights will be addressed during the analysis of the novels selected for this research.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a summary of the social transformations that are taking place in Saudi Arabia as a result of the Gulf War and has also referred to the impact of the events popularly known as 9/11 on the society and its readiness for various transformations in an ultra-conservative environment for which it has always been known .

The chapter has also highlighted a number of controversial issues which preoccupied public opinion in Saudi society with the aim of providing an orientation to the influential movements of that era, which will serve to contextualise the later analysis of the chosen literary texts. The following chapters of this study will take a thematic approach to studying the representation of marginalised segments of Saudi society in a selection of novels by authors from Saudi Arabia published during the period 1990-2011 (see section 2.3). The analysis will draw on some of the contextual elements discussed in this chapter, highlighting other issues as they emerge in the discussed novels.

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<sup>33</sup> Serpil Yuce, Nitin Agarwal, and Rolf T Wigand, 'Mapping Cyber-Collective Action among Female Muslim Bloggers for the Women to Drive Movement', in *Social Computing, Behavioral-Cultural Modeling and Prediction* (Springer, 2013), pp. 331-340;

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Social Marginalisation of Saudi Women Due to Gender

#### 4.1 Introduction

Applying feminist theory to Saudi literature requires an exploration of key conceptual frame works in gender theory. The legacy of gender studies brings about literature written by both women and men alike. In his article “The Sociology of Gender”, J. Mill emphasises that “gender awareness has modified existing sociological theory and led to the creation of a new feminist paradigm”<sup>1</sup>. Aside from defining what gender is and what is feminism, researchers explore sex when they look at male or female features. This chapter will address the theme of marginalised women in Saudi novels by using gender equality theory. This theory comprises theories of both gender and feminism, bearing in mind that there are common elements between the two sets of theories.

According to Valerie Bryson, “many of the existing differences between women and men are a socially produced matter of gender rather than a natural quality of sex; as such, they are open to challenge and change”.<sup>2</sup> Gender, race and class are the most important ascribed statuses, based on Marxist theory. Based on this perspective, studies of social marginalisation of women still need to use concepts drawn from both feminist and gender theory.

The theory of gender alone cannot explain the marginalisation of women, especially in patriarchal Saudi society. Indeed, in gender studies, some researchers see that

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<sup>1</sup> Linda L Lindsey and Sandra Christie, *Gender Roles* (Prentice Hall, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Valerie Bryson, *Gender and the Politics of Time: Feminist Theory and Contemporary Debates* (The Policy Press, 2007), p. 52.

“biological sex is no longer of main interest; instead gender researchers are more interested in studying the formation of ‘men’ and ‘women’ in social and cultural processes”.<sup>3</sup>

Patriarchal structure can be global but it is not inevitable in all societies. In some countries, the gender system is a historical action of life and it is a contemporary fact of life in some others. J. Belkhir argues that “the failure of Marxism to develop adequate tools and comprehensive theory of ethnicity, gender and class is undisputable”<sup>4</sup>. As stated earlier, gender equality theory is best suited to discuss the marginalisation of Saudi women. Reckdenwald's article, “The Influence of Gender Inequality and Marginalisation on Types of Female Offending”<sup>5</sup> claims that by examining measures of gender inequality and economic marginalisation together, we can better understand the female gender.<sup>6</sup>

The subject of gender equality is the most discussed issue in Saudi Arabia in regard to women. In Saudi Arabia, women are segregated in public places, are forbidden to drive. Husbands can divorce wives without explanation, by simply registering a statement with the court. In contrast, wives cannot initiate a divorce and if they do, they lose custody of and the right to see their children, because under the law children, especially daughters belong to their fathers.

This part of the study will examine Saudi novels written by both men and women and the depiction of Saudi women in relation to violence, bargaining with the patriarchal society, women's resistance and the feminisation of poverty and all those

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<sup>3</sup> Danijela Lassen Inger Majstorovic, *Living with Patriarchy Discursive Constructions of Gendered Subjects across Cultures*(Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Jean Belkhir, 'The "Failure" and Revival of Marxism on Race, Gender & Class Issues', *Race, Sex & Class*, 2 (1994), 79-107 (p. 79).

<sup>5</sup> See Amy Reckdenwald and Karen F Parker, 'The Influence of Gender Inequality and Marginalisation on Types of Female Offending', *Homicide Studies*, 12 (2008), 1-19.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

issues will be examined in both the public sphere and private one. In addition, this study will explore gender stereotypes, women's empowerment and gender mainstream in selected novels. According to Cameron, “reality is understood as constructed by social forces and it has become sound as natural”.<sup>7</sup> So, it is important to start with an explanation of how the Saudi novel represents gender roles in a Saudi society which puts women in this weak position.

## 4.2 Gender Roles in Saudi Society

In *Saqf Al-Kifāyah (The Roof of Enough)*, Mohammed Alwan<sup>8</sup> explores the relationship between males and females in Riyadh and uses a male protagonist, Nāṣir, to comment on how this urban community enforces a clear differentiation between the sexes, beginning in childhood:

في الرياض يعلموننا أحيانا كيف نكون ذكوراً قبل أن يعلمونا كيف نكون إنساً , تكتمل ذكورتنا قبل إنسانيتنا , ويجتهد الجميع في تلقين هذا الدرس , حتى النساء أنفسهن , يربين أولادهن على الذكورة الصرفة , ويوحين للابن منذ طفولته بأنه رجل , لا يجدر به اللعب مع البنات<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes, in Riyadh, they teach us how to be a male before they teach us how to be a human. Our masculinity is fully formed before our humanity. Everybody works hard to teach us this lesson, even females themselves. They bring up their little boys to become real men which will prevent them from playing with girls.

The author uses Nāṣir's reflections to comment on the relationship between boys and girls in Riyadh society so he can explain why he needed to hide his relationship with the girl he loved. He describes the pervasive effect of society on their life as a couple.

The male protagonist and narrator plead with the reader:

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<sup>7</sup> Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> He was born in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in 1979. He has four novels. He was selected as one of the 39 best Arab authors under the age of 40 by the 2009-2010 Beirut 39 project of the Hay Festival and Beirut World Book Capital. His work has been published in the Beirut 39 Anthology. See, Author's profile in *Banipal Magazine*. Available at: <<http://www.banipal.co.uk/contributors/511/mohammed-hasan-alwan/>> [accessed on 12/02/2013]

<sup>9</sup> Muhammed Alwan, *Saqf Al-Kifāyah [The Roof of Enough]*, 1 edn (Beirut: Dar Al-Farabi, 2004), p. 35.

لا أفهم كيف يمكن لأم أن تربي ابنها على انتقاص بنات جنسها دون أن تدري؟ , فيكبر الفتى وهو “ مستعد على النساء , وتكبر الفتاة وهي خائفة من رجل لم تعرفه , لم أفهم أبدا لماذا يعلمون الأولاد دروس التفاضل على النساء ولا يعلمونهم دروس التكامل معهن من أجل معادلة صحيحة”<sup>10</sup>

I do not understand how a mother can teach her son to despise those of her own gender without realising her mistake. Then the boy will grow up and attack women, meaning that the girl will also grow up to be afraid of a man who does not know. I have never understood why boys are brought up to be superior to women rather than to teach both males and females how to complement each other in order to achieve equilibrium.

Thus, Alwan argues that Saudi society teaches boys that all men are better than all women. Munira Al-Sahi, the female protagonist of *Munira's Bottle* by Yousef Al-Mohaimeed<sup>11</sup>, voices a similar point of view, reflecting on her relationship with the boys and men in her life:

I am a female, just a female with clipped wings. That is how people see me in my country, a female with no power and no strength. My sole purpose is to receive, like the earth receives the rain and the sunlight and the plough. Supine and recumbent am I, unable to stand erect like a male. I submissively accept all things, even love.<sup>12</sup>

The novelist uses passive terms such as: “recipient”, “I’ll belong to my teenage son” and “tell me what to do and what not to do”, to make the readers sympathise with Munira, who has been betrayed by her husband ‘Ali Al-Dahhal. Al-Nafjān confirms Munira’s evaluation of her legal position as a woman in Saudi Arabia in the following terms:

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Yousef Al-Mohaimeed, as he is defined by “Penguin Books”, was born in Riyadh in 1964. He has published several novels and short story collections in Arabic and has had stories published in Lebanon, Egypt, France, Germany, Spain, and Russia. He studied English and photography at Norwich University in England and was recently presented with an award by Diwan al Arab magazine and the Egyptian Journalists Union in recognition of his creative contribution to Arab culture. He lives in Riyadh. Available at: <http://www.penguin.com/author/yousef-al-mohaimeed/1000071357> [accessed on 20/01/ 2013]

<sup>12</sup> Yousef Al-Mohaimeed, *Munira's Bottle*, ([S.I.]: Amer Univ In Cairo Press, 2004), p. 72.

Every Saudi woman has a male guardian. At birth, the guardianship is given to her father and then upon marriage to her husband. If a woman is a widow, her guardianship is given to her son—meaning that she would need her own son's permission for the majority of her interactions with the government, including the right to travel abroad.<sup>13</sup>

In her article on women and education in Saudi Arabia, Hamdan notes that until 2001, “Saudi women were considered an extension of their male guardians.”<sup>14</sup> Through Munira, Al-Mohaimeed echoes the sentiments voiced by the protagonist of *Saqf Al-Kifāyah (The roof of enough)* concerning the way in which mothers treat their sons and daughters:

When I was child, my mother taught me to be wary of strangers, to keep to myself, to store my emotions and energy inside. It was my three brothers whose energies had right to burst forth into the world. Even their genitals moved freely on the outside while mine were tucked inside. This is what my mother taught me in childhood: to keep my emotions and my energy inside me... because only my three brothers are allowed to display their energies.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, it becomes obvious that mothers in Saudi Arabia teach their sons and daughters that there is a gender difference between them. In *Girls of Riyadh*, Rajaa Al-Sanea<sup>16</sup> describes the result, referring to her male character, ‘Son of sheikhs’<sup>17</sup>:

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<sup>13</sup> Iman Al-Nafjan, 'What Do Saudi Women Want?', *Foreign Policy*, November 28, 2011 (2011). Available at: <[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/11/28/what\\_do\\_saudi\\_women\\_want](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/11/28/what_do_saudi_women_want)> [Accessed on 21/07/2012]

<sup>14</sup> Hamdan, p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, pp. 70-71.

<sup>16</sup> Saudi writer Rajaa Al-Sanea was born in Kuwait in 1981. She shot to fame in 2005 when her highly controversial book *Girls of Riyadh* was first published in Lebanon. The book was long-listed for the Dublin Literary Award in 2009. In her native country, Saudi Arabia, it was immediately banned and there remains a distinctive divide in opinion of the novel, which was heavily criticised in the Saudi media. While Al-Sanea is held as a role model by liberals, the conservative sections of Saudi society have heavily criticised the book for being unconventional. Al-Sanea, who comes from a family of doctors, is now a practising dentist in Chicago. Rumour has it that she is currently penning her next novel. See, 'Revealed: 100 Most Powerful Arab Women 2012', in *Arabian Business* (Dubai: Arabian Business Publishing Ltd, 2012). Available at: <<http://www.arabianbusiness.com/100-most-powerful-arab-women-2012-448295.html?view=profile&itemid=448264#.VBb9nJRdWAO>> [accessed on 05/08/2013]



“It is perfectly natural for a man to choose a woman who is inferior to him (especially since all women, in his view, are one level below men in the hierarchy of organisms anyway).”<sup>18</sup>

Men are raised to believe that women's demands for equal rights are not acceptable, especially when the women are the ones making the demands. In addition, longstanding customs and traditions in Saudi society prevent women from claiming their rights. According to tradition, women are forbidden to raise their voices in the presence of men.

One researcher describes the situation of Saudi women as follows:

The women's question in Saudi Arabia is not taboo, at least, not anymore. It has been discussed intensively by public personalities such as certain members of the government, some official and unofficial *Ulama*, and a number of female and male intellectuals with different orientations.<sup>19</sup>

However, in *Lam A'ud Abkī (I no longer cry)*, by Zaynab Hifni,<sup>20</sup> Ṭalāl, a male journalist who is in love with the protagonist, is sentenced to jail for six months for daring to write about women's rights. Some novelists portray issues as they see them rather than exactly as they occurred.

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<sup>17</sup> He is defined thus by the translator of the novel as: Here, Sheikh refers to the patriarch of an Arabian tribe or family. See: Rajaa Al-Sanea, *Girls of Riyadh* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 265.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 265-266.

<sup>19</sup> Amélie Le Renard, 'Only for Women: Women, the State, and Reform in Saudi Arabia', *The Middle East Journal*, 62 (2008): 61-629 (p. 617).

<sup>20</sup> Zaynab Hifni, *Lam 'A'ud 'Abkī [I no longer cry]*, (Beirut: Dar Al Saqi, 2013), p. 114. Hifni was prevented from travelling and writing in the press after publishing her 1996 novel *Nisā' 'alā Khaṭ Al-Istiwā'* [*Women on the Equator*], which addresses issues of sex, love, and women's rights. Hifni talks about this work in an interview for *Iḍā'āt* programme on Al-Arabia Channel, which was uploaded onto YouTube in 2011:

<[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ox8\\_SyyyJlk&list=PL22F32B69D68FC72C](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ox8_SyyyJlk&list=PL22F32B69D68FC72C)> [accessed on 10/10/2013]

When people, like oppressed minorities and women, are too afraid of the strong reaction from others towards their claims for equal treatment, they remain at the margins of society. According to some Saudi novelists, that is exactly what has happened to Saudi women. Rajaa Al-Sanea emphasises this point in her description of girls in Riyadh shopping centres:

Guys stare at women for their own reasons, while women stare at each other just because they are nosy! And they have no excuse for it. A girl cannot stroll about in the malls under the protection of God without being checked out thoroughly by everyone.<sup>21</sup>

In Riyadh, the level of watching each other is higher than elsewhere in Saudi Arabia.<sup>22</sup> Young people are watching each other even though they all make the same mistakes. Alwan says in a conversation between Nāṣir and the girl he loves:

في مدينة مثل الرياض , هنا الجميع رقباء... حتى هذا الشاب العابث كان رقيباً علينا رغم عبثه.<sup>23</sup>

In a city like Riyadh, everyone is watching everyone else, even that frivolous guy was watching us although he messes up.<sup>24</sup>

An atmosphere of this kind ensures that women are kept at the margins, attempting to keep far away from those locations (Malls for example) that community traditions consider suspicious. Later in the novel, Nāṣir engages in an internal monologue with his girlfriend about the bag which she had given him as a present:

كم من لعنات المدينة ستنتهمر عليك لو قدر لهذه الحقيبة أن يفتحها أحد غيري؟<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Al-Sanea, p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> For example, there has been a big debate about preventing the CPVPV from entering chalets in Jeddah unless it gets permission from the prince of Mecca while in Riyadh it can enter any public places for its tasks. See, 'Al-Hay'Ah Tanfī wa Al-'Arīfī Yū'akid (Cpvpv Confirms It but Al-Arifi Denies It)', in *Ajil*, (Saudi Arabia: Ajil, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Alwan, p. 48.

<sup>24</sup> By flirting, for example.

How many curses of this city [Riyadh] would pour down on you if this bag was made available to be opened by everybody?

This reflects the extent to which Saudi women are not allowed to have a personal life in public spaces. The problems of Saudi women are more likely to be expressed in novels than in the media. Saudi women are in the best position to protest the restrictions that are imposed on them. However, some male Saudi novelists have also exposed some of the problems faced by Saudi women. Usually, insider writers are better at expressing their opinions about women's situation in their communities than outsider authors, but they may not have the freedom to talk about some of the issues which are considered taboo in their social environment. So, while they are more able to express the problems faced by Saudi women, they do not have the freedom of those who are living abroad.

Michelle, one of the five female characters in *Girls of Riyadh*, consults an Egyptian psychiatrist after being abandoned by her boyfriend Faisal. After four visits without results, she comments:

How could a male Egyptian shrink understand the dimensions of a problem that afflicted her female Saudi self anyway, with the enormous gap in social background that their nationalities entailed, since Saudi Arabia has a unique social setting that makes its people unlike any others?<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the difference between Saudi Arabia and Egypt makes it difficult for non-Saudis to understand Saudi women. In 'What do Saudi Women Want?', Eman Al-Nafjan claims that "Saudi Arabia may be even more conservative than most outsiders think. There are some who are not only passively happy with the status quo

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<sup>25</sup> Alwan, p. .58

<sup>26</sup> AL-Sanea, p. 122.

but also loud in their resistance to any form of change”.<sup>27</sup> Thus, many people who criticise the treatment of Saudi Arabian women will be accused of opposing government policies. This idea is discussed in *Al-Riyadh–November 90* by Saad Al-Dosari<sup>28</sup> in the context of the issue of women driving.<sup>29</sup>

Believing that they are unable to debate the restrictions on Saudi women in the Kingdom’s official press, Saudi writers have resorted to the novel. In their fiction, they are also able to explain why they could not express their opinions in the press. A scene in Al-Dosari’s novel features a telephone conversation between his male protagonist and a girl from a conservative family. Since he is the editor of a magazine, she asks,<sup>30</sup> “Shouldn’t you deal with some controversial issues relating to Saudi women instead of what you usually discuss in your magazine?” He answers:

أنا أتفق معك.. لكن لدينا قائمة بالمواضيع التي لا يستطيع أحد طرحها<sup>31</sup>”

I agree with you, but we have a list of subjects which no one can talk about.

Then she replies:

“ كل ذلك لأن المرأة هي لب الموضوع<sup>32</sup>”

That is so because women are the main issue.

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<sup>27</sup> Al-Nafjan, ‘*What do Saudi women want?*’. Available at: <[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/11/28/what\\_do\\_saudi\\_women\\_want](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/11/28/what_do_saudi_women_want)> [accessed on 25/07/2012]

<sup>28</sup> A Saudi writer who won the most prestigious literary prize offered by the Ministry of Culture in Saudi Arabia in 2012. See, Saad Al-Dosari, ‘*Anfaqtu Tharwatī Alā “Al-Riyadh November 1990”*’, in *Al-Sharq*, (2012). Available at: <<http://www.alsharq.net.sa/2012/03/21/176199>> [accessed on 12/08/2012]

<sup>29</sup> Saad Al-Dosari, *Al-Riyadh-November 90*, (Beirut: Al-Markaz Al-Thaqafi Al-Arabi, 2012), pp. 110-111.

<sup>30</sup> The name of this magazine is not mentioned in the novel.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Dosari, p. 69.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.69.

The girl tries to find a logical explanation for what prevents women from claiming their own rights. At the same time, she could not discuss this subject with her family. Thus, in this conversation, it is highlighted that the main reason for preventing the discussion of Saudi women's rights is not because it does not comply with the teachings of Islam, but because it revolves around "judging women on the basis of their gender".

This could lead to misogyny. Jonte-Pace claims that Freud is seen as a misogynist thinker from his critical feminist perspective because he claims that women have a straining influence on civilisation.<sup>33</sup> That is absolutely the view of some Arab women activists nowadays. In 2012, Mona Eltahawy<sup>34</sup> caused an uproar in the media when she raised the question "Why do they hate us?" in *Foreign Policy*<sup>35</sup>, referring to the men in Arab world. In 2014, she was asked on Aljazeera channel:

Mona, is your view that there is a war being waged on women in the Arab world?

Then she answered:

Absolutely, I mean when 12-year-old girls are dying giving childbirth in Yemen, when 91 percent of Egyptian girls and women have had their genitals mutilated, when 16-year-old girls in Morocco are forced to marry their rapists so that their rapist can escape conviction, that is nothing short of a war.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Diane E Jonte-Pace, *Speaking the Unspeakable: Religion, Misogyny, and the Uncanny Mother in Freud's Cultural Texts* (California: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 6-7.

<sup>34</sup> Eltahawy was born in Port Said in August 1, 1967. Her family moved to the UK when she was 7 and then to Saudi Arabia when she was 15. She graduated from the American University in Cairo in 1990 with a bachelor's degree and earned a master's degree in mass communication with a concentration in journalism in 1992. She is a freelance Egyptian-American journalist and commentator based in New York City. She gained American citizenship in 2011, See; Rabie, Passant (December 2009). "Egyptian-born, US-based Journalist Mona Eltahawy Challenges the Stereotype of the Arab Woman".

<sup>35</sup> Mona Eltahawy, 'Why do they hate us' (*Foreign Policy*, 2012). Available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/04/23/why-do-they-hate-us/> [accessed on 02 July 2014]

<sup>36</sup> It was an interview with Mona Eltahawy on Aljazeera, (February 02, 2014). Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/headtohead/2014/02/do-arab-men-hate-women-201421282224596667.html> [accessed on 02 July 2014]

In fact, Islam, as religion, has traditionally rejected the abuse and oppression of women, and stands in opposition to many misogynistic Arabic traditions. For example, Islam prohibits *Wa'd Al-Banāt* (female infanticide). Before Islam, Arab fathers use to kill their infant daughters as they believed that girls usually bring the shame to their family so they killed them for fear of the dishonour that might inflict the family, unlike the male children who were seen as a source of pride to their fathers.

Although infanticide has been outlawed by Islam and as such is no longer practiced in Saudi society, it can be seen as a background of any impression about Arabic women especially when women are deprived of their basic human rights and privileges such as driving for reasons that have nothing to do with religion. It can be said that the misogynist attitude is found in Arabic culture and not in Islamic teachings, based on the subject of *Wa'd Al-Banāt* (female infanticide).

### **4.3 Saudi Women and the Right to Drive**

Women in Saudi Arabia are still not legally permitted to drive. It is rare to find someone talking about Saudi women without mentioning this issue. Conservative clerics and “religious puritans who object to the very idea of women are exposed to strangers outside their homes by driving”<sup>37</sup> see this as a step on the road towards westernisation and an erosion of Saudi identity. In contrast, liberal clerics argue that there is no basis for this prohibition and increasing numbers of Saudi men have

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<sup>37</sup> Neil MacFarquhar and Manal Al-Sharif, 'Saudis Arrest Woman Leading Right-to-Drive Campaign', *New York Times*(2011).

found ways to demand lifting the ban by signing petitions or even writing to King Abdullah.<sup>38</sup>

The subject of women driving has proved to be one of the most controversial issues in connection with women's rights in Saudi Arabia, mainly, as argued earlier, because of its symbolic importance in terms of women's freedom of movement. This topic has not only provoked much public debate but, as our analysis shows, it also proved to be a rich source for novelists wishing to address the subject of marginalisation of women in Saudi society.

*Al-Riyadh–November 90* by Saad Al-Dosari and *Al-Qārūrah*, (Munira's Bottle) by Yousef Al-Mohaimed are novels that mention the ban on women's driving. In addition, throughout this section reference will be made to the book, *Al-Sādis Min November 1990: Al-Mar'ah Wa Qiyādat Al-Sayyarah* (The Sixth of November 1990: Women and Driving Cars). In this book, Ayshah Almanea and Hissah Al-Shaykh, two of the 47 participants<sup>39</sup> in the Riyadh protest, recount the events that led up to the protest, their arrest and its aftermath. Al-Manea herself, a businesswoman, claims that the demonstration had a much broader symbolic value. On the fifteenth anniversary of the demonstration in 2005, she stated, "It was never about driving [...] Driving is just a symbol. [...] It's about female empowerment and mobility. Women need incomes, they need jobs, and they need a way to get to those jobs".<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Charlotte M Karam and Dima Jamali, 'Gendering CSR in the Arab Middle East', *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 23 (2012), 31-68 .

<sup>39</sup> In previous chapter entitled "Social transformations in Saudi Arabia in the Post-Gulf War", it was mentioned that women participants in this event were 70. However, 47 is the number that can be considered as it is mentioned by two participants in the demonstration, Al-Manea and Al-Shaykh.

<sup>40</sup> Faiza Saleh Ambah, "Saudi women recall a day of driving," *The Christian Science Monitor*, (December 7 2001). Available at: [www.csmonitor.com/2005/1207/p06s02-wome.html](http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1207/p06s02-wome.html)

### 4.3.1 November 6, 1990: The Driving Demonstration

This section begins by analysing the Al-Dosari's work *Al-Riyadh–November 90*. He began the novel at the end of 1991, in response to the Gulf War:

I was thinking about recording the events of the important historical stage which we lived in before and after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. It was a significant turning point in history, on both a local and an international level. Every writer in the world must have thought about writing about it or actually did.<sup>41</sup>

Al-Dosari confirmed that the majority of the people who bought his novel at the Book Fair in Riyadh in 2012 were young Saudis (males and females), perhaps because his novel is a depiction of that historic moment<sup>42</sup> and a commentary on the social issues that emerged, including women's right to drive.

Although Al-Dosari's novel was banned for twenty years until 2011,<sup>43</sup> in 2012 it won the most prestigious literary prize offered by the Ministry of Culture in Saudi Arabia.<sup>44</sup> This fact in itself shows that many social transformations have occurred in the Saudi society at all levels, including both public and official.<sup>45</sup> These social transformations have meant that Al-Dosari's novel was finally able to be read. The Saudi literary critic Abdūllah Al-Ghadhāmī commented on the significance of this novel in the following terms:

كتب سعد الدوسري هذه الرواية قبل عشرين سنة , وهي تلامس الواقعة الاجتماعية بتفاصيلها , غير أن سعداً لم يجرؤ على نشر الرواية , ومثله كان كل أصدقائه الذين تناوبوا التناصح معه في عدم نشرها. ولقد شاعت الرواية بين الأيدي , بالتصوير والتهادي , حتى لقد صارت أشهر رواية عربية

<sup>41</sup> Al-Dosari. Available at:<<http://www.alsharq.net.sa/2012/03/21/176199>>[Accessed on 12/08/2012]

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Dosari was asked about the reasons for preventing his novel, he answered: "I have no idea. You can ask the question to the agencies that I have dealt with". (See *ibid.*)

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> These social transformations are dealt with in an earlier section (Social Transformations in Saudi Arabia in the Post-Gulf War Period).



غير منشورة. ولو نشرت في حينها , لأحدثت ضجة كبيرة ومدوية , لأنها كانت فعلا أول رواية  
“سعودية تغوص في العمق وتضع اليد على الممنوع والمسكوت عنه

Saad Al-Dosari wrote this novel twenty years ago. It offers detailed coverage of events within society. However, Al-Dosari did not dare to publicise it, since all his friends advised him not to do this. It was passed from person to person by making copies of it and giving these to each other as a gift, making it the most famous unpublished novel in Arabic. If it had been published at that time, it would have created a major debate because indeed it was the first novel to address taboos with such depth.<sup>46</sup>

The novel gives the impression that the protagonist is a member of the Saudi educated elite.<sup>47</sup> In the opening scene, the hero searches his library for a famous Mexican novel. Sometimes, the author describes the details of the protagonist's daily life, sitting in the living room, reading the newspapers, watching television and conversing with his wife and his mother about the war.

The protagonist is a medical assistant in a hospital, where he encounters Saudis of all classes and backgrounds. Al-Dosari also describes the relationship between the hero of the story and his wife's cynical teenage brother, typical of many young Saudis who do not care about the future. Al-Dosari thus presents many topics, including that of women driving, from many points of view.

The protagonist hears about the women's demonstration from Munira, a student working towards her Master's in special education. She tells him: “Some girls went on a demonstration.”<sup>48</sup> البنات خرجوا في مظاهرة<sup>48</sup>”

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<sup>46</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are the researcher's own.

<sup>47</sup> The novel's first-person narrator remains nameless, although it has been proposed that the majority of Saudi novels are autobiographical. For further details, see 'Al-Kuttāb Al-Sa'ūdyīn Yalja`ūna Lissiyar Al-Thātyyah Fī `a`Malihim' ('Saudi Writers Resort to the Autobiography in Their Literary Works'), in *Asharq Al-Awsat*, ed. by Fath Al-Rahman Yousif and Yaser Al-Hijan (2010).

<sup>48</sup> Al-Dosari, p. 73.

The author deliberately uses the word “مظاهرة” (demonstration), which is how most Saudis saw it.<sup>49</sup> He also implies that the event was spontaneous.<sup>50</sup> However, Al-Manea and Al-Shaykh describe in their memoir three planning meetings. The first was held in October 1990, when Noura Al-Ghanem and her sister Sarah visited Dr Al-Shaykh in her office. The second was held in the home of Noura Al-Ghanem on October 24, 1990, when a group of women wrote a letter to Salman Bin Abdul Aziz, Prince of Riyadh, demanding their right to drive, among others. At the final meeting on November 5, 1990 at Nadia Al-Abdali's house, the women decided that the next day they would drive through the streets of Riyadh.<sup>51</sup>

Al-Dosari uses Munira to explain the extent to which the driving demonstration had been planned:<sup>52</sup>

اتفقت أربعون بنتاً وامرأة , أن يجتمعن عصر اليوم أمام مركز “قال” بشارع صلاح الدين , وقدن من هناك سيارات أزواجهن وإخوانهن باتجاه شارع العروبة , وهن الآن موقوفات رهن التحقيق في مركز شرطة العليا<sup>53</sup>

Forty girls and women agreed to meet each other this afternoon in front of the Fāl centre<sup>54</sup> in Ṣalāḥ Al-Dīn Street. They drove their husbands' and brothers' cars from there towards Al-Urūbah Street. Now, they have been detained for investigation in Al-'Ulayyā police.

<sup>49</sup> The word “المظاهرة” (Demonstration) in Arabic means helping. For example, “إذا جاء اثنان , يتظاهروا عليه” (Two people against one person) which gives a meaning of power. See: Muhammad ibn Mukarram Ibn Manzur, *Lisan Al-'Arab*, (Bierut: Dar Sadir, 1955).Chapter: “ظهر”. Also, “يظهر على عدوه”, means: he conquer his enemy, so it is mentioned in the holy book of Quran as “إنهم إن يظهروا عليكم” (When they come to know about you, they will stone you or return you to their religion). Sūrah Al-kaḥf. Ayat 20, so it refers to the power usually.

<sup>50</sup> See Al-Dosari, pp. 100,113,114,254.

<sup>51</sup> Ayshah Al-Manea and Hissah Al-Shaykh, *Al-Sādis Min November 1990: Al-Mar'ah wa Qīadat Al-Sayyārah. (the Sixth of November: Woman and Driving the Car 1990)*, 1 edn (Beirut-Lebanon: Jadawel, 2013), pp. 27-38.

<sup>52</sup> It was viewed as important to know whether the event was planned or spontaneous since there were claims that the female demonstrators were working with outside forces against the policy of the Saudi government and the religion. See *ibid.*, pp. 69-107.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Dosari, p. 74.

<sup>54</sup> It is a shopping centre.

In this passage, the word “اتفقت” (agreed) gives an indication that they were planning this event.

The narrator has his character give places and times, of the event although according to Al-Manea and Al-Shaykh, it took place in another location.<sup>55</sup>

Following this episode, Al-Dosari describes an interview with a girl who, like many other young women wants to become a volunteer at the hospital when the Gulf war began. The Nurse objects, insisting that the girl was weak and not fit for the job: “Doctor, would you believe that she came to the interview with two of her servants?”

تخيل يا دكتور أنها جاءت للمقابلة الشخصية وبرفقتها خادمتان<sup>56</sup>،

This is the view of the majority of Saudi society about women at that time (even women themselves); so many women activists try to raise the level of awareness among women about their rights. For example, Manal Al-Shareef usually confirms this point in her interviews and presentations.<sup>57</sup> They believe that Saudi women need help with everything, including driving.

The novel then shifts to the scene of the women protesters who had been detained by the police. One girl was showing them how to answer the questions they could expect during interrogation:

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<sup>55</sup> Al-Manea and Al-Shaykh confirm that they met each other in the parking lot of Al-Tamimi Centre in central Riyadh. See, Al-Manea and Al-Shaykh, p. 43.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Dosari, p. 100.

<sup>57</sup> She is a women’s’ rights activist who called for women to start driving in 2011 and used Facebook to broadcast her demands. See her presentation about her attempts to raise awareness of women in Saudi Arabia of their rights in TEDTalks, Manal Al-Shareef, 'Manal Al-Sharif: A Saudi Woman Who Dared to Drive', (TEDTalks, 2013).

إذا سألكن : من الذي نظمّ المظاهرة , قلن : لم ينظمهن أحد . لقد اجتمعنا بالصدفة , ووجدنا أنفسنا “  
نقود السيارات . لا تفر عن منه . سيستقركن . سيهددكن بالسجن . لا تخفن . لن يستطيعوا سجننا”<sup>58</sup>

When he asks you: “Who arranged this demonstration?” say, “Nobody. We met each other by accident and we found ourselves driving the cars.” Don’t be scared. He is going to threaten you. He is going to threaten you with imprisonment. Don’t be frightened. They will not be able to put us in prison.

This unnamed girl reminds the protesters that they have not broken any rules and explains why they have the right to drive: “We did not commit a moral crime. We have international driving licenses. There is no formal rule preventing Saudi women from driving.”

نحن لم نرتكب جريمة أخلاقية , لدينا رخص قيادة دولية , وليس هناك نظام رسمي يمنع المرأة السعودية من “  
قيادة السيارة”<sup>59</sup>

Al-Manea and Al-Shaykh claim that those who took part in the driving protest were not afraid of the police, but of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice.<sup>61</sup> They had heard many frightening stories about how the organisation treated people accused of committing moral violations.<sup>62</sup>

The author narrates a conversation between two young men in the waiting room at the hospital after the protest. One of them describes what he had seen:

وعندما حاصرتهم سيارة الشرطة بالمسدسات , نزلن رافعات أيديهن , مزقت واحدة منهن عباؤها “  
ثم داستها برجلها , واحدة أخرى صارت تتحدث للمصور الأمريكي الذي كان يصور المظاهرة , قالت

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<sup>58</sup> Al-Dosari, p. 100.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Shumuluvitz (2011: p. 2) explains that “In Saudi Arabia there is no law stating that it is illegal for women to drive; rather a convoluted pair of laws makes it *de facto* illegal”.

<sup>61</sup> For further details see an earlier section (Social Transformations in Saudi Arabia in the Post-Gulf War Period).

<sup>62</sup> Al-Manea and Al-Shaykh, pp. 55-56.

له بغنج وشعرها الطويل يتناثر على فستانها الضيق المفتوح حتى ركبتيها: نريد أن نتحرر, ورفعت يدها بعلامة النصر. وضع الشرطي كفه على كاميرا المصور ثم طرده»<sup>63</sup>

When armed policemen surrounded them they got out of their cars and raised their hands. One of them tore off her *Abaya* and trampled on it. Another girl talked to an American photographer who was filming the demonstration. Her long hair was falling loose onto her dress which was tight-fitting and open up to the knee. She said: ‘We want to be free’. Then she raised her hand with a sign of victory. After that, the policeman put his hand over the photographer’s camera and then pushed him away.

The protesters, according to the witness, did not respect Saudi traditions or Islamic obligations concerning *Awrah* and *khalwah*. Two of the drivers have defied the Saudi dress code. Even worse, they do so in the presence of a non-*mahram* foreign male who is taking photographs. In keeping with Al-Dosari’s narrative technique, he has the other character ask him about it:

سأله الآخر: “

إذن كنت في المظاهرة؟!

“لا . الشخص الذي روى لي القصة كان يقود سيارته خلف البنات ورأى كل شيء

The other young man asked him: , “So you were there?!”

“No, the person who told me this story was driving his car behind the girls and he saw everything.”

Many of the accounts of the protest were second- and third-hand gossip and rumour, not eyewitness reports. In another scene, Al-Dosari comments on another discussion of the protest:

لم يكونوا يتناقشون عن المظاهرة كحدث اجتماعي أو حتى سياسي . كان كل همهم استعراض أسماء البنات . هل هن قبيليات أم خضيريات؟! متزوجات أم عازبات؟! جميلات أم قبيحات؟! أحدهم قال بأنهن لو كن جميلات ذوات نسب عائلي رفيع , لما قبضت الشرطة عليهن»<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Al-Dosari, p. 103.

They were not discussing the demonstration as a social or political event. Their interest was in knowing the girls' names. Were they belonging to tribes or were they non-tribal *Khaḍīrī*?!<sup>65</sup> Were they beautiful or ugly girls?! Someone said: 'If they were beautiful women with high family connections, the police would not have arrested them'".

As Anthony notes: "Despite a half-century's official campaign against tribalism in the name of encouraging national and Islamic solidarity, clan and lineage remain a potent force in Saudi Arabian society".<sup>66</sup>

The author suggests the extent to which people slandered the women who participated in the event.<sup>67</sup> Al-Dosari has several characters describe what had happened:

“حاولت أن أفهمه أنني كنت أنا وزوجتي بالصدفة في شارع صلاح الدين , وأنتي رأيتهن منقبات , ولم تظهر خصلة من شعر إحداهن , رد علي بأن صديقا له رأى بعضهن كاشفات وجوههن وأنهن قبيحات”<sup>68</sup>

“I have tried to explain that I and my wife were in Ṣalāḥ Al-Dīn Street and I saw them veiled. None of them were showing any part of their hair. He replies that his friend saw some of them uncover their faces and they are ugly”.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>65</sup> These terms are explained in Chapter Three, titled “Social Marginalisation in Saudi Arabia”.

<sup>66</sup> John Duke Anthony, “Saudi Arabia: from Tribal Society to nation-state”, in *Saudi Arabia: Energy, Developmental Planning, and Industrialization*, ed. By R. El Mallakh and Dorothea H. El Mallakh (Lexington, Mass.: D C Heath). Available online at: <[ncusar.org/publications/publications/1982-27-01-Saudi-Arabia.pdf](http://ncusar.org/publications/publications/1982-27-01-Saudi-Arabia.pdf)>It is interesting to note in this context Al-Shaikh's own experience. When she revealed to her father that she had participated in the protest, he was angry and concerned not only about the reaction of Saudi society but that of their tribe. Sometime later, at a tribal meeting, it was decided that due to her actions Al-Shaykh was no longer to be considered as one of the tribe.

<sup>67</sup> Al-Manea and Al-Shaykh include a whole chapter in their book (Chapter Three) about official and popular reactions in Saudi society to their protest, entitled “مابعد الحدث” (After the event). They recount how they suffered from accusations and lies which led to threats made against them and their family members after participating in the event.

<sup>68</sup> Al-Dosari, p. 107.

Once again, an eyewitness account is juxtaposed against an anonymous one which looks as if fabricated. In addition to documenting the range of reactions to the protest, Al-Dosari encourages the reader to reflect on the veracity of the accounts that were circulating at the time. According to Rosnow and Foster, rumours function as “public communications that are infused with private hypotheses about how the world works [...] or more specifically, ways of making sense to help us cope with our anxieties and uncertainties”<sup>69</sup>. By reproducing these rumours, Al-Dosari reveals the latent fear of change in Saudi society.

In *Munira's Bottle*, Yousef Al-Mohaimeed describes the events of November 6<sup>th</sup> 1990 from the perspective of his female protagonist, Munira Al-Sahi. The characters have their own responses, but Al-Mohaimeed seems sympathetic to his protagonist where he speaks through her. Actually, this is not the narrator's job to give his own opinion and try to convince others of his opinion. In chapter thirteen of his novel, he takes the role of the lawyer in this case. In *Munira's Bottle*, the reader is going to feel that Al-Mohaimeed could not make difference between his personal opinion and the reality. This is why many critics believe that early Saudi novelists could not put clear boundaries between the novel and the newspaper article. A passage from *Munira's Bottle*, by Al-Mohaimeed describes the event from one point of view:

At the next lights the first-ever procession of cars driven by women in this desert city comes to a halt when a traffic policeman, who has just turned out of Aruba street, signal to them to stop. A university professor winds down the window of her Chevrolet to speak to him. She is wearing a *niqab*, and all that is visible of her face are two nervous eyes. Clearly shaken, the policeman looks at her and asks her for her driving license. She takes out an international driving license she obtained when she was studying in

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<sup>69</sup> Ralph L Rosnow and Eric K Foster, 'Rumor and Gossip Research', *Psychological Science Agenda*, 19:4 (2005). Available at: <[www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2005/04/gossip.aspx](http://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2005/04/gossip.aspx)> [accessed on 20/09/2012]

America... He has no idea what to do. The women are driving well; they are dressed modestly, and they have not broken any traffic regulations.<sup>70</sup>

In *Munira's Bottle*, the story of the protest is told without interruption by a single source, perhaps because the author was sympathetic to the women.<sup>71</sup> Al-Mohaimeed's version, like that of Al-Dosar is laden with symbolism. The author begins by referring to Riyadh as (A desert city) مدينة صحراوية, a curious description for the capital city of Saudi Arabia.<sup>72</sup> The term 'desert' has numerous negative connotations such as a harsh, primal environment. Perhaps, Al-Mohaimeed wished to evoke these negative images in reference to the difficult lives of women in this city.<sup>73</sup>

According to the narrator in *Munira's Bottle*, the details are indicative of class and status. The woman who is stopped is driving a Chevrolet, a luxury car. She is an academic who has studied in the United States, and is therefore a member of the educated upper class. Scoring to Al-Manea and Al-Shaykh, the protesters were members of the Riyadh elite.<sup>74</sup> By stressing that the majority of the women are

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<sup>70</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, p. 87.

<sup>71</sup> In reviewing the novel, Shawky (2010) comments: 'At times, the reader can forget that the author of this well-woven novel is a male. Al-Mohaimeed successfully dives into Munira's world and portrays the intertwined details' (online).

<sup>72</sup> The very name of the city is originally derived from the Arabic *rawdah*, meaning gardens or meadows, and refers to the fact that it is located at the juncture of two *Wadis* which make it a naturally fertile location.

<sup>73</sup> It is interesting to note that this link between Riyadh and the desert is made in another contemporary Saudi novel. Muhammed Al-Muzaini, *Mafāriq Al-Atamah* (Beirut: The Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 2004, p. 8 ), emphasises the geographical location of the Saudi capital as an Arabian Peninsula city which travellers must approach by the desert:

“هناك ترقد المدينة المكدودة تحفها الرمال من جهاتها الأربع... تلك كانت مدينتي (الرياض) وفي جزء منها حيث أظن”

“There, where the tired city lies surrounded by sand on all four sides [...] that was my city (Riyadh) and I was living in a part of it”.

Also, Alwan, p. 12, describes Riyadh as a huge spaceship which landed on the desert a hundred years ago and has still not moved.

<sup>74</sup> Al-Manea and Al-Shaykh, p. 28.



educated and have been studying abroad, the author also perhaps suggests that they participated in this act consciously.

In this description, emphasis is placed on the female protester's appropriate clothing as being veiled. The other women were wearing modest clothes. There is no evidence of rebellion, or disrespect for the *status quo*. The first protester is described as قلقة (nervous), and when asked, she provides an international driver's license. All of the women are said to be complying with all traffic laws. The final comment, therefore, proves that as drivers, at least, these women pose no threat.

The other theme which emerges here is that of Westernisation as a positive force. The protester is driving an American car, with a permit issued in the United States, where she presumably learned to drive. Having been educated in the United States, this woman might also have been influenced by American ideas about the role of women in society and is willing to struggle to obtain these rights in her own country. Someone can ask:

Is it not just as likely that the fact that her family sent her to study in the US means that she had acquired this sense of empowerment from her parents in Saudi Arabia? Do families who wish to keep their daughters in "traditional" roles send them to study in Western countries where they can get exposed to ideas that are objectionable?

Actually, those families do not mind to send their daughters for education but not for acquiring Western ideas that cannot be applicable in the Saudi environment.

### 4.3.2 Representing the Aftermath of November 6, 1990

Al-Manea herself has commented on the symbolism of November 6, 1990. When questioned about the intentions of the protesters, Al-Manea explained on the fifteenth anniversary of the original demonstration that:

“It was never about driving [...] Driving is just a symbol. [...] It’s about female empowerment and mobility. Women need incomes, they need jobs, and they need a way to get to those jobs”.<sup>75</sup>

In their introductory chapter Al-Manea and Al-Shaykh discuss the marginalised status of Saudi women before the protest. They argue that Saudi females are excluded from decision-making. Their opinions go unrepresented, not only in politics and economics, but even in society. Saudi women have no autonomy, being unable to attend school, travel or work without the consent of a father or husband. Nor can they represent themselves in court.<sup>76</sup>

Al-Dosari gives voice to the opinions of Saudis in response to the protest.

Two girls who are volunteers in the hospital where the protagonist works debate the effects of the event:

- المظاهرة ستسيء إلى سمعة حكومتنا في هذا الطرف الصعب<sup>77</sup>،

“The demonstration will damage the reputation of our government”.

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<sup>75</sup> Faiza Saleh Ambah, 'Saudi Women Recall a Day of Driving', *The Christian Science Monitor* (2005). Available at: <[www.csmonitor.com/2005/1207/p06s02-wome.html](http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1207/p06s02-wome.html)>[accessed on 12/10/2013], also reinforces the idea that the protest is not ultimately about driving but about much broader issues regarding women’s marginalisation during a telephone conversation between his main character and another unidentified individual who is dismissive about the protesters’ demands:

- أتعتقدين أنهن يواجهن مشكلة حقيقية في التنقل بالسيارة؟! -

”- لا . لدى كل واحدة منهن سائق يتحرك بإشارة منهن

“- Do you think they face real problems with driving?

- No. Every one of them has a chauffeur who will do what they want in a flash.”

<sup>76</sup> Al-Shaykh, p. 23.

<sup>77</sup> Al-Dosari, p. 110.

- سمعة الحكومة لن يطلها شيء , تنظيم المظاهرات السلمية حدث طبيعي في كل مكان في العالم. سيعتبرونها “ نوعا من الديمقراطية”<sup>78</sup>

“The government's reputation will not be damaged. It's natural to organise peaceful demonstrations everywhere in the world. It will be viewed as a kind of democracy”.

Al-Dosari includes a conversation between a non-Saudi nurse from Europe and a Saudi doctor as they drive to the hospital where they work. The nurse gazes admiringly at the doctor's vehicle, prompting him to ask: “Do you like it?” She replies that she has one just like it in her country. He offers to let her drive it to which she answers, partly in jest:

”أوووه... لا. لقد جئت لأعمل , لا لكي أسجن“<sup>79</sup>

“Oooh... No. I came to work, not to be in prison”.

Although those Women who are not Saudis could drive during the Gulf war in 1990, especially the American soldiers, they became unable to drive after the war finished.

Later, she asks rhetorically:

ألا تفعل المرأة هنا غير الأكل والإنجاب”<sup>80</sup>

“Do women here do anything except give birth and eat?”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>81</sup> The Saudi female novelist, Zaynab Hifni, raises the same subject in her recent work *Lam 'Áud Abkī* [I no longer cry] when a foreign girl explains:

لا أستطيع العيش في بلادكم , المرأة عندكم أحلامها مبتورة , وظيفتها الوحيدة في الحياة تكوين أسرة وإنجاب أطفال وإهدار وقتها “ في متابعة آخر أخبار الرياضة

“I cannot live in your country. Here, a woman's dreams remain unfulfilled. Her task in life is making a family, giving birth and watching the latest sports news”.

The nurse's comments are intended to ridicule people who have this image of Saudi women. This could help to create opposition to the social marginalisation of women, which is the goal of the novelist.

In *Munira's Bottle*, a Kuwaiti woman attacks Munira: "You are the one who is a refugee in your own country... you cannot even drive your own car. Someone else has to drive it for you".<sup>82</sup>

Both Saudi novelists use the driving protest as a means to call attention to other problems facing women in Saudi Arabian society, and the domestic and international reaction to them.

The demonstration took place during *Al-Sahwah Al-Islamiyyah* (Islamic Awakening), a religious revival that began in the 1970s and was reflected in increased religious piety and the spread of Islamic culture.<sup>83</sup> It is often associated in the West with the rise of "Fundamentalist Islam". At the time, *Al-Sahwah Al-Islamiyyah* figures such as Salmān Al-'Aūdah and Safar Al-Ḥawālī were revered in Saudi society. They were vehemently opposed to lifting the ban on women's driving.<sup>84</sup> As a result, the female participants in the demonstration were denounced not only by the majority of Saudi society but also by their own families. Al-Shaykh, for example, recalled having to explain herself to her father:

My husband understood my situation unlike my family members, but the difficulty was how to tell my father. The first meeting with him was very hard. I did not know what his reaction would be. Would he understand my participation in the women driving that day? Would he be able to put up with the social pressure? Or would he reject what I did?<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Al-Mohaimed, p. 76.

<sup>83</sup> For further details, see Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>84</sup> Al-Shaykh, p. 8.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

Al-Shaykh asked her sister to find out if her father had heard about the event. According to her, he said: “Yes, I have heard about it. May God guide them to the right path”.<sup>86</sup>

Al-Dosari’s novel claims that the husbands who had allowed their wives to drive were condemned as pimps.<sup>87</sup>

It was expected by the participants that the driving demonstration would lead to changes, giving women the right to drive. It was expected that the social marginalisation of Saudi women would decrease. In contrast, there was retaliation, as some of the participants lost their jobs, found their reputations tarnished, and were disowned. Al-Dosari explains how the CPVPV became even more suspicious of women travelling alone:

البارحة أوقفوا سيارة ليموزين وهي تخرج من المستشفى , كانت تستقلها امرأة , بعد أن تم علاجها “  
في وحدة الطوارئ , حاولت أن تفهمهم أنها للتو خرجت من المستشفى , وأنها مريضة , لكنهم لم  
يصدقوها”<sup>88</sup>

Last night, they stopped a taxi when it was leaving the hospital. There was a woman inside. She got into it after being treated in the emergency unit. She tried to explain to them that she had just left hospital and was ill but they did not believe her.

In Saudi Arabia, the religious authorities shape public opinion. In 1991, the Ministry of the Interior published a statement opposing women being allowed to drive, in the wake of a ruling of the *fatwa*<sup>89</sup> from the Saudi Council of Senior *Ulama* (religious

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>87</sup> Al-Dosari, p.118.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>89</sup> A religious edict legal opinion or ruling issued by an Islamic scholar.

scholars).<sup>90</sup> It did not matter that other *fatwas* issued outside Saudi Arabia by Islamic authorities had no objections to allowing women to drive. After the Saudi fatwa was issued, *fatwas* in other Islamic countries were issued to defend women's right to drive unless it was contrary to religion or violate the civil law.<sup>91</sup>

Also, the various sections of Saudi society differed in terms of their response to the event. The most passionate opponents of women driving were religious conservatives. In *Munira's Bottle*, Al-Mohaimeed includes a dialogue between Munira's brother, Mohammad, and her aged father. The former is a militant Islamist, influenced by Al Qaeda, who refuses to work for the state. He declares what he thinks should happen to foreign soldiers:

They should be expelled as ruthlessly as possible. It was also imperative to remove those secularists and modernists who were in league with the influence, and to expose the whores and harlots who were demanding their rights and driving cars, inviting fornication and adultery to spread among the women of Islam. He would say all this sitting next to his elderly father as they both leaned on the cushion placed between them. But then he would be caught unawares by his father's snoring, and the old man's head would slump forward onto his chest.<sup>92</sup>

Mohammad represents the hard-line reactionary; his father is a simple and apolitical man who works hard for his family. Munira is convinced that the women, including herself, had a right to participate in the event, although she had not.

These Saudi novels depict the long-term effects of the event on its participants. For example, in *Al-Rīyād November 1990*, Al-Dosari tells the story of a family that flees Riyadh during the Gulf War. One daughter asks her father if she can stay behind to keep her job, but he refuses:

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<sup>90</sup> Al-Shaykh, p. 107.

<sup>91</sup> See Al-Manea and Al-Shaykh, pp. 111-119.

<sup>92</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, p. 152.

أنت بنت . أين ستسكنين إذا سافرنا وتركناك؟! أجبتّه: المستشفى في حالة حربٍ سيؤمن لنا سكناً“  
نجحت بعد جهد كبير أن أجعله يرضخ , لكنه بعد أن استمع إلى الشريط و سألني : كيف سيحمي  
المستشفى سمعتك؟!<sup>93</sup>

“You are a girl. Where are you going to live when we travel and leave you behind?!” I answered: “The hospital is in a state of war and it will give us accommodation”. Making great efforts, I tried to convince him. However, after listening for a long time he asked me: “How will you protect your reputation?!”

Families like this one controlled their daughters merely to protect the family’s reputation. They feared that society would judge their own daughters as harshly as it had judged the women drivers.

Hayā Al-Ubūdī<sup>94</sup> mentions the risks which her husband had warned her about. She knew that she was likely to face the wrath of religious groups, lose her job, and be slandered.

In another episode, Al-Dosari suggests that the participants in the demonstration, like Al-Ubūdī, knew exactly what to expect. This is reflected in a telephone conversation between the main character and a woman called Tahānī who bristles at being compared to the demonstrators:

لا تقارني ببنات المظاهرة , هؤلاء وضعن أعناقهن للذبح , لقد كن يعرفن أنهن سيتعرضن لكل هذه  
المصائب<sup>95</sup>

“Don’t compare me with the demonstration girls! They gave their necks for slaughter willing to be sacrificed themselves. They knew that they would face all those problems”.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Al-Dosari, p. 311.

<sup>94</sup> She is one of the participated in driving demonstration. She is a teacher in one of the secondary schools in Riyadh. See Al-Manea and Al-Shaykh, p. 53.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 233.

<sup>96</sup> Elsewhere, the author comments that some of the women only participated in the demonstration in order to become famous. (Al-Dosari, p. 355)

Did Saudi women need men to support their demands? Saudi women had been bargaining with the patriarchal society for generations. As M Al-Rasheed states, “In 1970s, Saudi society began to enjoy the many opportunities, services, questions related to the political and civil rights and gender equality”.<sup>97</sup> However, the “women question” had been raised in novels written by Saudi women between 1990 and 2011. According to Al-Dāmin<sup>98</sup>, by 2008 Saudi women<sup>99</sup> had published 143 novels, 97 of which had been published before 2000<sup>100</sup>. Al-Rasheed states:

The marginality of Saudi women in the public sphere with the consolidation of the state project in the second half of the twentieth century against their historical centrality in social, religious, and political context may have led women towards equally marginal activities such as literature in a society where fiction, in particular the novel, has been condemned as an alien, decadent, and suspicious mode of expression imported from west.<sup>101</sup>

According to Khālid Al-Rifā'ī, these novels tended to be written by first-time novelists. These novelists were also likely to be young, and willing to take on taboo subjects.<sup>102</sup> These emerging novelists have demanded an end to the marginalisation of Saudi women. In Al-Rasheed's words, “Their heroines are not mothers and grandmothers; they are school and college students, struggling with restrictions on sexuality, personal freedom, marriage choices, and relationships”.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A Most Masculine State : Gender, Politics and Religion in Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>98</sup> A Saudi female critic.

<sup>99</sup> The last bibliography about Saudi novels was by Khalid Yousef in 2008.

<sup>100</sup> Samāhir ḍāmin, *Nisā' bilā 'Ummahāt : Al-Dhawāt Al-'Unthawiyyah fi Al-Riwāyah Al-Nisā'iyyah Al-Sa'udiyyah : Fikr Wa Naqd* (Bayrut: Muassasat Al-Intishar Al-'Arabi, 2010).

<sup>101</sup> Al-Rasheed, p. 176.

<sup>102</sup> *Al-Riwāyah Al-Nisā'iyyah Al-Sa'udiyyah, Qirā'ah fi Al-Tārīkh, wa Al-Mawḍū', wa Al-Qaḍiyyah, wa Al-Fann*, [The Saudi Feminine Novel, Reading in the History, the Theme, the Issue and the Art] (Riyadh: Al-Nadi Al-Adabi Bil-Riyadh, 2009), pp. 46-58.

<sup>103</sup> Al-Rasheed, p. 220.



#### 4.4 Saudi Women and the World of Work

The question of Saudi women in the work force has been the subject of debate between liberals who support the idea, and those religious conservatives who oppose it. In January 2012 the Saudi Minister of Labour began enforcing a law, passed in 2006, banning men from working in lingerie shops. The ban was to be extended to cosmetics stores in July 2012. This not only ended “decades of awkwardness” for Saudi women forced to buy intimate apparel from male shop assistants, but also created up to 40,000 jobs for women.<sup>104</sup>

The members of the religious establishment opposed having women working in areas where they would come into contact with men.<sup>105</sup> Sheikh Abdel Aziz al-Sheikh, the Grand Mufti, was reported as warning shop owners that it was a “crime and prohibited by Islamic *sharia* law” to hire women.<sup>106</sup>

Saudi women are allowed to work in the fields of education and the health-related professions, as well as in journalism, a profession that received the most attention in the novels examined here as many Saudi female novelists are or were journal. Female journalists in Saudi Arabia have begun to realise that novels are better vehicles through which to express ideas that are considered too sensitive for publication in the press.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> E. Buchanan, “Women only to work in Saudi Arabia lingerie shops,” BBC News, Middle East. (5 January 2012). Available at: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16412202](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16412202) [accessed on 20/10/2013]

<sup>105</sup> 'Saudi Arabia to Enforce Law for Women-Only Lingerie Shops', in *The Guardian* (2 January 2012).

<sup>106</sup> Buchanan.

<sup>107</sup> This point was argued previously in my conference paper titled, “The Contribution of Saudi Women Journalists to Novel Writing” (May 16<sup>th</sup> 2012, York University).

In *Lam A'ud Abkī (I no longer cry)*, Zaynab Hifni creates a conversation between Ghādah, the female protagonist who announces that she intends to become a journalist, and her friend Nashwā:

أطلقت نشوى ضحكة طويلة قائلة: “

صحافة!! هل تعنين ما تقولين؟! لماذا تجلبين لنفسك وجع الرأس؟! هذا عالم صاخب يا صديقتي يزخر بالشخصيات المتناقضة . كيف يمكنك التعامل مع هذه الدنيا المخبولة وأنت الفتاة الرقيقة. آه يا صديقتي, كم أخاف وأشفق عليك من هذا العالم!!”<sup>108</sup>

Nashwā let out a hearty laugh and said:

The Press!! Do you really mean what you say?! Why would you want that kind of a headache for yourself?! This is a tough world, my friend. It contains many different characters. How will you be able to deal with this crazy world being such a delicate girl? Oh, my friend, how much I fear for you and pity you in such a world!!

When Ghādah explains that she has always dreamed of working in journalism,

Nashwā replies sarcastically:

اعذريني , لم أسمع طوال عمري عن صحافية سعودية ذاع صيتها في الأفاق . أنت يا صغيرتي “ تعيشين في بلد مكبل بقيود اجتماعية كثيرة, وهي بالتأكيد ستعيق طموحاتك. ولا تنسي أن مجتمعك يطغح بالذكورية”<sup>109</sup>.

Pardon me but I have never ever heard about any famous Saudi female journalists. My dear girl, you live in a country shackled by many social constraints, which will certainly hamper your aspirations. Don't forget that your society is a patriarchal community.

Nashwā does not mention anything in relation to this being potentially problematic from the viewpoint of Islamic teaching, and Ghādah agrees:

قد يكون في كلامك الكثير من الصحة , صحيح أن حقوق المرأة مدجنة في مجتمعنا السعودي نتيجة “ العادة والتقاليد التي توارثناها , لكن ألا نتفقين معي أننا يجب أن نسعى إلى تحطيم هذه القيود بدلا من الاستسلام لها!!”<sup>110</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Hifni, p. 44.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

Most of what you say may be right. It's true that women's rights in our Saudi society are restricted due to traditions and customs passed down from one generation to another, but don't you agree with me that we should seek to break free of these shackles rather than be bound by them?

It is important to note the use of the word (القيود) "shackles" to describe those restraints which prevent people from achieving their freedom and their rights. This term has strong negative connotations comparing women to slaves or prisoners.<sup>111</sup> Thus, journalism is a difficult profession for women because of the tradition of *Ikhtilat* which discourages the mixing of non-*mahram* men and women. Although this is enforced in government and the civil service, it is not obligatory in private businesses. The possibility that a woman may find herself on her own in a private place with a man would violate the principle of segregation of the sexes known as *khalwa* and would raise doubts about her morality and her honour.<sup>112</sup>

When Nashwā decides to find a newspaper job for Ghādah, she invites her to a party hosted by an important media personality:

هناك عدد من الصحفيين والكتاب الكبار يتواجدون من حين لآخر في السهرات التي أحضرها. ثقي  
وتؤكدني من أن المرأة التي تنجح في مد جسور مينة مع أشخاص من الوسط الإعلامي تستطيع فتح  
كافة الأبواب المغلقة<sup>113</sup>

Occasionally, there are a number of famous journalists and writers in the parties that I attend. Trust me and be sure that women who succeed in

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<sup>111</sup> The first extract from "Al-Hafā'ir Tatanaffas" (Al-Hafair neighbourhood is breathing) by Abdullah Al-Tauzzi, describes how slaves were shackled together in Mecca for sale. It will be more addressed in the part of "Social Marginalisation Due to Ethnicity".

<sup>112</sup> Some English-language newspapers operate mixed workplaces. However, in March 2010 *Arab News* reported that *Al-Jazirah* newspaper in Riyadh was to open an all-female journalism centre in order to allow women the chance to experience all journalism-related jobs including specialized areas such as editing, layout and design in order to open up more job opportunities for women journalists. Hawari, W. All-women journalism centre at *Al-Jazirah*, (27 March 2010), available at: [www.arabnews.com/node/340794](http://www.arabnews.com/node/340794)

<sup>113</sup> Hifni, p. 45.

building bridges with the people from the media scene will be able to open all closed doors.<sup>114</sup>

Self-employment can also be difficult for women, as shown by Al-Sanea in *Girls of Riyadh*, when Sadeem, decides to start a small business. However she needs to get her cousin Tariq to act as her agent because, as she explains, “Women are not always permitted to take care of legal matter with banks and other offices themselves”<sup>115</sup>.

#### **4.5 Domestic Violence against Saudi Women**

In Saudi Arabia, as elsewhere, the most dangerous kind of violence against women is domestic violence. According to Tashkandi and Al-Rasheed, however, “There is little information about the incidence, prevalence and matter of domestic violence against women in Saudi Arabia”<sup>116</sup>. The media is in a position to report on incidents of domestic violence. In 2004, Rania Al-Baz, a popular female presenter on the Saudi channel, was beaten so severely by her husband that he broke thirteen bones in her face by pounding her head into a marble floor. She spent four days in a coma and two weeks in the intensive care unit. No one outside of her family would have known what had happened if her father had taken photographs of her nearly unrecognisable face, photographs that were later sent to the BBC and published.

In 1995, Oprah Winfrey dedicated an episode of her highly rated *Oprah Winfrey Show* to the lives of Saudi women, and Rania Al-Baz was one of the guests. She

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<sup>114</sup> Al-Mohaimeed also discusses the issue of Saudi women working in the press in his novel *Al-Qārūrah [Munira's Bottle]*. In this novel he confirms that tribes exercise authority over women's choices of work and may prevent women from working for social considerations. This point will be examined in more detail in the discussion concerning the impact of the tribe in the marginalisation of people in “Social marginalisation due to class”.

<sup>115</sup> AL-Sanea, p. 243.

<sup>116</sup> AA Tashkandi and P Rasheed, 'Wife Abuse: A Hidden Problem. A Study among Saudi Women Attending Phc Centers', *East Mediterr Health J*, 15 (2009), 1242-1253 (p. 1243).

made it known that she was the Saudi woman who had been beaten by her husband. So, it is found in Saudi Arabia as a problem and it is reasonable that the Saudi novel has attempted to address it in many novels by several writers.

Despite Islamic teachings which require men to respect women, abusers can always explain away their behaviour, as Rania's husband did.<sup>117</sup> It may happen when the wife allows a strange man to enter the house with no permission of her husband. Also, it happens without reason when the expected behaviour is associated with a status as a preconceived opinion. This kind of behaviour can be explained by what consideration of what is called *stereotype* as Mill finds that “women are stereotyped as flighty and unreliable because they possess uncontrollable raging hormones that fuel unpredictable emotional outbursts. The assignment of negative stereotypes can result in sexism”.<sup>118</sup> Sexism is continued and maintained by the nature of patriarchy, so the oppression of women is a result of male-dominated social structures.

Domestic violence can be defined in many ways and includes many forms of relationships between man and woman so it can be called domestic abuse, partner violence or spousal abuse. In Saudi Arabia, the novel discusses this kind of violence which is usually being hidden below the surface and seen as a nature of Saudi life. According to Cameron, reality is understood as constructed by social forces and it may be made to sound as natural.<sup>119</sup> Actually, this type of domestic violence usually happens to a woman in many aspects related to the subject of marriage.

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<sup>117</sup> That is his answer on the presenter's question: when can men hit their wives? It was in a TV interview. See, Ranya Al-Baz, 'Women's Rights in Islam: Not in the Face'(2009). Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJOrvXELg-I>> [accessed on 07/12/2013]

<sup>118</sup> Lindsey and Christie, p. 3.

<sup>119</sup> Cameron, p. 34.

## 4.6 Saudi Women and Marriage

The focus now shifts to the private sphere, traditionally viewed as the female domain. The following sections cover domestic relationships. The remaining sections of the chapter will reveal the inherent inequities in the Saudi marriage.

### 4.6.1 Underage Marriage

This subject has been discussed among Saudi writers since the publication of the novel *Wa Marrat Al-Ayyām* (Days have passed) by Hamid Damanhori<sup>120</sup> in the early 1960s. Although underage marriage has declined somewhat in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it still occurs frequently enough to warrant press coverage.<sup>121</sup>

In *Munira's Bottle*, Munira Al-Sahi is a specialist in a Social Care Institution<sup>122</sup> in Riyadh, giving advice to its female inmates. She comes across ميثاء (Maytha), one of the novel characters who came to the Institution having been accused of killing her much older husband. The character's name is a common one among Bedouins and indicates that her story has taken place against a backdrop of tribal customs and traditions. Al-Sahi creates a conversation between Maytha and the head of the Institution:

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<sup>120</sup> Hamid Damanhori has written two novels *Thaman Al-Taḍḥiyah* [*The Cost of Sacrifice*] (1959) and *Wa Marrat Al-Ayyām* [*Days have passed*] (1963), both of which addressed social issues in Saudi Arabia at that time. *Thaman Al-Taḍḥiyah* is considered by many critics to mark the real start of the novel genre in Saudi Arabia. For further information, see, Sultan S. M. Al-Qahtani, 'The Novel in Saudi Arabia: Emergence and Development 1930-1989: An Historical and Critical Study' (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1994).

<sup>121</sup> On 13 May 2013, CNN World newspaper published in its digital version a press report by Suad Abu Dayyah about the marriage of underage girls in Saudi Arabia. The report begins by asking: Will Saudi Arabia end child marriage? Then it cites the story of 12-year-old Fatima who was "sold" into marriage to a man more than four times her age. Her father, a drug addict, did it to obtain money. For further details see: Suad Abu-Dayyah, 'Will Saudi Arabia End Child Marriage?', in *CNN World*, (2013). Available at: <<http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2013/05/27/will-saudi-arabia-end-child-marriage/>> [accessed on 13/02/2013]

<sup>122</sup> It is a detention centre for women who commit crimes and need to be investigated.

Maytha voiced this mundane information with boredom and distaste that reached its peak when she was asked why she had been arrested. “Surely you must have it written down on the paper”, she replied.

“Why did you kill your husband?” asked the director, who had apparently read all the information on the case before she entered the interrogation room.

“Because I hated him”.

“Do not you feel any remorse?”

“No, not at all, if he came back to life I would kill him again”<sup>123</sup>.

Clearly, Maytha did not see what she had done wrong. Moreover, she returned to the scene of the crime and re-enacted it with the help of an Egyptian worker<sup>124</sup>. She brought the investigators there.

Al-Mohaimeed uses Al-Sahi to tell Maytha’s story. As a young girl, Maytha and her cousin<sup>125</sup> had fallen in love. However, as a result of divorce Maytha’s father hated everyone in his ex-wife's family and married his daughter off to a rich man his own age. Maytha kept running away back to her father, only to be beaten and returned to her husband. One day, she returned home to find her husband waiting for her with a whip. After telling her: “Nothing will ever make you disciplined except this, you daughter of a bitch!” he beat her for half an hour until she fainted. Then he poured cold water on her and forced her to cook dinner for him. Afterwards he dragged her into bed by her hair and repeatedly raped her. After he had finished, Maytha vomited so he slapped and kicked her. After her husband had fallen asleep, she went to Jumaa,

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<sup>123</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, p. 107

<sup>124</sup> There will be further analysis of this character when considering the social marginalisation of foreign workers in Saudi Arabia.

<sup>125</sup> A cousin on her mother’s side.

an Egyptian worker, who had heard her cries. He had also been a target of her husband's abuse, so he took a cleaver and went with Maytha to kill her husband.<sup>126</sup>

Using Maytha's story, Al-Mohaimeed highlights the social issue of child marriage and the issue of domestic violence together. Hamdan notes that: "Parents can force their girls to marry at any age. There is no law to prevent parents or a guardian from having their girls marry. This problem varies depending on the socio-economic level of the region and the traditions of the local tribes."<sup>127</sup> Poor families are willing to exchange their daughters to rich men for money; even if those men are decades older than the girls.

A character in Zaynab Hifni's novel, *Malāmiḥ (Features)*, is a girl who had been forcibly married off to an older man. Husain, tells the story of his 14-year-old cousin Safiyyah, who had been sold to his uncle. He remembers her happiness at being given a new dress and golden jewellery, as she walked around proudly inside their house, repeating:

أنا عروس<sup>128</sup>،

I am a bride.

Husain also recalls that later, dark shadows appeared under his cousin's eyes due to crying.<sup>129</sup> Although Safiyyah is a minor character, readers can understand how she had ended up in such a marriage.

Early marriage [...] jeopardises girls' right to education, while stifling the potential for social connections. Marrying girls restricts their mobility, limits their control over resources, leaves them with little power in their new

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<sup>126</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, pp. 110-112.

<sup>127</sup> Hamdan, p. 59.

<sup>128</sup> Zaynab Hifni, *Malāmiḥ [Features]* (Beirut: Dār Al-Sāqī, 2006), p. 69.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.



households, and, according to studies by UNICEF, places them at considerable risk of domestic violence.<sup>130</sup>

Moreover, there have also been reports of preadolescent girls dying from internal injuries because their husbands forced them to engage in penetrative sexual intercourse.<sup>131</sup>

In *Mudun Ta'kul Al-'Ushb (Cities Eat the Grass)*, Abdo Khal<sup>132</sup> tells the story of Ḥassīnah, the sister of the male protagonist, Yaḥyā. Khāl's novel is set in Jazan in 1962, when many people in the southern part of Saudi Arabia were forced to flee their homes because of the war between Yemen and Egypt.

Yaḥyā's widowed mother sends her son (Yaḥyā) with his grandmother to Mecca for Hajj. She wants her son to stay there and try to obtain money as a trader. Unfortunately, Yaḥyā's grandmother passes away on the journey. However after being befriended by Ṭāhir, whose group is also going to Mecca, Yaḥyā goes to live with his family in Jeddah. Ṭāhir finds him a job in a cafe but then deceives him, keeping his salary whilst claiming that he had been sending his wages to Yaḥyā's mother and two sisters in Jazan.

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<sup>130</sup> See, Abu-Dayyah. Available at: <<http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2013/05/27/will-saudi-arabia-end-child-marriage/>> [accessed on 12/12/2013]

<sup>131</sup> Yemeni media covered the story of an eight-year old girl who died after suffering heavy bleeding due to a tear in her genitals after sleeping with her middle-aged husband. See, Saeed Al Batati, 'Eight-Year-Old Girl's Wedding Night Death Denied in Yemen'(Gulfnews, 2013). Available at: <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/yemen/eight-year-old-girl-s-wedding-night-death-denied-in-yemen-1.1229149> [accessed on 14/12/2013]

<sup>132</sup> "Abdo Khal is a Saudi novelist born in Al-Majanah, southern Saudi Arabia, in 1962. He studied political science at King Abdel Al Aziz University in Jeddah before starting writing in 1980. He is the author of several works, including: A dialogue at the Gates of the Earth, There's nothing to be Happy About, and Cities Eating the Grass. Some of his works have been translated into English, French and German. In addition to his writing, he is a member of the board of directors of the Jeddah Literary Club and the editor-in-chief of the Ukaz newspaper, for which he writes a daily column. As a result of winning IPAF, Spewing Sparks as Big as Castles is being translated into English by Maia Tabet and Michael K. Scott and will be published by Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing in 2012". See his profile on website of "International Prize for Arabic Fiction". Available at: <<http://www.arabicfiction.org/author/17.html>> [accessed on 10/07/2014]

Desperate for news of Yaḥyā's whereabouts and destitute, Yaḥyā's mother finally agrees to allow Abdullah, a man from the city of Al-Kharj in Najd, to marry her young daughter Ḥassīnah because he promises to find her son and provide her with enough money to settle in Jeddah. Abdullah's proposal is viewed with suspicion by many local people. Actually, Yaḥyā's mother is warned not to trust this man but she has no choice to sacrifice her daughter in order to find her son. However, after the marriage Abdullah abandons Yaḥyā's mother in Jeddah with her sick daughter, and takes his young wife to his hometown of Al-Kharj.

In the novel's final scene, Ḥassīnah, now covered by Hijab, is riding with her husband to Najd. She tries to shout through the window to a passer-by to pass on her greetings to her mother. However, before she is able to, her husband strikes her. Yaḥyā sees what happened, but does not recognise his sister because he had been told by the villagers that his family had probably perished in the war.<sup>133</sup>

Although in two of these novels, the novelists create dramatic emotional narratives, they reflect the environment in which underage marriage takes place in Saudi Arabia. Maythā's story is illustrative of this Bedouin tradition whilst Ḥassīnah's story is set in southern Saudi Arabia. Moreover both of these young wives become victims of domestic abuse, as do many women like them, according to UNICEF studies.<sup>134</sup>

The next two sections will present two literary representations of married life, neither of which bears much resemblance to the Islamic ideal.<sup>135</sup> The first is the story

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<sup>133</sup> Abdo Khal, *Mudun Ta'kul Al-'Ushb (Cities Eat the Grass)* (Beirut: Dār Al-Sāqī, 1998), pp. 320-348.

<sup>134</sup> See, Abu-Dayyah. Available at: <<http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2013/05/27/will-saudi-arabia-end-child-marriage/>>

<sup>135</sup> Abubaker A. Bagader gives an explanation of this phrase by saying: "Islam presents itself as the blueprint of social order, as a way life based on a set of rules and principles that are eternal divinely ordained and independent of the will of its followers... In addition, Islam is equally accessible to all believers. It does not have a formal church or priesthood. All believers have the right to speak for Islam provided that they are learned and have followers." See, Abubaker A. Bagader, 'Contemporary

of Khadījah<sup>136</sup>, the long-suffering wife of the deceitful Ṭāhir, who is willing to put up with a loveless marriage for the sake of her children. The second example is Thurayyā, who sacrifices her chastity (Commits adultery) to advance her husband's career.

#### 4.6.2 The Long-Suffering Wife<sup>137</sup>

In *Mudun Ta'kul Al-'Ushb [Cities that eat the grass]*, Ṭāhir's wife, Khadījah, is a minor character but through her the reader sees Ṭāhir's unsavoury qualities, and especially his exploitation of Yaḥyā. There is no clear evidence of affection, much less love between Khadījah and her husband; she seems to be his unpaid cook, house keeper and accountant.

Despite her considerable contribution to the household, Ṭāhir excludes his wife from decision-making and refuses to allow her to voice an opinion. His customary answer to any of her questions is "That's none of your business".

When her husband returns home after a long absence, Khadījah is very happy to see him because she feels safe with a man to be in the house and curious about Yaḥyā.

As usual, Ṭāhir treats his wife with contempt:

وقف أمامها مباشرة:

- لا تنظري إلى هكذا , جهزي لنا ما نأكله
- وهل تظن أن لدينا ما نأكله؟
- كلما غبت أقول ستتغيرين. لكنك مثل الأشجار اليابسة تتغيرين نحو الأسوأ

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Islamic Movements in the Arabic World', in *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity*, ed. by Akber S Ahmed and Hasting S Donnan (London: Routledge, 1994), (p. 111)

<sup>136</sup> The wife of the Prophet Muhammed has this name. It is a common name for girls and the novelist choose it here on purpose.

<sup>137</sup> There is no specific name of this kind of marriage in Arabic although it is found widely. It can be described and explained by given examples, so the study will gives an example of it in the story of character (Khadījah) in *Mudun Ta'kul Al-'Ushb*. It is similar to what is called "Common-law wife" in English. The study finds the phrase of "the long-suffering wife" is accurate expression of this kind of relationship.

نظرت إلى وأعدت وجهها نحوه وردت:

- من أين جئت به؟  
زجر بصوت محتد: هذا لا يعينك.
- وما الذي يعينني؟  
.....
- ..... أن أظل أنتظر عودتك من كل سفر , كل يوم في ترحال وأنا أتحمل العنت والجوع وتدبير كسرة خبز لابنتيك  
فصاح محتدا:  
هذا الذي آخذه منك , تذمر وشكوى<sup>138</sup>

He stood up right in front of her.

“Don’t look at me like that. Go and prepare food for us.”

“Do you think that we have anything to eat?”

“Whenever I’m away I keep thinking you might have changed but you’re like withered trees that just get drier.”

She looked at me then turned towards him and said:

“Where did you bring him from?”

He shouts: “That’s none of your business”.

“So, what *is* my business?”

“... ”

“... To keep waiting for you to return from your travels. You’re out travelling every day and I have to put up with the hardship, hunger and feeding breadcrumbs to your daughters?”

He answered loudly:

“And this is what I have to put up with from you: nagging and complaints”<sup>139</sup>.

It is clear from this dialogue, which is typical of the conversations between this couple in the novel, that Khāl is conveying to his readers that Khadījah is willing to sacrifice her personal happiness to keep her daughters safe. Her husband exercises his power over the household knowing that in this situation his wife has little realistic alternative but to put up with this treatment if she wishes to keep her home

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<sup>138</sup> Khal, p. 123.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 123

and her children. For although she works hard to keep their marital relationship going her husband usually threatens her that she will be forced to leave the house if she does not stop nagging and complaining. One night he threatens her:

والله لو لم تصمتي لأقذف بك خارج البيت في هذا الليل<sup>140</sup>،

I swear if you don't shut up, I'll throw you out of the house this very night.

Like so many long-suffering wives, Khadījah can only hold her tongue. She is a good example of the feminisation of poverty. J. Mill confirms that “when the issue of poverty becomes “feminised”, the issue is defined primarily by gender-women are at the high level of risk of being poor than men”.<sup>141</sup>

#### 4.6.3 The Self-Sacrificing Wife

Hifni's novel *Malāmiḥ* (*Features*), takes on the taboo topics of lesbianism and sexual abuse. Her character Thurayyā, is sacrificing everything, even her body, for her selfish and ambitious husband.

The novel begins with Thurayyā's husband Husain throwing a letter of divorce onto the living-room table in front of her, saying:

هاهي ورقة خلاصي منك<sup>142</sup>،

This is the letter to get rid of you.

The reader immediately hates this man, even without knowing why he wants a divorce. The truth is revealed as a series of flashbacks. This shock in the beginning

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>141</sup> Lindsey and Christie, p. 12.

<sup>142</sup> Hifni, p. 7.

of the novel can be seen as a good example of the relationship between the writer's style and his subject matter in the contemporary Saudi novel.<sup>143</sup> The writer shocks the reader to lead him to hating that man from the first action.

The narrator, Thurayyā herself, explains how she was forced to have sex with her husband's boss 'Alawī.<sup>144</sup> Thurayyā acts out of a sense of duty to her husband, even when it goes against her own moral values. She feels guilty after committing “an outrageous act” in having sex with 'Alawī. She comments:

كنت في حالة ذهول مما جرى , أود لو أصفغ نفسي , أرميها من علو شاهق , أحطم عظامها , مرددة: كيف اقترفت هذا الفعل الفاضح؟<sup>145</sup>

I was shocked about what had happened. I wanted to hit myself, throw myself from a high place and break my bones, I kept repeating:

How could I have committed this outrageous act?

Now, it is clear why the writer starts the novel with the divorce letter scene. Her husband has taken advantage of Thurayyā's sense of obligation to him. As soon as she has served her purpose, he discards her without a second thought.

#### 4.6.4 The Invisible Divorcee

A Saudi woman who has been divorced can be more vulnerable and marginalised than a woman who has never married. A divorced woman has little chance of marrying again, even if she would like to. In some Saudi communities, especially tribal ones, a divorced woman is considered to have tarnished her reputation. Ṭalāl Al-Bakrī, a member of Saudi Arabia's Shura Council proposed a new law that

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<sup>143</sup> For further details, see, Geoffrey N. Short Mick Leech, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*(London; New York: Longman, 1981).

<sup>144</sup> Hifni, pp.47-52.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

extends greater legal protection to divorced women in 2011. He explained the need for laws pertaining to alimony and child custody.<sup>146</sup>

Finally there are practical matters which complicate life for divorced women. Until 2011, divorced Saudi women had to remain on the identity card of their former husband's family identity card. As the *Saudi Gazette* noted, "the issue of the husband keeping all the documents of the divorced wife and her sons – family record, passport and birth certificate for example – is considered the biggest problem facing divorced women".<sup>147</sup> Moreover, some men have used their former wife's documents to commit financial fraud, buy buying goods or obtaining loans in her name.<sup>148</sup>

This section concludes by considering Gamrah, a female protagonist in the *Girls of Riyadh*. When her marriage to Faysal begins to break down, she balks at asking for a divorce even though it is her right as a Muslim woman to do so, because she considers divorce shameful. Moreover, her mother has taught her that after a divorce, the man will live more comfortably than the woman will. When Gamrah calls her mother in tears, the mother still makes it clear that divorce is out of the question. "There will be no divorce in our family. I do not care if your brother did divorce his wife. Al-Qusmanji girls never get divorced".<sup>149</sup>

In Saudi society, divorce stigmatises the woman's family, and the tribal community from which the family originates (Al-Qaseem). For Saudi men (like Gamrah's brother) getting divorced carries no such stigma.

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<sup>146</sup> Katerina Nikolas, 'Saudi Arabia Considers Law to Protect Women Divorced in Absence', *Digital Journal*, (2012) <<http://digitaljournal.com/article/319975>> [accessed on 15 April 2011]

<sup>147</sup> "Divorced women will be allowed to have own family IDs" Available at: <[www.saudigazette.com.sa/indexcfm?method=home.regcon&contentid=2011050299670](http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/indexcfm?method=home.regcon&contentid=2011050299670)> [accessed on 02 May 2011]

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> *Al-Qusmanji* is the adjective used to refer to a girl from the city of Al-Qaseem and is not found in the original Arabic version of the novel (see AL-Sanea, p. 106).

Despite her mother's warning, Gamrah's marriage ends in divorce by her husband. Sometime later, her uncle informs her that his friend Abo Musaad, a forty-six year old colonel in the Saudi army, wants to marry her. Although he has been married for eight years, Abo Musaad wants a second wife who will produce offspring. Rajaa Al-Sanea describes how Gamrah's father, uncle and Abo Musaad discuss the marriage contract without consulting her:

Gamrah was shifting her gaze from her father to her uncle to Abo Musaad. It had not occurred to any of these men to consult the person who has the biggest stake in this, and who happened to be sitting there in front of them, even if she was as silent and stiff as a wooden plank<sup>150</sup>.

As this chapter has demonstrated, Saudi women are often relegated to the periphery of their own lives, which are controlled by the men in their lives and by the men who run Saudi Arabia's political and religious institutions.

#### **4.7 Saudi Women Activists and the Saudi Novel**

Feminists aspire to empower women in patriarchal societies so that they have control over their own lives. The extent to which Saudi women must comply with secular, religious and tribal laws and traditions remains a matter of debate. Some people believe that Saudi women must accept their society as it is and that anything less is treasonous. Others see that Saudi society has to keep pace with the progress that other countries are making in terms of extending equal rights to men and women. A third group comprises people who are convinced that the regime is using the debate on women's rights to distract public attention from more pressing matters of

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.



economic policy, public rights of citizens, administrative and financial corruption and arbitrary arrests.

Saudi activists, female and male have been demanding the expansion of women's rights since 1990. Manal Al-Shareef, who filmed herself behind the wheel of a car and posted it on YouTube in 2011, told her story at a TED Conference, opening her talk with a provocative question. "Some people battle oppressive government and others battle oppressive society. Which battle do you think is harder?"

Then she tells her story with her five-year-old son Aboodi. "Mommy, are we bad people?"

I was shocked. "Why do you say such things, Aboody?"

Earlier that day, I noticed some bruises on his face when he came from school. He wouldn't tell me what happened. [But now] he was ready to tell.

"Two boys hit me today in school. They told me, 'We saw your mom on Facebook. You and your mom should be put in jail'".<sup>151</sup>

She wanted to show that it is harder for Saudi society than for the government to come to terms with change. Saudi society creates activists by defaming and demonising them and their families. Al-Shareef ended her talk on an ambivalent note."So I have no clue, really, how I became an activist. And I don't know how I became one now".<sup>152</sup> Thus, women's awareness of their rights arises from a sense of injustice, a sense of being wronged. M. Al-Rasheed claims that "some Saudi women accused of promoting a Western agenda, with the purpose of destabilising society

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<sup>151</sup> See, Al-Shareef. Available at:

[http://www.ted.com/talks/manal\\_al\\_sharif\\_a\\_saudi\\_woman\\_who\\_dared\\_to\\_drive.html?awesm=on.ted.com\\_sISU&utm\\_content=ted-androidapp&utm\\_medium=on.ted.com-android-share&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_campaign=](http://www.ted.com/talks/manal_al_sharif_a_saudi_woman_who_dared_to_drive.html?awesm=on.ted.com_sISU&utm_content=ted-androidapp&utm_medium=on.ted.com-android-share&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=) [Accessed on 10/12/2013]

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

and threatening its Islamic piety and authenticity”.<sup>153</sup> Mohammad Al-Oraifi<sup>154</sup> argued that although the teachers who took part in the driving demonstration in 1990, were suspended, as soon as they were reinstated they continued to promote Western ideas in their classrooms.<sup>155</sup>

What makes these women seem so dangerous in religious people’s opinion? Actually, considering the thought of feminist is helping to find strong demands for gender equality such as the sexual orientation topic, which is not fitting with religion. Some western feminist ideas are incompatible with Islam. Some activists ask for the freedom to choose one’s sex/gender (for example to change their sex). This strong idea of feminist might be consisted of such works of enthusiastic activists in the subject of women's empowerment like Mary Daly, Andree Collard and Adrienne Rich.<sup>156</sup> They are asking a very bold ideas, and perhaps extreme ideas, in the subject of equality between women and men.

In Saudi Arabia, there have been some opinions which go against religion with regard to the issue of equality between men and women. Islamic teachings are not against the equality of men and women in everything but there are many aspects of equality which Islam does not guarantee such as the issue of equal inheritance between men and women. Some devout Muslims and some conservative Islamic scholars, fear that the ideas of Western feminism might take root in Saudi society. In 2009, Nadine Al-Budayr<sup>157</sup> in her article “Anā wa Azwājī Al-Arba’ah” (My four

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<sup>153</sup> Al-Rasheed, p. 148.

<sup>154</sup> He is a Saudi religious scholar and has a huge influence on the public opinion especially on the young. He has more than 7 millions of followers on Twitter at the moment. Available at: <<https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe>>[accessed on 05/11/2013]

<sup>155</sup> Al-Rasheed, p. 148.

<sup>156</sup> Christina Hughes, 'Key Concepts in Feminist Theory and Research'(London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2002), p. 62.

<sup>157</sup> She is a Saudi Television presenter and she had worked for an American owned Al-Hora Arabic television channel Dubai before moving to Rotana.

husbands and I), advocates polyandry (plural marriage for women) since Islam allows polygamy (plural marriage for men).<sup>158</sup> Many people asked in response: Was she being serious, or satirical? Was she trying to make a point about the way that husbands treat wives? Whatever she meant, this article caused uproar not only on the Saudi scene but in the whole Arab world. In fact, there are many questions on the subject of equality between men and women that must be asked at the moment, not just what Al-Budayr is asking. So, any attempt to escalate the issue of women like this, in the presence of the strong rivalry between activists and conservatives, will not help Saudi women to obtain their other rights such as driving.

*Al-Ākharūn*<sup>159</sup> (The others) by Saba Al-Hirz<sup>160</sup> tells a story of a Shi'a a young lesbian. Al-Rasheed comments "Both *Shiism* and lesbian relations bring out questions about not only minorities but also minorities within minorities in Saudi Arabia"<sup>161</sup>. The narrator tells four stories within this novel, three of which are about forbidden love that ends in tragedy. The fourth story, however, ends with someone named "Omer". This name "Omer" is found mostly in *Sunni* communities not in *Shi'a* ones. Since a Sunni man would never become sexually involved with a Shiite woman in Saudi Arabia so the novelist places his characters in England. "They converse in England to refer to "dirty acts", escaping shame through a linguistic device. The move from homosexuality to bisexuality highlights personal freedom and choices".<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Nadine Al-Budayr, "Anā Wa Azwājī Al-'Arba'ah" (I and My Four Husbands), *Al-Masri Alyawm* (2009).

<sup>159</sup> Saba Al-Hirz, *Al-Ākharūn [The Others]* (Beirute: Dar al-Saqi, 2006). It is published under the pseudonym. The writer hides his or her name from people because he or she addresses very controversial issues and breaks taboos, as well as Warda Abd A-Malik in her novel *Al-'Awdah [The Return]* (Beirut: Dar Al-Saqi, 2006).

<sup>160</sup> There is no clear information about this female author, neither in databases nor in the media. Perhaps the reason is that this novel talks about the conservative Shiite society and the author does not want to be known so she does not get punished.

<sup>161</sup> Al-Rasheed, p. 293.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

## 4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the issue of social marginalisation of Saudi women in the public and private spheres. It has examined how women's right to drive, employment and marriage have been depicted by Saudi male and female novelists. Different textual strategies and literary techniques used by these novelists were analysed when they wrote about the social reality of Saudi women's lives.

The analysis of these works suggests that when writing about the protest in Riyadh on November 6, 1990, novelists used a range of strategies. Al-Dosari has his male narrator present a multiplicity of voices expressing the diverse reactions to the protest within Saudi society, without taking a stand. Al-Mohaimeed, in contrast, uses his female narrator to take a position so he voiced his views through his characters.

In depicting the marginalisation of Saudi women, novelists imply that the obstacles and difficulties which they document are not attributable to Islamic teachings but to the imposition of tribal customs and traditions. This explains why Saudi women writers cite Islamic teachings in demanding the rights which their faith grants them, but that tribal traditions have taken away from them.

The next chapter will be devoted to describe the ways in which Saudi literature reflects an area of concern that is little known outside the Arab world. It will examine how the tribal and ethnic origins of individuals can marginalise them in a nation which confers special value on this aspect of social identity.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Social Marginalisation due to Ethnicity

#### 5.1 Introduction

Writing about the positive and negative aspects of tribal allegiance amongst the nations of the Arabian Peninsula, Sultan Al-Qassemi observed:

Tribalism effectively sidelines non-tribal and naturalised citizens in these countries. Such “irregular” individuals can never truly become integrated in tribal societies, even after decades of intermarriage. Unlike, say, a political party or social movement that a citizen can join, a tribal network is exclusive toward those not carrying a specific last name.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter, then, will address the topic of what might be labelled ‘Irregular individuals’ in Saudi society. These can be defined as individuals who for various reasons relating to their personal circumstances are destined to remain on the margins in a community which places enormous value on the ability to trace someone’s lineage and origins as a means not only of validating identity but also of assessing someone’s social status and ultimately their worth as human being.

The chapter begins by examining the continuing centrality of the concept of the tribe and of Bedouin identity in the Arabian Peninsula, tracing its historical origins and exploring some of its more recent manifestations in Saudi society.

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<sup>1</sup> Sultan al-Qassemi. Available at: <[http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4198/tribalism-in-the-arabian-peninsula\\_it-is-a-family->](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4198/tribalism-in-the-arabian-peninsula_it-is-a-family->) [accessed on 13/05/2014]

The chapter then moves onto analyse the representation of *Turād*<sup>2</sup>, the narrator protagonist of Yousef Al-Mohaimeed's novel *Fikhākh Al-Rā'iḥah (Wolves of the Crescent Moon)*. This one-eared Bedouin is a double-outsider, self-exiled from his own tribe and making a precarious living at the margins of the Saudi capital, Riyadh. This character is used to explore the difficulties encountered by city-dwelling Bedouin whose traditional way of life has been altered by the forces of state formation, modernisation and urbanisation.

The next section examines a novel by the female author Layla Al-Juhani who in her *Jāhiliyyah (Ignorance)* examines the consequences of breaking tribal taboo and attempting to marry an outsider. Her work also raises issues about racism and the fate of the *Bidoun* or Stateless Arabs, and highlights and criticises a number of traditions in Saudi society which she believes run counter to Islamic religious values and principles.

The chapter concludes by not only considering foundlings and their treatment in Saudi society but also discusses the techniques of literary representation which Al-Mohaimeed has used to give a voice to silenced minorities.

## **5.2 The Central Importance of the Tribe in Saudi Society**

The tribe continues to play a central role in Saudi society, and consequently also has an impact on those groups and individuals who do not have a tribal identity. This section focuses on the development of the tribe within Saudi society, examining its changing social status and political importance over the decades. Using evidence

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<sup>2</sup> It has been analysed for another purpose in a previous work of the researcher: see, Hamad Alhazza, *Al-Madīnah fī Al-Rīwāyah Al-Sāūdiyyah (1400-1425) [The City in the Saudi Novel (1400-1425)]* (Saudi Arabia: Al-Kifah Publishing House, 2013), pp. 88-92.

from a range of critical opinions it will be argued that the tribe has, in fact, become more prominent in the post-modern era in Saudi Arabia.

Following the establishment of what is officially called the Third Saudi State in 1902, it is claimed by some that the new regime, particularly in its early years, gave greater opportunities to city dwellers than to Bedouins. This claim may be true, largely due to the fact that many of the urban people living in Al-Hejaz area were literate unlike the desert-dwelling Bedouin, and such people would have been needed to help set up the bureaucracy required by any modern state and would therefore have had the chance to gain influential roles. According to Muḥammad bin Ṣunaytān and Saʿad Al-Ṣwayyān it was this focus on literacy which was to lead to huge numbers of Bedouins being socially marginalised. Doing low-ranking jobs and living at the outskirts of the city, they became the proletariat class with the changes that accompanied the post-1902 period.<sup>3</sup>

It was at this time also that the so-called settled families emerged. This does not mean family merely in the sense of a nuclear unit consisting of father, mother and children, but goes beyond that to refer to a much broader meaning of kinship. This has replaced the traditional tribe in terms of its original functions and has become the central social unit within the modern city.

Although it is clear that the central importance of and effectiveness of the tribe originally lay outside the urban environment, among Bedouin communities, in his book '*Al-Wahhābīyyah Bayna Al-Shirk wa Taṣaddu' Al-Qabīlah* (Wahhabism Between Polytheism and the Fragmenting of the Tribe)' Al-Dakhīl confirms that the

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<sup>3</sup> Nuʿaymān ʿUthmān, *Al-Qabīlah: ʿAjz Al-ʿAkādīmī wa Murāwaghat Al-Muthaqqaf* [The tribe: Inability of the academic and equivocation of the intellectual] (Beirut: Jadawel, 2011), p. 172.

transformation of Saudi society inside the modern city has not led to the disappearance and erosion of tribal ideologies. Rather, according Al-Dakhīl, these still form part of urban culture in Saudi society despite the rapidly accelerating process of modernisation in other aspects of Saudi life. For example, a tribal man, القبلي (*Al-Qabīlī*), cannot get married to a non-tribal woman, الخضيرية (*Al-Khaḍriyyah*), even if they are both city dwellers. This reflects something of the contradiction between traditional tribal ideologies and modern urban values city. However, Al-Dakhīl cites three reasons which he claims account for this contradiction. Firstly, the structure of Saudi society inside cities is largely built on tribal structures, meaning that tribal ideologies continue to form part of the Saudi mindset. Secondly, Bedouin tribes still represent the majority of the population in the central Arabian Peninsula, according to Al-Jāsir.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the urban Bedouin community is often illiterate and poor, and has developed its own class system and social hierarchy because, according to Al-Dakhīl, all communities will seek to create their own hierarchical divisions. As a consequence, in the urban setting, the only criterion for creating a hierarchy was one which discriminated on the basis of tribal lineage.<sup>5</sup>

Another literary critic, Al-Ghadhāmī, sees no difference between the modern metropolitan lifestyle and the traditional tribal society in terms of violence, economic exclusion and discriminatory social classification, citing the opinions of both Russell

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<sup>4</sup> Ḥamad Al-Jāsir (b.1907 – d.14 September 2000) was a prominent Saudi journalist and historian. He devoted most of his life to writing and research, becoming an internationally renowned authority on the history and geography of Arabia. He was granted membership of several Arab Institutes, including the Arab Scientific Institute in Damascus (1951) and in Baghdad (1954), the Arabic Language Institute in Cairo (1958), and others. For further information, see 'Mu'assasat Sulṭān Ibn 'Alī Al-'Uways Al-Thaqāfiyah' at: <<http://www.alowaisnet.org/en/winnersbio/abhiidgcefbceejjj.aspx>> [accessed on 04/05/2013]

<sup>5</sup> Al-Dakhīl, pp. 123-124.



and Steiner regarding the city and the tribe.<sup>6</sup> He emphasises that people continue to return to tribalism and sectarianism even at a time of scientific development and the emergence of Al-Şaḥwah (the Islamic Awakening) claiming this is due to the nature of postmodernism. However, he confirms that within the urban environment, the word “tribe” does not necessarily carry negative connotations in all circumstances but only when the tribe stops being a source of security for its members and becomes the reason for marginalising others. In this context, he draws a distinction between the terms *Al-Qabīlah* (the tribe), and *Al-Qabā’iliyyah* (tribalism), viewing the first as positive and the second as negative.<sup>7</sup>

It is clear from the work of Saudi critics that there is considerable debate concerning the subject of the tribe. Many of them believe that the value of the tribe still persists as Al-Rashid argues in her book “Politics in An Arabian Oasis: The Rashidis of Saudi Arabia”. She confirms that Saudi society is still completely imbued with the ethos of the tribe which values this form of social status.<sup>8</sup>

More recently, much has been made of the political basis for the social exclusion of certain tribes. Researcher, John R. Bradley, argues that the Saudi regime and the ruling family have marginalised some Saudi Bedouins because they belong to the big tribes which pose a threat to it. Tribes are often considered to represent a source of

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<sup>6</sup> Abdullah Al-Ghadhāmī, '*Al-Qabīlah wa Al-Qabā’iliyyah: Hawīyyāt Mābād Al-Ḥadāthah*' [*The tribe and Tribalism: Identities aftermath the era of Modernity*] (Beirut: Al-Markaz Al-Thaqafi Al-Arabi, 2009), p. 8. Al-Ghadhāmī himself comments that the first time he began to think seriously about ethnicity was not in Al-Qassim where he grew up but in the multicultural city of Jeddah when he became a lecturer at King Abdul Aziz University. Thus, his first real interest in his tribal origins began in an academic environment for the educated elite, far away from his roots (Ghadhāmī, p. 222).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> Madawi Al Rasheed, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis: The Rashidis of Saudi Arabia* (Ib Tauris, 1997), p. 257.

power to their members so they give their loyalties to the tribe more than to the government. Bradley illustrates his point with this true incident:

In late 2003, when the conservative members of the Al-Saud ruling family were leading a widespread crackdown on both liberal and Islamist reformers, Riyadh-based lawyer Abdul Aziz Al-Tayyar spoke live from his home to Al-Jazeera TV in Qatar about social and economic conditions inside Saudi Arabia. ‘All tribesmen are now willing to fight this government—we will protect the rights of our people,’ he said in impassioned tones over the telephone. ‘This is not the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia any more. It is a jungle full of monsters. The Saudi people are suppressed. They suffer poverty and unemployment.’ Minutes later, the Saudi security forces kicked down his front door, and carted Al-Tayyar off to jail.<sup>9</sup>

Bradley deduces that Al-Saud was so incensed by what Al-Tayyār said because “most of the hijackers on September 11 were from prominent Saudi tribes, and those ‘tribesmen’ of whom Al-Tayyār spoke still make up as many as 60 percent of the kingdom’s population”.<sup>10</sup>

In an interview on *Al-Jazeera* television station in 1990, Ḥumaydī Al-Jarbā, *Sheikh* (leader) of the Shammar, one of the most numerous tribes in the Arab World, was asked about his views on the marginalisation of tribal peoples by Arab governments:

Interviewer: Are you aiming for a re-consideration of the issue of the tribe (*Al-Qabīlah*) in the Arab World?

Al-Jarbā: We talk to our Arab presidents and say to them: Fear God! Don’t marginalise us like this.

Interviewer: But Arab presidents may not be seeking to marginalise tribal people as you think.

Al-Jarbā: They may not have intended it but the end result is effectively marginalisation so I’m not accusing them personally but marginalisation of tribes is practiced.

Interviewer: Can you give us an example?

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<sup>9</sup> John R. Bradley, *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

Al-Jarbā: For example, “قبيلة عنزة” (the ‘Unazah tribe)<sup>11</sup> is dispersed throughout Syria, Iraq, Jordan, the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia so its members cannot see each other unless they get permission for this.<sup>12</sup>

However, when questioned more closely about the issue of social exclusion of tribal peoples, Al-Jarbā could not provide a convincing example, producing an issue that only affected him personally, explaining: “I am in a high social position and I need to meet the members of my tribe to ascertain their needs”.<sup>13</sup>

It appears all the more remarkable that tribe members are marginalised by Arab governments even considering the view that the nature of the royal family regimes would strengthen a tribes’ rule to earn their loyalty by supporting their leaders financially. Perhaps royal family regimes may overtly support tribal leaders for the sake of political expediency whilst covertly introducing social policies which may have the effect of marginalising the rest of the members of a tribe.

The resurgence in interest in tribal lineage and heritage and in its negative counterpart, tribalism, has prompted debate about whether the Arab novel is actually a product of the city or the desert. In fact, Ghosh, a renowned novelist and anthropologist, has invented a new term to describe the contemporary Arab novel, namely “Petrofiction”. He explains:

Many Arab writers from Egypt and Lebanon -countries with faltering economies but rich literary traditions- are constrained to earn their livelihood in the Gulf. As a result, young Arab writers are no more likely to write about

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<sup>11</sup> Another of the most numerous tribes in the Arab World.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Al-Qabīlah Fī Al-‘Ālam Al-‘Arabī’, in *Al-Jazeera Website* (1990). Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/pages/0cd82048-5f22-4de7-ac21-ab0f62d05f7b> [accessed on 14/03/2014]

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

the Oil Encounter than are their Western counterparts. No matter how long they have lived in the Gulf or in Libya when it comes to the practice of fiction they generally prefer to return to the familiar territories staked out by their literary forebears.<sup>14</sup>

It would make an interesting future project to test out Ghosh's hypothesis, examining contemporary Saudi novels, an urban-based genre, for those intertextual traces of literary forebears. However, the focus here and now is on exploring how the concept of the tribe and of tribalism, both of which can be said to permeate contemporary Saudi society, is represented in the novels selected for analysis, beginning with Yousef Almohaimeed's work *Fikhākh Al-Rā'iḥah (Wolves of the Crescent Moon)*<sup>15</sup>.

### **5.2.1 *Fikhākh Al-Rā'iḥah (Wolves of the Crescent Moon): The Tribal Outcast and Urban Outsider***

The opening scene of Yousef Al-Mohaimeed's novel *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* describes the protagonist, *Ṭurād*, standing in front of the ticket counter at the departures terminal of King Khalid airport in Riyadh. *Ṭurād* is a Bedouin man who has been living in Riyadh for many years. However, having grown up as a desert dweller, he has found himself unable to adapt to realities of urban life. The setting of the opening scene, a busy international airport, has been chosen to encapsulate his sense of alienation. The airport is one of the most vibrant places in a city, filled with travellers, arriving and departing. In addition, time in an airport seems different; with the constantly rushing passengers it seems that the pace of life and time itself has

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<sup>14</sup> Amitav Ghosh, 'Petrofiction -- the Trench by Abdelrahman Munif and Translated by Peter Theroux / Cities of Salt by Abdelrahman Munif and Translated by Peter Theroux', in *The New Republic* (Washington: New Republic, 1992), p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> The novel has been translated into English by Anthony Calderbank under the title of '*Wolves of the Crescent Moon*'. The analysis will be of the translated version.

speeded up. As Pascoe notes, “It is tempting to think of airports [...] as metaphors of modern existence.”<sup>16</sup>

For *Ṭurād*, a Bedouin accustomed to a life without such complexities, this setting proves bewildering and thus, when the ticket seller asks him where he wants to go, he has no idea about a possible destination. This opening scene highlights *Ṭurād*'s inability to adapt to life in Riyadh and cope with life in an urban environment, this sense of isolation from the rest of society making him a socially marginalised outsider. He complains: “To hell with this city and the people in it. They have stripped me of every ounce of dignity and decency. Are they Arabs or what?”<sup>17</sup>

Al-Mohaimed uses *Ṭurād*'s angry words to reflect not only the character's personal frustrations with his life in Riyadh but they can also be said to indicate a number of underlying cultural and social issues relating to the life of the Bedouin in an urban setting like Riyadh. The most striking aspect of the character's words is the bitterness he expresses towards the city dwellers. Firstly, he curses them. Then he specifies their offence: they have taken from him the two things in life he values most. It is perhaps not surprising that he should mention dignity, invoking his noble status as a tribesman, for as we learn more about the character of *Ṭurād* it emerges that like many urban Bedouin, he has been able to find only poorly paid jobs, lacking in social prestige. He has worked as a day labourer, a coffee server, a security guard in a bank and at a palace gate, and finally as a messenger in a Government Ministry, but all without success. In his opinion, none of these jobs fits what he perceives to be

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<sup>16</sup> David Pascoe, *Airspaces* (Reaktion Books, 2001), p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> Yousef Al-Mohaimed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon: A Novel* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 4. An interesting account of the evolution of Riyadh into what some have called a post-modern city and the changing position of Bedouin settlers there can be found in Chapter Three “City of the Future” in Pascal Menoret, *Joyriding in Riyadh: Oil, Urbanism and Road Revolt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

his high social status as a noble tribesman. It is interesting, however, that *Ṭurād* also mentions that he has been stripped of decency, suggesting that as a Bedouin, he has been morally corrupted by the city dwellers and their lifestyle, evoking a recurrent theme not only in religious discourse but also in many different literary forms.

Finally, in his outburst, *Ṭurād* questions the authenticity of the Arab ethnicity of the city dwellers. In his opinion, he is a real Arab – the urban residents of Riyadh are something else, although he does not specify what this identity might consist of. In the space of just a few words spoken by *Ṭurād*, Al-Mohaimed manages to encapsulate many of the deep frustrations felt by urban Bedouin struggling to survive at the margins of the Saudi economy and their feelings towards city dwellers (*Al-Ḥaḍar*) who they believe are responsible for making them lead such a difficult life, for a variety of reasons outlined earlier in the chapter.

The author presents the character of *Ṭurād* as a member of a lower caste by comparing him with other people from different classes. This is one of the easiest and most effective ways of describing how a character understands their position within a particular social hierarchy, especially when this description is provided in the first person by the marginalised character himself:

There, in that vast ministry building, my feet had combed every corridor as I carried in my right hand the shiny brass coffeepot and three very small, ornately patterned china coffee cups. I had to stand at the door of the office; lift the pot up in the air, and pour. I used to take great pleasure in the task, moving from guest to guest with that coffee aroma perking them up. When the director of financial affairs gestured to me with his hand ‘enough’ I would leave immediately.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

In this section, the author has his protagonist *Ṭurād* provide a detailed account of his coffee-serving tasks in the Ministry thus conveying to readers the impression that this lowly profession is not suitable for this Bedouin man. The fact that the director of financial affairs does not even bother to speak to him when he is serving coffee, but merely uses a dismissive hand gesture, could be said to be symbolic of the extent to which *Ṭurād* simply does not count, as an excluded and socially marginalised individual.

Elsewhere, in the novel, when the narrator is describing *Ṭurād's* miserable attempts at job hunting, the reader is given a further insight not only into how *Ṭurād* ranks himself within the social hierarchy of the city, but also how he views his tribal identity:

After all roads tired of his wretched feet, and posh offices ejected him, and faces shunned him, after all the houses turned him away, he had decided to vie with the Indians and Bangladeshis washing cars. ‘There is nothing dishonourable about it’, he told himself out loud, but the voice residing deep inside chastised him: ‘You, son of the free tribes, son of the wild lands and the wide canyons, how can you accept becoming a cleaner, a servant or a slave?’ ‘We are all his slaves,’ he would say to console himself.<sup>19</sup>

Here, the narrator uses the literary technique of “interior monologue,”<sup>20</sup> also known as “dramatic monologue,” to allow his character to express his psychological state, revealing his motivations and personal views. This means that the author can portray

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> It is one of the narrative techniques typically employed when a character is faced with a moment of decision, usually in moral crisis. See Philip Sellev, 'Interior Monologue as a Narrative Device in the Parables of Luke', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, (1992). p.239

the difficult challenges facing his character and give readers access to the characters' unspoken thoughts. Glennis Byron states: "The dramatic monologue is now considered particularly appropriate for the purposes of social critique",<sup>21</sup> and this is what Al-Mohaimed does in this section. Philip Sellew highlights the fact that interior monologue as a technique of self-address has a long history, having been used "in Greek mimetic or dramatic literature, especially in epic poetry, tragedy, and the Hellenistic novels, as well as in some of the biblical tradition". However, as Sellew notes, across the ages the author's intention in using interior monologue has remained the same: "to paint more vivid and poignant portraits".<sup>22</sup>

It is interesting that in this section, the author mentions that *Ṭurād* is competing for car-washing jobs with Bangladeshis and Indians, two other ethnicities typically found amongst another group of socially marginalised people in Saudi Arabia, namely, the foreign or guest workers who come as economic migrants, often to carry out the menial tasks which urban Saudis shun. In terms of the social hierarchy, he ranks himself alongside those who have been forced by economic circumstances to abandon their former lives or have been lured by false promises of a better life. The topic of foreign workers will be addressed later in this thesis.

The most revealing aspect of this extract, however, is what it tells us about *Ṭurād's* understanding of what means to be a member of a Bedouin tribe. First and foremost, it implies a personal sense of honour which has been instilled in him, reflected in the fact that even though he tries to convince himself that an existence performing menial tasks for urban dwellers is acceptable, an inner voice tells him that this goes

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<sup>21</sup> Glennis Byron, *Dramatic Monologue* (Psychology Press, 2003), p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Sellew, p. 240.



against his innate nobility, and equates such tasks with servitude or slavery. Secondly, it entails a particular lifestyle which is not settled, and involves close contact with a natural environment (wild lands and the wide canyons) which contrasts absolutely with his sedentary urban existence in Riyadh. Finally, it also includes religious devotion, as reflected in his claim that ‘We are all his slaves,’ reminding readers of the origin of the term Islam meaning “submission” echoing the Qur’anic verse “unto Him we have surrendered” (2.136).<sup>23</sup>

It is clear that life in the city has played a major role in the marginalisation of *Turād*, a tribesman, as it becomes apparent he is unable to cope with many aspects of urban life in the Saudi capital. However, it is also important to address the issue of the extent to which tribal values effectively contributed to forcing *Turād* into living in the city, as the author reveals. For later, in one of the most dramatic parts of the novel, *Turād* recalls the circumstances in which he lost his ear. After he and his companion attempted to steal a couple of camels from the caravan of some tribesmen en route to Mecca, both of them were tortured. They were then abandoned in the Nafud Desert, and subjected to a traditional punishment. Buried in the sand up to their necks, they were left to await the arrival of the hungry wolves taking them as prey and as a result, his ear is bitten off.

Al-Muḥaymīd thus forces the reader to see that to a certain extent *Turād* has romanticised his previous lifestyle as “son of the free tribes, son of the wild lands and the wide canyons” for essentially, he earned his living as a common thief. Al-Muḥaymīd’s unflinching description of the cruelty of the caravaneers shows that tribal justice knows no mercy. Moreover, after his fight with a wolf in the darkness

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<sup>23</sup> Al-Mohaimed, pp. 5-6. For more about the Bedouins and the coming of Islam, see C. E. Farah (7<sup>th</sup> edition), *Islam* (New York: Barron’s, 2003).

of the desert, the other members of his tribe constantly mock his disability, and like other disabled individuals in tribal communities, he is no longer addressed by his given name, but simply referred to in terms of his disability. This leaves him hating his own tribal community, causing him to escape to Riyadh.

Later in the novel, while leafing through a pile of magazines on the table in the waiting area, *Ṭurād* finds some documents which have been abandoned. It emerges that the documents belong to Nāṣir, a foundling, and they contain all his personal details since birth. Al-Muḥaymīd uses this as an opportunity for *Ṭurād* to engage in an imaginary dialogue with Nāṣir, talking to him as though he was right there in front of him, and divulging his innermost thoughts and feelings about his tribe:

“Damn the tribes and their evil customs. What good have the tribes done for me, Nāṣir my friend? Nothing. They said I was defective because I was without an ear, yet before that my reputation and courage had preceded me into the desert wilderness”.<sup>24</sup>

*Ṭurād*, then, is a double outsider. Unable to return to the tribe he hates for their cruelty towards him, and unable to adapt to a socially marginalised lifestyle in Riyadh, which he refers to as “*Hell*”, *Ṭurād* chooses a new place to live: ‘Ar‘ar, a settlement close to the Iraq border, explaining:

The best thing about it is that it is right on the border of Hell, one step and I will be in another country. I am not looking for heaven, or paradise, or even an easy life. All I want is a place where people will respect me, not abuse me or treat me like a dog. I ran away from all my folk because of the tribe. I ran away from a palace, and from the parking lot, and from the ministry, and now at last I am trying to run away from Hell.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

It is perhaps not surprising that Al-Mohaimeed's novel was banned by the Saudi authorities for it tackles certain themes and talks about inconvenient truths about the reality of life for some marginalised groups like the urban Bedouin.<sup>26</sup>

### **5.2.2 *Jāhiliyyah (Ignorance): Breaking Tribal Taboo***

“Asking about the would-be son-in-law is normal in all societies, but among some Saudis the question does not focus on the behaviour and attitude of the would-be son-in-law but about his family and tribal origin”

Dr Salwa Al-Khateeb, professor of sociology, King Saud University<sup>27</sup>

Saudi writers often address the subject of those individuals who cannot trace their origins to a tribe and how this impacts on the individual concerned and the structure of Saudi society itself. They use many forms of writing to address this subject but the novel is perhaps the most important of these forms, for as David Lodge has argued, one of the key functions of the contemporary novel is to portray the experiences of individuals in modern societies is, and represent their specific consciousness of the world.<sup>28</sup>

As previously mentioned, the theme which tends to emerge most prominently in the discussion of the tribe and tribalism is marriage, mainly because this social occasion focuses not only on the bride and the groom but also, more importantly, involves discussion about their kinship and tribal origins. As Bin Şunaytān observes “Many

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<sup>26</sup> Zuzana Kratka *Banipal, Three young men take on the wolves* (Magazine of Modern Arab Literature, 31 August 2008). Available at: [http://www.banipal.co.uk/book\\_reviews/42/wolves-of-the-crescent-moon-by-yousef-al-mohaimeed/](http://www.banipal.co.uk/book_reviews/42/wolves-of-the-crescent-moon-by-yousef-al-mohaimeed/) [accessed on 22/07/2013]

<sup>27</sup> Salwa Al-khateeb, *Tribal ties weigh heavily on Saudi marriages* (Gulfnews, 14 June 2007). Available at: <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/tribal-ties-weigh-heavily-on-saudi-marriages-1.186154> [accessed on 05/07/2013]

<sup>28</sup> See David Lodge, *Consciousness & the Novel: Connected Essays* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 1.

people forget their roots until they start to talk about marriage.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, tribalism is so deeply rooted in Saudi Arabia that some tribe members have turned to the courts.<sup>30</sup> In 2013 alone, courts in Saudi Arabia nullified 36 marriages, reaching a forced-divorce decision on the grounds of a lack of equal social status between the two parties involved.<sup>31</sup>

In Saudi society, it is still common for people to discriminate against others purely on the grounds of ethnicity or tribal origins. This phenomenon has its roots in the historical background of Arabs. Although Islamic teachings are against this hierarchical view of society, many Saudis still adopt this discriminatory attitude when dealing with those from other ethnic or tribal backgrounds. Louise Mason<sup>32</sup> has explored the roots of this fundamental paradox in attitudes to social class and hierarchy, a major problem in the social history of the early Islamic world, and has noted that there are passages in the Quran, notably “The most noble among you in the sight of God is the most pious” (49:13), which suggest that the religious and moral qualities of an individual, rather than any social distinctions based on wealth or genealogy, should be the true measure of worth in a Muslim society. Mason also provides evidence that this view is supported by Traditions of the Prophet and

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<sup>29</sup> Muhammad Bin Ṣunaytān, *Al-Sa’ūdī Al-Sīyāsī wa Al-Qabīlah* [*The Political Saudi and the Tribe*] (Beirut: Arabi Network for Research and Publishing, 2008), p. 102.

<sup>30</sup> The most well-known recent example of this kind is that of Fatimah and her husband Mansour Al-Taimani. In July 2005, a judge in Al-Jouf (northern Saudi Arabia), nullified the couple’s marriage following family allegations that Al-Taimani had misled them about his tribal affiliations based on the principle that the status of the wife’s family is considered superior to that of her husband’s. See Mariam Al Hakeem, ‘Tribal Ties Weigh Heavily on Saudi Marriages’, (Gulfnews, 2007). Available at: <<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/tribal-ties-weigh-heavily-on-saudi-marriages-1.186154>> [accessed on 20/04/2014]

<sup>31</sup> See, Hattan Abu Athmah, ‘36 Case of Forced-Divorce Decision Due Unequal in Ethnicity’, *Al-Madinah*, (2014). Available at: <<http://www.al-madina.com/node/511302>> [accessed on 20/04/2014]

<sup>32</sup> Louise Mason, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

sayings attributed to `Ali ibn Abi Talib, which suggest that egalitarian views enjoyed a widespread following at least for the first two centuries of Islam.

In her novel *Jāhiliyyah* (Ignorance), Layla Al-Juhani<sup>33</sup> highlights and criticises a number of traditions in Saudi society which she believes run counter to Islamic religious values and principles. The title of her novel is important since it already draws links to the concept of *Al-Jāhiliyyah*, the term used by Muslims to refer to the time prior to the revelation of the Qur'an to Mohammed and the spread of Islam.

Al-Juhani's work is set in the coastal city of Jeddah which is seen as a multicultural city compared with other Saudi cities. The city's geographical location places it at the heart of the region covered by the Middle East and North Africa, marking Jeddah as the second largest commercial centre of the Middle East after Dubai. Jeddah is the principal gateway to Mecca, Islam's holiest city, which able-bodied Muslims are required to make a pilgrimage to at least once in their lifetime. It is also a gateway to Medina, the second holiest place in Islam.

It is clear that Al-Juhani takes great care in choosing her main characters' names since each of these has its own symbolism. The novel's female protagonist لين (Leen) meaning soft and flexible falls in love with a young black man named مالك (Mālik) or the owner. The irony of his name becomes apparent when he is referred to at times in terms suggesting he is a slave. So it seems suitable to the situation in which Leen is flexible enough to accept this kind of relationship unlike the rigid opposition which

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<sup>33</sup> "She was born in 1969 in Tubuq, Saudi Arabia. She has a BA in English Literature from King Abdul Aziz University in Medina, an MA in Foreign Languages, and is working for a PhD in education at the University of Tiba in Medina. She has won prizes for her short stories – coming first in the 1993 short story competition of Medina Literary Club, and third place in the Tiaf Literary Club's 1991 short story competition". See her profile on bainipal website, available at: <http://www.bainipal.co.uk/contributors/469/Laila%20al-Juhni/> [accessed on 14/01/2014]

she meets from Saudi society and her family, in particular her brother هاشم (Hāshim). Just as his name means “breaker” or “crusher”, it is he who finally succeeds in breaking up his sister’s relationship by crushing Mālik’s skull. It is clear that Hashim will never accept his sister’s relationship with this young black man since, as the author reveals, Hashim’s prejudice runs so deep that he believes black people are different in everything, even their smell:

لعنة الله عليها ألم تضايقها رائحته؟ كل أبناء جنسه لهم رائحة حادة مزعجة, ألم تنتبه لها؟ لكن رائحة الواحد،  
منهم تتم عنه من مسافة, فكيف لم تنتبه؟<sup>34</sup>

God damn her, has she never been bothered by his smell? Everyone like him has a strong, offensive smell. Doesn’t she notice it? You can tell those people even from a distance just by their smell. Why doesn’t she notice it?

In this novel, it emerges that the character of Hāshim has been having illicit sexual relations with several girls but justifies his own behaviour while preventing his sister from forming a legitimate relationship, simply due to the fact that this relationship is with a young black man. On one occasion, he has sex with a girl in his car, then tells her to get out. Offended by his treatment, she warns him:

الدنيا سلف ودين يا هاشم, عندك أخت وبكرة تندم<sup>35</sup>،

Life is about give-and-take, Hāshim. You have a sister and you will regret tomorrow.

Thus, for Hāshim, the key problem relating to his sister and her lover, Mālik, is the difference in social class and race. Her parents also share their son’s opinion regarding the unsuitability of Mālik. They reject him but are less blunt in their expression, blaming their reservations on the negative reaction which such a marriage would provoke in Saudi society. Her father foresees legal obstacles to the

<sup>34</sup> Layla Al-Juhani, *Jāhiliyyah: Ignorance* (Beirut: Dār Al-’Adāb, 2007), p. 35.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

marriage, coming from those responsible for registering the marriage. He remembers an incident he witnessed when visiting the court one day. He saw a white girl enter, accompanied by her brother, in order to register her marriage since her father would not accept her relationship with a young black man. Then the *Shuyūkh* (the religious representatives at the court) took the girl into a side room and asked her:

لم تريدن الزواج بأسود؟ هل يهددك بشيء ما؟ أخبرينا وسنتصرف معه. هل ارتكبتما الفاحشة؟<sup>36</sup>

Why do you want to marry a black man? Is he threatening you? Just tell us and we will deal with it. Have you committed adultery with him?

After remembering this scene, Leen's father wonders what people would do if he allowed his daughter to marry Mālik and imagines what the *Shuyūkh* would say to him:

أف يا أبو هاشم، مالقيت إلا هالعبد تزوجه بنتك؟ ليه بارت وماعاد فيه رجال؟ كان قلت لنا وحننا تصرفنا. “  
الشباب مالين البلد يا أبو هاشم”<sup>37</sup>

Ogh... Abū-Hāshim. Have not you found anyone to give your daughter to other than this black slave? Why? Are there no men left? Tell us and we will deal with it. There are young men all over our land.

A number of points emerge from this passage which merit commentary since they highlight broader themes in Al-Juhanī novel. The first thing that Leen's father imagines the *Shuyūkh* saying has been transliterated here as “Ogh”, for it is not even a word but a sound which immediately connotes anger and sets the tone for his comments to come.<sup>38</sup> In his mind, Leen's father is then addressed by the *Shuyūkh* as Abū-Hāshim. Although this reflects a common practice of honorific naming in Saudi

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>38</sup> It is mentioned in the *Holy Quran* within the context of prohibiting children to abuse their parents by making any sound in anger like “Ogh” (*Surat Al-Anbyā'* [verse:35])

Arabia where many men prefer to be called by their son's rather than their daughter's name, even if she is the older offspring, in this context it also reminds the reader that one of the man's children, Hāshim, is the key obstacle to the pursuit of happiness of the other, Leen.

The next statement: "Have you not found anyone to give your daughter to other than this black slave?" now reveals the true depth of the *Shuyūkh*'s contempt at the idea that such a marriage should be allowed to go ahead. Their dismissive rhetorical question concerning the man's inability to have found "anyone" to marry his daughter other than Mālik reflects the extent to which Leen's opinions are considered of no importance in the matter. The future of Abū-Hāshim's daughter is being discussed but nothing is said about her own personal preferences. Moreover, the men focus solely on their own suggestions and opinions as if the matter relates only to them and not to her. She is not even named as an individual in her own right but simply referred to as "your daughter".

All references to Mālik, the potential son-in-law, are overtly racist in nature. Firstly, he is directly referred to as العبد a word which has two usages in Arabic, both of which are derogatory in nature: slave or a racist term of abuse for someone who is black.<sup>39</sup> Ironically, the word they use, with its associations of social injustice, appears in the mouths of those who responsible for overseeing affairs in the court which should be the place where justice is meted out not racist abuse. The following comment: "Are there no men left?" is a further indication of racism, implying that Mālik is viewed by them as something less than human, reflecting elements of the

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<sup>39</sup> Many sayings regarding classifying and judging people by their race have been passed from generation to generation e.g. Al-Mutanabbī:

لا تشتري العبد إلا والعصا معه  
"إن العبيد لأنجاس منكاي"

Never buy a slave unless the stick comes along with him. Slaves are impure and can jinx.



racism which still exists covertly in many sectors of Saudi society but can surface overtly in the case of issues such as marriage.

The *Shuyūkh*'s offer to "deal with it" can be viewed on one level as a genuine if somewhat paternalistic offer of help to fix Abū-Hāshim's problem and find a suitable husband for his daughter. However, this could also be interpreted as an underlying threat and effectively foreshadows the violent action which Hāshim will commit in order to deal with the "problem" which Mālik poses to the family, literally taking matters into his own hands.

The use of the possessive pronoun in the final comment, stressing that "There are young men all over our land", projects a clear message that the only suitors who should be considered for Leen are to be found on "our" land; in other words, they are the sons of the tribe to which Leen's family belong.

Al-Juhani cleverly weaves all these thematic strands into this text which written as an interior monologue revealing not only what is going on in the mind of Leen's father but also highlighting the degree of social marginalisation that black people are exposed to in Saudi Arabia.

Al-Juhani often allows the reader access to the internal world of her characters, exteriorising their innermost thoughts, prejudices, emotions, dreams and nightmares. Her use of this technique is particularly effective when she attempts to portray what it feels like to be exposed to the kind of social pressure exerted against any individual who is brave or foolhardy enough to attempt to break a social taboo. In the following passage, Al-Juhani describes the psychological state of her character Leen as she sits alone in her room with her vivid imagination producing terrifying visions of all those who have been offended and affronted by her behaviour:

... رأتهم ينسلون إلى غرفتها من كل مكان: من تحت الباب, عبر النافذة, من فتحة المكيف, من خلال مقابس الكهرباء, رأته كل أولئك الذين سيكتشفون عما قليل أنها ثقتبت سياجهم الشفاف المقدس, الذي نصبوه منذ دهور طويلة مضت بين الألوان والأجناس والأعراق كي لا تختلط, فيحل الفساد في البر والبحر, ملأوا فضاء الغرفة من حولها, وابتسموا ساخرين وهم يرددون الواحد تلو الآخر: قلنا لك تكروني ما فهمت<sup>40</sup>

She saw them creeping into her room from everywhere: under the door, through the window, from the air-conditioner vents and out of the electric sockets. She saw all those people who would soon reveal that she had broken through their sacred invisible fence which they had long since erected in order to prevent races, genders and ethnicities from mixing, thus allowing corruption to exist everywhere. They overwhelmed the atmosphere in the room and smiled, sarcastically repeating:

We told you that he is *Takrūnī*<sup>41</sup> but you didn't understand.

Once again, Al-Juhani allows the reader to access her character's imaginings and in the process, she also raises a number of interesting issues about the interaction between society and the individual. Leen's vision of disapproving disembodied individuals entering her room, invading her personal space, seeping in by every means possible, is initially reminiscent of Gothic novels or perhaps their Hollywood adaptations.<sup>42</sup> Her description recalls countless scenes when the hapless female victim finds herself unable to ward off unwanted threats from visitors from other worlds. This evocation perhaps suggests at first that Leen has an overactive imagination, casting herself as the melodramatic heroine in a frightening tale which she hopes will ultimately have a happy ending.

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<sup>40</sup> Al-Juhani, pp. 104-105.

<sup>41</sup> *Takrūnī* (plural *Takarīnah*) is a Saudi expression, sometimes used with offensive overtones, to describe black Africans, belonging originally to tribes including *Hawsa*, *Fallatah* and *Borno*, who have settled illegally in Saudi Arabia after travelling there for the Hajj. See <http://sundaytrust.com.ng/index.php/news/8582-hajjlife-of-nigerias-takari-settlers-in-saudi-arabia> [accessed on 03\03\2014]

<sup>42</sup> The text which most easily springs to mind is Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), with its shape-shifting vampire who materialises into the bedrooms of his female victims.

However, Al-Juhani then goes beyond this somewhat superficial comparison, to make an insightful comment on the nature of social taboo, likening this to a “sacred invisible fence [...] erected in order to prevent races, genders and ethnicities from mixing”. Her use of the word “sacred” links directly to the origins of taboo described by the *Encyclopædia Britannica* as “a vehement prohibition of an action based on the belief that such behaviour is either too sacred or too accursed for ordinary individuals to undertake, under threat of supernatural punishment”.<sup>43</sup> The entry into Leen’s room of the army of disembodied figures now takes on a further meaning. She fears they have come to exact revenge for what she has done by attempting to enter into marriage with Mālik which would potentially lead to the “mixing” of races and ethnicities in any children they might have together.

Perhaps, too, in this image one can also read a more localised reference here to religious taboo in Saudi Arabia since the “sacred invisible fence” which Leen imagines is intended to segregate not only races and ethnicities but also males and females, reminiscent of the Kingdom’s strict Wahhabi interpretation of Islam which forbids women from being in contact with members of the opposite sex, unless they are accompanied by a male ‘guardian’, usually a senior family member.

There is also here an important comment by Al-Juhani on the consequences of Leen’s role in breaching the protective fence, “thus allowing corruption to exist everywhere”. For the judgmental figures imagined by Leen view her in the role which the female has often been cast in mythical and religious discourse: as the bringer into the world of chaos and corruption. To mention but two specific

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<sup>43</sup> ‘Taboo’, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* (2012). Available at: <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/579821/taboo>> [accessed on 21/03/2014] The entry draws on the 1958 monograph by the social anthropologist Franz Steiner *Taboo* (1958).

examples, the Ancient Greek myth of Pandora and interpretations of the biblical story of Eve (Genesis, Chapter 3). As Phipps notes:

The characters of Eve in Genesis and Pandora in Ancient Greek myth have some striking similarities. Each is the first woman in the world; and each is a central character in a story of transition from an original state of plenty and ease to one of suffering and death, a transition which is brought about in revenge for a transgression of divine law.<sup>44</sup>

Phipps reference here to ‘transgression of divine law’ suggests a further parallel between Eve, Pandora and Leen: all have broken sacred taboo and must pay the price for their actions. Just as in Abū-Hāshim’s imaginings about the problems his daughter’s marriage might cause with the *Shuyūkh* there was an underlying threat, here also the unhappy end to Leen’s relationship with Mālik is foreshadowed.

Al-Juhani also employs an interesting narrative technique to tackle the issues raised by social marginalisation due to ethnicity and to explore how racism operates in contemporary Saudi society. She allows Mālik to narrate his own life story and gradually disclose his true feelings to Leen, using each incident he recounts to highlight one central aspect of the social marginalisation he has faced at every stage of his life. He begins by recounting episodes from his school days and the difficulty he faced when answering a question posed innocently by one of his class mates studying with him in the primary school:

لما الواحد يكون أسود، كيف يحس؟<sup>45</sup>

When someone is black, how does he feel?

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<sup>44</sup> William E Phipps, 'Eve and Pandora Contrasted', *Theology Today*, 45 (1988), 34-48. Available online at: <Academic\_Affairs/Academic\_Departments/Theology\_Today/apr1988/v45-1-article3.htm> [accessed on 14/04/2014]

<sup>45</sup> Al-Juhani, p. 151.

This question posed by a child is deceptively simple but actually goes to the heart of the issue about the suffering endured by those who face racism due to their ethnicity.

Mālik reports that he gave the following answer:

لما العيال يقولوا عني بقايا حجاج ولا طرش بحر أحس بغيطر, فكيف لما أكون طرش بحر وأسود كمان<sup>46</sup>”

When children call me *Baqāyā Ḥujjāj*<sup>47</sup> or *Ṭarsh Baḥr* I feel angry: so what if I am a *Ṭarsh Baḥr* and black too?

Mālik’s words serve a double purpose here since they not only convey the raw emotions that he felt as a school boy, answering the child’s question, but also his ongoing feelings about facing such terms of abuse. Another incident which sticks in his mind and which he relates to Leen is an encounter he had with the assistant school director who asked him not to study so hard that he became the best in the class. Mālik is confused by this request until the man explained that since he will have no opportunity to study at university, it would be better for him to give a real Saudi the chance to be the best. The assistant school director concluded their meeting by telling Mālik that this was a small sacrifice to offer to the land which had sheltered him and his family, and allowed him to escape a life working as a car-parking attendant or kitchen porter.

Throughout her novel, Al-Juhani allows us to see the racist behaviour of certain segments of Saudi society through Mālik’s eyes, as he recounts the typical problems he encounters: the racial slurs that he faces whenever he makes a driving mistake;<sup>48</sup> the fact that even police officers, who are supposed to be protecting him, ask him to

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Both these expressions are used as terms of abuse in the Saudi community. Ironically, both terms also point to the fact that Mālik’s family originally came to Saudi Arabia as *Ḥajj* pilgrims fulfilling their religious duty. (In the case of *Ṭarsh Baḥr* the term specifies *Ḥajj* pilgrims who reached the Arabian Peninsula by sea). Different areas, they settled and obtained Saudi nationality, but are still viewed as lower class outsiders by tribal members.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Juhani, p. 108.

show his residence document and not to look like a native.<sup>49</sup> Sadly, Mālik finally grasps the fact that Saudi society is not yet ready for this kind of relationship. Equality only exists in the fictional world of TV programmes. He and Leen finally accept that there is no way to continue their relationship because Mālik does not belong to an Arab tribe and is a *Bidoun*.<sup>50</sup>

### 5.2.3 *Sa'ūdi wa lākin Laqīṭ* (He is a Saudi but he is a Foundling): Foundlings and Identity

Throughout this part of study, reference will be made to the book *Sa'ūdi wa lākin Laqīṭ* which is an autobiographical account by a genuine Saudi foundling, as the opening page declares:

اسم المؤلف اسم مستعار "ليس حقيقياً", ولكن أحداث القصة كلها حقيقية, والمؤلف هو صاحب القصة  
نفسه»<sup>51</sup>

The author's name is a pseudonym not his real one. However, everything that takes place in this story is true and the author himself is the protagonist.

Samīr Muhammad claims that he was prompted to write his autobiography due to the exclusion and social marginalisation that he has faced personally in Saudi society.<sup>52</sup>

It is clear that the author resorted to using a pseudonym in order to be more explicit and more frank. This makes his study more robust since it is based on real facts. In this section, the objective is to make a comparison between what this biography

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>50</sup> Also known as Stateless Arabs, *bidoun* are stateless people (from the Arabic بدون جنسية, without nationality). In 2012, Ḥajjī Jābir published a novel, *Samrāweet* (Beirut: Al-Markaz Al-Thaqāfi Al-`Arabī, 2012), about *bidoun* in Saudi Arabia and chose Jeddah as the setting since it is known as the most multicultural city in Saudi Arabia and also where he himself grew up. Jābir is originally from Eritrea and wanted to portray the suffering of the *bidoun* in Saudi Arabia. As this novel does not fall within the chronological parameters established for the research, it will not be analysed but merits mention here as an interesting new development.

<sup>51</sup> Samīr Muhammad, *Sa'ūdi wa lākin Laqīṭ* [He is a Saudi but he is a foundling] (Dubai: Madarek Publishing House, 2012), p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

reveals about the life of a foundling in Saudi society and how this topic is represented by Saudi novelists. For various reasons, as a tribal and religiously conservative society, Saudi Arabia marginalises foundlings in a number of ways not normally seen elsewhere. For example, foundlings carry the additional stigma of being considered to be the product of the sin of fornication or adultery. This becomes apparent when Samīr presents a list of the various names and terms of abuse which are commonly used to refer to foundlings in Saudi society:

مجهول النسب, لقيط, ابن الحرام, ابن غير شرعي, مجهول الأبوين, ثمن الخطيئة, ابن الرعاية, ضائع النسب, “  
ولد الساقطة, ابن الزنا, النبتة الشيطانية, ابن العاهرة”<sup>53</sup>.

Of unknown parentage, Foundling, Son of the Sacred, Illegitimate son, Parents Unknown, The fruit of sin, Son of the orphanage, The lost root, Son of a prostitute, Illegitimate, The Satanic plant, Son of a bitch.

Some of these are clearly neutral official or legal phrases found in bureaucratic documents. Others, though, are clearly intended to be disparaging, abusive or designed to cause offence.

This section explores how Saudi novelists have dealt with the topic of foundlings and chosen to represent the reality of their lives inside Saudi communities. The most prominent themes that relate to the position of foundlings in Saudi Arabia are those of internal conflict since foundlings are often extremely concerned about the search for their true identity, being raised in an orphanage, their relationships with the external world, finding jobs, and getting married within a society obsessed by being able to trace one’s lineage and origins.

Al-Mohaimed novel, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon*, features a foundling character referred to as ‘Nassir’ but he chooses to represent him in a different way to the other

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 56

characters within the novel. Nassir's story is originally presented by means of some documents that Turād, the Bedouin outcast, finds 'accidentally' at the airport while waiting for his flight, just as Nassir himself was found 'accidentally' near the Mosque of Abdullah Bin Al-Zubayr by an individual called Muhammad Abdū Nassir.<sup>54</sup> All the information that Turād has about Nassir is a set of official documents inside a file and this is the only information that the narrator allows us, as readers, to have access to about this character.

Moreover, the narrator draws attention to the fact this information takes the form of official reports and documents by presenting it differently on the printed page, within different margins and in a different font to the rest of the novel's text. Four reports are used to identify 'Nassir', entitled: 'محضر عثور' (Incident Report), 'تقرير طبي' (Medical Report), 'محضر تسمية' (Naming Record) and 'تبليغ عن ولادة' (Announcement of Birth). The first of these is the Medical Report which appears as follows:

#### **MEDICAL REPORT**

Symptoms: The baby's left hip is dislocated. In addition, severe damage suffered to the tissue surrounding the right eye socket as a result of the traumatic loss of the eye. The baby is also suffering from hepatitis and dehydration.<sup>55</sup>

The clinical, dispassionate style of writing of the medical report is informative but unemotional, intended to record the physical reality of the baby's condition but it is left up to readers to draw their own conclusions about the causes of the symptoms which the baby is suffering from. Regardless of the style in which the account is

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<sup>54</sup> Al-Mohaimed, p. 34. Many foundlings in Saudi Arabia are abandoned close to mosques since these buildings are visited on a frequent basis when people come to pray, and there is more of a chance that the child will be found unharmed.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 43.



given, Al-Muhaymīd makes it clear for Nassir, like other foundlings in Saudi society, life from birth itself is an uphill struggle. The inclusion throughout the novel of this style of official discourse serves to remind readers of the fact that there are always multiple versions of ‘reality’ and that ultimately so-called ‘documentary evidence’ or ‘the official version’ is actually sometimes less helpful in conveying the truth about an issue than fiction.<sup>56</sup>

There is perhaps here an intriguing link to be drawn between the process of writing and the process of ‘inventing’ oneself which is highlighted in the case of foundlings who must literally make up a story about themselves.

In *Wolves of the Crescent Moon*, by foregrounding the process by which Turād invents the story of Nassir from a set of official documents and then holds imaginary conversations with him, Al-Mohaimed draws attention to the process of literary creation, when the author draws upon some elements of social reality and uses these to produce a novelised version of that reality, just as he has done in his own work. Catriona Seth has previously drawn links between foundling characters, the literary process and the emergence of novel-writing:

Eighteenth-century writers used foundlings as the heroes of numerous fictional tales, but they also saw them as providing an analogy of what becomes of a written work once it is published, particularly if it is anonymous. The omnipresence of references to foundlings in literature shows how important the paradigm of the abandoned child was and how it contributed to the emergence of the modern novel.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Many video clips and photos are published on social media sites, drawing attention to the plight of foundlings. Some of them were found dead of hunger whilst others were attacked by predators (just as in the case of Nassir, who, it emerges, loses an eye following an attack by a rat). The following link is a newspaper report about a foundling abandoned in a container next to a maternity hospital in the city of Taif in 2014. Available at: <<http://www.okaz.com.sa/24x7/articles/article8729.html>> [accessed on 05/05/2014]

<sup>57</sup> Catriona Seth, *Nobody's Children? Enlightenment Foundlings, Identity and Individual Rights* (Utrecht: Werkgroep 18e Eeuw, 2012), p.4.

Another of the official documents which Turād discovers is the naming record of Nāssir. He learns that a mother's name was allocated at random to foundlings at the hospital by choosing one from the pre-existing list of invented names (suggesting that this was not an uncommon occurrence). The baby's own name was also chosen at random from the list of official names for male newborns.

### NAMING RECORD

Upon consulting the list of official names for newborn males and the list of names for mothers both the original in our possession and the copy held at the hospital of the medical complex the name selected for the newborn male is Nasir Abdulilah Hasan Abdullah. The name selected from the list of mothers' name is Salha Abdulrahman Ahmad.<sup>58</sup>

Al-Mohaimeed also uses the discovery of this text to allow his character Turād not only to draw a further comparison between Nāssir and himself but also to make a broader point about the importance of clan and tribal lineage in Saudi society. When Turād reads the document, he notices that the definite article *أل التعريف* which should proceed Nassir's *nisbah* (نسبة) or tribal name is missing:<sup>59</sup>

“There is no goddamn definite article at the end, not like the well-known families in our country. You are a nonentity, undefined, with no known father or mother”.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, pp. 44-45.

<sup>59</sup> The definite article *أل التعريف* is a particle (ḥarf) whose function is to render the noun on which it is prefixed definite. It fulfils a number of grammatical, pragmatic and semantic uses in Arabic, but most relevant to our purposes here is that it should normally be attached to the tribal name. Na'ama Pat-El, 'The Development of the Semitic Definite Article: A Syntactic Approach', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 54 (2009), p. 19. Novelists including Hifni and Al-Sanea have criticised its misuse in contemporary writing: Hifni, P. 128, and Al-Sanea, pp:108,110,129.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, p. 45.

However, Turād then adds: “But I am like you in every aspect. We are both lost in this strange and unfamiliar city”<sup>61</sup>.

The city he is referring to is, of course, Riyadh, which has remained ‘strange and unfamiliar’ to him although he has lived there for many years, indicating his sense of alienation there. With regard to the question of foundling and identity in Saudi Arabia, it is interesting to note that in his autobiography, Samīr Muhammad, the Saudi foundling mentioned above, devotes a whole chapter entitled ‘Who am I? The question is killing me’, to the issue of identity, which poses multiple questions for him which other Saudis do not have to think about:

بدأت مشتتة الذهن، أ طرح على نفسي بشكل يومي تساؤلات مزعجة تدور في مخيلتي من أنا؟ من أكون؟ من هو والدي؟ من هي أمي؟ ولماذا تخلوا عني؟ وأين هما الآن؟ ومن هي قبيلتي أو عائلتي التي أنتمي إليها؟ ولماذا زملائي في المدرسة عندهم آباء وأمهات وإخوان وأسر وقبيلة وأنا وحيد أذهب للدار نهاية اليوم الدراسي وزملائي يذهبون لبيوتهم وأسرهم؟<sup>62</sup>

Every day I have started to become distracted by posing numerous worrisome questions about myself: ‘Who am I?’, ‘Who is my father?’, ‘Who is my mother’, ‘Why did they abandon me?’, ‘Where are they?’, ‘What tribe and family do I belong to?’, ‘Why do my school friends have parents, brothers, families and tribes but I don’t?’ and ‘Why am I the only one who goes back to the orphanage every day when I’ve finished school while my friends go home to their families?’

As this shows, along with the questions concerning the identity of his parents, there is a broader concern about his lineage as he mentions family/tribe twice, reflecting the importance of the individual’s tribal heritage.

It is true that the government provides orphanages for foundlings where wet nurses look after babies or care workers look after older children but as Samīr explains the relationship is not a loving one:

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>62</sup> Muhammad, p.24.

كانت مرضعتي بالدار “أما” تسمى الأم البديلة, ليست أُمي بالمعنى الحقيقي بقدر ماهي موظفة “  
تمارس مهامها الوظيفية ليس بيني وبينها رابط وجداني أو رابط أمومة عاطفية , أو رابط صلة قرابة,  
إنما الرابط بيني وبينها رابط نفعي برجماتي”.<sup>63</sup>

The wet-nurse is called a surrogate mother. She was not my real mother. She is just an employee doing her job. There is no sentimental link between her and me, not a maternal link nor a family link; the only link between us is a utilitarian pragmatic one.

Moreover, some Saudi families foster foundlings, taking them to live with them in their homes but as Samīr Muhammad explains, in the chapter entitled “My quarrels with the children of the foster families”, foundlings may be exposed to harassment from other children when they know the truth about their situation.<sup>64</sup> Even the buses provided to drop foundlings at school can reveal their identities to others, causing them to be subject of ridicule and contempt by their peers.

Al-Mohaimed raises another disturbing issue when Turād narrates his account of Nāssir’s life as a foundling in *Al-Dār*<sup>65</sup> in the chapter entitled “Abused as a child”:<sup>66</sup>

The nannies and the maids did not spare you their mischief or lechery, either; your body was not safe in their charge, even as a tender child. Bath times filled you with dread. Lambai, the Filipina maid, would scrub your body in the bathtub, and her hands would work their way unnoticed between your thighs, then her face and her mouth, until your skin was raw and turned bright red. In the end the doctor had to come and have a look at it after you complained about the pain. A decision was made to terminate Lambai’s contract after an investigation, during which she admitted her habit.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-30.

<sup>65</sup> Al-Dār means the house and it is the common word that used to refer to an orphanage, being a shortened form of ‘Dār Al-Ri’āyah Al-Ijtimā’iyyah’.

<sup>66</sup> Al-Muhaymīd also raises the issue of physical abuse in passing in another of his novels, *Munira’s Bottle*. His protagonist *Munirah* mentions that a new girl in the Young Women’s Remand Centre where she works as a supervisor had been assaulted by girls older than her. Amany Aly Shawky, ‘Munira’s Bottle... Insight into the Heart of Saudi’, *Egypt Independent*(2010), (p. 96)

<sup>67</sup> Al-Mohaimed, p. 107.

In his autobiography, Samīr recounts a similarly painful story regarding sexual abuse carried by a homosexual employee on a friend of his whilst he was inside the orphanage. All the foundlings were scared of the care worker in question, especially those with light skins, who he referred to as ‘beautiful boys’. When the care worker was doing the night shift, the orphan boys would stay awake all night to avoid any sexual contact with him.<sup>68</sup>

Sexual abuse, particularly of vulnerable children in care, has become a significant issue in recent times. As Swerdlin, Berkowitz and Craft note this problem has reached “epidemic proportions, affecting children of all ages, socioeconomic levels, and cultural backgrounds”.<sup>69</sup> According to their estimates “Approximately 1% of children experience some form of sexual abuse each year”.<sup>70</sup> Other experts point out that “diagnosing sexual abuse is a challenge because many children do not report the abuse, and the physical findings tend to be absent or nonspecific”.<sup>71</sup> In 2005, the US-based organisation Representing Children Worldwide, reported that the Saudi Government did not keep any national statistics on cases of child abuse and that the Saudi Ministry of the Interior would not release information about sexual abuse, calling the issue “too sensitive for public discussion.”<sup>72</sup>

This is another example, then, of how fictional works can raise concerns about social issues that are officially judged “too sensitive” to be raised by other means in the public domain. In this novel, the very fact that Al-Mohaimed has taken the rather unusual step of not allowing the character of Nāssir to speak for himself, means that

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<sup>68</sup> Muhammad, p. 39.

<sup>69</sup> A. Berkowitz, C. Craft, and N. Swerdlin, 'Cutaneous Signs of Child Abuse', *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, 57 (2007), 371-392.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 371-392.

<sup>71</sup> Manoel E. S. Modelli, Malthus Fonseca Galvão, and Riccardo Pratesi, 'Child Sexual Abuse', *Forensic Science International (Online)*, 217 (2012), 1-4 (p. 2).

<sup>72</sup> Available at: <<http://www.law.yale.edu/rcw/rcw/jurisdictions/asw/saudiarabia/frontpage.htm>> [accessed on 14/05/2014]

his absence ultimately becomes a powerful presence. This technique seems to act as a way of emphasising that some marginalised and socially excluded groups simply have no voice in the society that is contemporary Saudi Arabia. Like Nāssir, they are dependent on someone else to tell their story, however disturbing or politically inconvenient it may prove to be.

### **5.3 Beyond the Orphanage: Life for Adult Foundlings outside *Al-Dār*<sup>73</sup>**

An insight into the life experienced by adult foundlings in Saudi society when they leave behind the world of their childhood in *Al-Dār* can be gained by focusing on two topics which in many societies mark the transition of the individual into adulthood, namely, marriage and employment.

#### **5.3.1 Foundlings and Marriage**

In *Fikhākh Al-Rā'iḥah*, Al-Mohaimeed explains how Nāṣir was destined to be a foundling from the moment of his conception, relating how it was impossible for his parents to get married to each other, despite their obvious love for each other, due to their respective ethnic differences:

They enjoyed the pleasure many times, until one day she wept with him like a little bird at the slaughter. “The fruit of our love is growing in my womb”, she told him. He was perturbed and promised her they would resolve the matter as soon as possible. After he had explained to his family his desire to marry, he mentioned her family’s name. They laughed for a long time. His mother assured him she would look for a suitable bride, but he objected. “You are a son of the tribe”, they told him. “You are a purebred, a son of free men. How can you marry a woman with no origins or breeding?” And when they noticed his insistence, his brother threatened to kill him, and waved the

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<sup>73</sup> It has already been defined in the section entitled “*Sa’ūdi wa lākin Laqīṭ* (He is a Saudi but he is a foundling): Foundlings and identity”, See , p. 150

shotgun in his face, “Do not even think about it. Do not even think about that common woman”.<sup>74</sup>

There is something of an ironic contrast here in the fact that Nāṣir’s mother describes her unborn child as “The fruit of our love” when, as previously mentioned, one of the commonly used expressions when referring to foundlings is “The fruit of sin” (cited in Samīr Muhammad’s autobiography). Al-Muḥaymīd’s portrayal of the reaction of his father’s family shows the depth of feeling regarding tribal allegiance. The very mention of someone else’s family name provokes derision. All of the reasons cited for the impossibility of the marriage relate to tribal heritage and identity. He is “a son of the tribe [...] a purebred, a son of free men”, with the emphasis on describing him in relation to his lineage. It is interesting to note he is not referred to as a man but specifically as a son, twice, to stress this family link. His lover is dismissed as “a woman with no origins or breeding [...] that common woman”, as though to highlight her lack of family connections: she is nobody’s daughter. The descriptions have been carefully chosen by Al-Muḥaymīd to clearly show how an individual’s lineage can be used to categorise him or her as belonging or an outsider. The added detail about his brother’s physical threat underlines the lengths to which families will go to enforce tribal allegiance.

By including this incident, Al-Mohaimeed alerts readers to the fact that sometimes foundlings are socially marginalised as a result of differences of this kind preventing their parents from marrying. In other cases, such differences may lead to a failed marriage with the child being abandoned for fear of scandal. It is perhaps not surprising, then, those foundlings might themselves have a negative attitude towards the subject of marriage. This is often compounded by the fact that having been

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<sup>74</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, pp. 72-73.

victims of their parents' failed marriage, they find that when they themselves try to normalise their own situation by getting married, they face further marginalisation because of their unknown parentage and tribal origins.

According to Nāhid Bāshataḥ, the seriousness with which the Saudi government view the difficulties faced by foundlings wishing to marry is reflected in the fact that the Ministry of Social Affairs was charged with finding a way to facilitate the marriage of foundlings.<sup>75</sup> As a result a charity known as *Insān*<sup>76</sup> was established. This government body has helped with arrangements for many successful marriages. However, there is evidence that getting married is only the start. The real challenge lies in making a successful marriage which stands the test of time and difficult circumstances.

Some foundlings continue to suffer from social marginalisation, even after getting married and having children, as a real-life example illustrates. Ṣālḥah, a Saudi woman in her fifties who was a foundling, relates her own story of enduring three unsuccessful marriages. She did not discover she was a foundling until she was nine years old. The couple who brought her up kept promising to tell her a secret when she was older. One day, the truth was revealed to her by the man she thought was her father so she understood why she was referred to as “اللقطة” (the foundling girl) by the employees of the Social Security Corporation while she was waiting for the subsidy provided by them for poor people. They said it for the insult because this description is always called in the context of a negative.

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<sup>75</sup> Salih Al-Yusuf, *Alriyadh*, 13326 (2004). Available at: <http://www.alriyadh.com/1641>[accessed 02/03/2013]

<sup>76</sup> This is a charity which focuses on orphan care and it was established in 2000, according to their website: <http://www.ensan.org.sa/home/born.html> [accessed on 15/03/2013]



Her first marriage took place when she was only fourteen years old and although this is legal in Saudi Arabia, it is considered to be a harmful practice by organisations such as UNICEF.<sup>77</sup> This marriage did not go well because her husband was a drug addict, and following his suicide by overdose, she was left facing a difficult life as a single mother with a child. The second marriage ended in divorce at her own instigation, due to the fact that her husband constantly referred to her as 'Illegitimate'. She married for a third time with a non-Saudi man, 'Yamani', with whom she had several children. However, when the Gulf War began in 1990, the Saudi government requested all Yemenis without legal residence status to leave as soon as possible so her husband went, taking his children's identity papers with him as he is the father and should keep his children documents which means he has the control in his family.

This led to further difficulties since, ironically, given her own situation, she found herself responsible for children without the necessary proof of identity. As a result, she is obliged to pay fines for having children without the legally required identities documents.<sup>78</sup>

### **5.3.2 Foundlings and Employment**

Al-Mohaimed also highlights some of the difficulties faced by foundlings when seeking employment by choosing to portray Nāṣir's attempts to secure a position for himself within the military sector. In Saudi Arabia, by law, foundlings are not allowed to work in this type of job. It appears that the government does not trust

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<sup>77</sup> 'Unicef Calls for End to Child Marriages', *AllAfrica.com* (2012). And see, Ajai Prasanna Laxmi, 'Unicef Concerned over Underage Marriage Circular [Thiruvananthapuram]', *The Times of India (Online)* (2013).

<sup>78</sup> 'A Saudi Foundling Woman in Her Fifties'(Al-Ikhbariyyah Al-Saudiyyah, 2012). Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9Ou70e34iw>> [Accessed on 07/06/2014]

them as much as other Saudi citizens. The reasoning seems to be that since they cannot prove that their roots lie in the Kingdom, they cannot be considered to have sufficient loyalty for Saudi Arabia. Moreover, as a result of their personal history, they may have psychological problems that would prevent them from fully engaging in combat and may encourage them to take revenge on society.

In the first line of the chapter entitled ‘Sin and punishment’, Nāṣir declares: “I USED TO DREAM OF BEING A SOLDIER”.<sup>79</sup> By choosing to entitle the chapter in this way, it appears that the author wishes to suggest that from Nāṣir’s point of view being prevented from serving in the army simply because he is a foundling feels as though it is a punishment for a sin that he himself was not responsible for committing. Then, Al-Muḥaymīd allows readers to gain an insight into Nāṣir’s feelings as a child in the orphanage, as he tries to explain his reasons for wanting to join the army:

Ever since I was a child in the orphanage, I have loved military uniforms. In the home they used to call me ‘the soldier’. Gamalat, the Egyptian nanny, used to call me Colonel Nasser. She hated President Gamal Abd Al-Nasser. By giving me the nickname Colonel Nasser, Gamalat was showing that she hated me. She was saying that President Abd Al-Nasser was a foundling and aggressive like me, and that I was obsessed with military dress because I lived to boss people around and was a little tyrant, and that I hit other kids in the home.<sup>80</sup>

The unfavourable parallel which Gamalat, the Egyptian nanny, draws here is between Nāṣir and Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970), who was President of Egypt from 1956 until his death. Superficially, the comparison is a simple one, viewed through the child’s eyes. The young Nāṣir notes the similarities he shares with the Egyptian leader according to Gamalat: both have a love of dressing up in uniforms,

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<sup>79</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, p. 141.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

both display an aggressive and bossy character, and both are “little tyrants” who are violent towards others. Al-Mohameed emphasises the fact that the perspective here is that of Nāṣir himself reflected in the child’s misunderstanding of Gamalat’s description of Nasser as “a foundling”. The Egyptian nanny clearly intends this to be used as a term of abuse, not as a literal statement of fact.<sup>81</sup>

From another perspective, Gamalat’s opinion of Nasser seems to be at odds with the Egyptian president’s popular image, considered by many to be “an iconic figure throughout the Arab world, a symbol of Arab unity and dignity”.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, this comparison appears to be so striking it can be argued that Al-Mohameed has deliberately employed this alternative view of Nasser to draw the reader’s attention to Gamalat, even though she is only a minor character in a narrative strand which is essentially focusing on Nāṣir’s story. The author seems to be asking readers to reflect on the fact that Gamalat is not simply “the Egyptian nanny”, just another one of the estimated 1.7 million Egyptians immigrants working in Saudi Arabia,<sup>83</sup> but an individual with her own story. Al-Mohameed does not himself reveal that story, because, as previously noted, Gamalat is viewed here through the eyes of the young Nāṣir who is chiefly concerned only by the fact that she hated him. As one would expect, as a child he is unaware of and unconcerned by the possible political or

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<sup>81</sup> Nasser was not a foundling. His adored mother died after giving birth to his third brother in 1926, when Nasser was only eight years old, and his father remarried only a few months later, compounding his pain. Nasser later described this as “a deep shock that time failed to remedy”: A. Nutting, *Nasser* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972), p. 7. Coincidentally, his wife, Tahia Kazim, also lost her mother at an early age. E. L. Sullivan, *Women in Egyptian Public Life* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

<sup>82</sup> Robert Henry Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography* (Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> ‘International Organization for Migration’. Available at; [www.egypt.iom.int](http://www.egypt.iom.int) [accessed on 08/12/2013]

economic reasons which may have prompted the nanny to leave her native Egypt.<sup>84</sup>

However, Al-Mohaimed does invite us as adult readers to ponder this.

In both Al-Mohaimed's fictional *Wolves of the Crescent moon* and Samir's autobiographical work *Sa'ūdi Walākin Laqīṭ* reference is made to 'lost dreams', recounting how both foundlings find their personal ambitions thwarted due to their life circumstances. Both texts are very similar in the way in which the accounts which they offer of personal disappointment suffered by orphans to the degree that you feel that might have been written by the same author. This adds weight to the suggestion that Al-Mohaimed is one of Saudi Arabia's most realistic writers because of his ability to capture the voices of marginalised people in his novels and reflect on the issues which affect them.

Most of the issues regarding foundlings which Al-Mohaimed covers in *Wolves of the Crescent moon* have also been succinctly raised in the introduction to a presentation given by Shaker Ali at a conference for Saudi students in America and Canada held in Chicago on April 5, 2013 entitled *Outliers: Idea Experience*.<sup>85</sup> He explained that the hypothesis of his presentation revolves around the fact that the life of a human being is reflected in a set of numbers: we think about ourselves, our families and our existence in terms of numbers. After introducing his idea, he

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<sup>84</sup> Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 40-41, notes, during Nasser's regime, that Egyptians immigrated to Saudi Arabia for reasons of both political persecution and economic hardship. Nasser's detractors considered him to be a dictator who impeded democratic progress and headed a repressive administration, which put thousands of dissidents in prison and was responsible for abuse of human rights. For Egyptian Islamists, particularly members of the Muslim Brotherhood, Nasser was a proponent of secular politics and criticised as an oppressive, tyrannical, and demonic leader.

<sup>85</sup> Shaker Ali founded a Facebook group for Saudis in the USA in 2008 (available at: <<https://ar-ar.facebook.com/suadisinUSA>>), providing help and advice for Saudi students studying in America. Information is now also available in posts on Twitter and Instagram. The name of the conference has its origins in Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers: the Story of Success* (2008) which attempts to explain why certain individuals are more successful than others.

projected the number 25 on a slide on the auditorium screen and announced: “I have proposed marriage to 25 girls and all of them refused to marry me”. The audience responded by laughing out loud. Shaker then showed another number and clarified its meaning: “I have been studying for eight years in the United States without visiting my home, Saudi Arabia”. Then he showed the number two, explaining that his friends usually ask him why he has only two names: Shaker and Ali? Finally, Shaker revealed that, unlike the members of his audience, he had no mother, no father, no brothers or sisters, no family at all. A zero then appeared on the screen while Shaker explained: “I was born a foundling. I am nothing in the mindset of Saudi society, for they do not see me as a human. But, no matter: I was born with hope”.

The young Saudi audience then grasped why marriage was problematic and visits to Saudi Arabia seemed pointless without a family home to return to for Shaker Ali, who only possesses the two names given to foundlings before they are sent to an orphanage.<sup>86</sup> Although Shaker Ali received a standing ovation from the audience, and young Saudis may like to believe that they would judge individuals like Shaker Ali purely on the basis of their own merits without considering their personal origins or tribal heritage, the truth is that both these issues are still of paramount importance in contemporary Saudi Arabia, a fact that Saudi novelists such as Al-Mohaimed have addressed in their works by examining the effects that such issues have on individuals.

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<sup>86</sup> Outliers, 'le Outliers - Chicago 2013 - Shaker Ali', (2013). Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5yPgjrIUl8>> [accessed on 20/05/2014]

## 5.4 Conclusion

This chapter examined the representation of three types of **‘irregular individuals’** in two Saudi novels, all of whom belong to socially marginalised groups in Saudi Arabia. Analysis of these novels has established that the concept of the tribe and of Bedouin identity, with all it entails, continue to play a central role in Saudi society. As the ethnographer Donald Powell Cole has observed: “It is clear that the term ‘Bedouin’ has changed from denoting a way of life in the past to marking an identity today”<sup>87</sup>. It is also clear that in a community which places enormous value on the individual’s ability to trace their lineage and origins as a means not only of validating their identity but also of assessing their social status and ultimately their worth as human being, those ‘irregular individuals’ without the requisite tribal credentials will face social marginalisation.

If, as Gist has argued, “social marginality refers to the position of groups as indicated by the interpersonal or intergroup relationships with one or more groups, and to the attitudes and images, which tend to shape these relationships”<sup>88</sup> then perhaps by challenging existing attitudes and presenting alternative images, literature may help to reshape those interpersonal and intergroup relationships, and in the process, contribute to improving the position of socially marginalised groups within society.

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<sup>87</sup> Donald Powell Cole, 'Where Have the Bedouin Gone?', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 76 (2003), 235-267 (p. 235).

<sup>88</sup> Gist, pp. 361-375.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **Social Marginalisation and “Foreign Workers”**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter will begin by examining the different types of terminology employed to refer to those who work in countries other than the ones of which they are citizens, and the various connotations which these expressions embody, particularly in the Saudi context. An overview of migrant worker trends in Saudi Arabia follows, outlining the socioeconomic factors and recruitment practices which have influenced the flow of foreign labour to the Kingdom, and which also help to account for the varying degrees of social marginalisation which non-Saudi workers experience.

The next section examines how Al-Mohaimed incorporates small but telling details into his writing in order to reflect the omnipresent nature of foreign workers in the Kingdom as they go about the tasks which Saudi citizens consider too dirty, dangerous or demeaning to perform for themselves. This is followed by a discussion of his novelistic representation of the plight of female domestic workers, probably the largest of the foreign worker communities who are woven into the very fabric of everyday Saudi life.

The focus then shifts to non-Saudi Arab workers and contextual information is provided on the changing demographics of this workforce which has become to be replaced in recent years by the growing numbers of Asian workers due to changing social and political attitudes amongst the Saudi host community. These changes are illustrated by references to Abodehman’s positive account of the arrival of Arab

teachers from neighbouring countries in the 1950s in *Al-Ḥizām (The Belt)*, and to the account of the exploitation of Egyptian agricultural workers under the *Kafālah* system in the more contemporary setting of Al-Mohaimed's *Al-Qārūrah (Munira's Bottle)*. The themes of solidarity amongst marginalised groups and the mutual dependency of foreign workers and their host community are also discussed.

Finally the chapter examines the reasons for the lack of representation of Westerners in the Saudi novel during the period in question and examines how the seclusion and segregation afforded by gated communities had led to a lack of contact, fuelling misunderstandings between Saudis and Westerners.

## **5.2 A Question of Terminology**

By way of introduction to this topic, it is worth briefly examining the range of phrases used to refer to those individuals who work in countries other than the ones of which they are citizens, since these often reflect how the government of the country in question values the contribution which they make in socioeconomic terms and also how they are viewed by the indigenous population. The term employed may also carry implications about the nature of the work in which they are engaged. Four main terms frequently appear in this context, namely “guest workers”, “migrant workers”, “expatriates” and “foreign workers”.

The first of these terms, “guest worker”, is a literal translation of the German word *Gastarbeiter*. This was first used to refer to non-German nationals who moved to the then West Germany (GDR) mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, as part of a Government programme aimed at attracting much-needed factory workers from other countries to take up jobs that required few qualifications in the industrial sector. This new word



was created since the term *Fremdarbeiter* (foreign worker) had negative connotations, having previously been used during the Nazi era to refer to workers brought against their will from German-occupied Europe to do forced labour in German farms and factories. Although the word “guest” implies a positive reaction from the “host” nation, it also clearly carries the implication of a temporary situation and a particular type of relationship: guests should not outstay their welcome and they should be careful not to upset their host. Sometimes when economic conditions change, guest workers are no longer welcome and are “encouraged” by Government policy to return home.<sup>1</sup> The term “guest workers” has never been adopted in the Saudi context.

In more recent times, many industrialised nations, including the UK, have started to employ the more neutral term “migrant workers” which replaced the earlier use of “immigrant workers” as this term was seen as having acquired a pejorative connotation.<sup>2</sup> This also appears to be the term preferred by international organizations such as the International Labour Organization and the United Nations. The latter’s “Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families” defines a migrant worker as: “a person who is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national”. Thus far, the countries that have ratified the Convention are primarily the

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Castles, ‘The Guests Who Stayed - The Debate on “Foreigners Policy” in the German Federal Republic,’ *International Migration Review*, 19: 3, 517-534.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Castles, ‘Guestworkers in Europe: A Resurrection?’, *International Migration Review*, 40 (2006), 741-763.

countries from which migrant workers originate. At the time of writing, Saudi Arabia has not signed or ratified this convention.<sup>3</sup>

The word “expatriate” often shortened to “expat” has its origins in the Latin terms *ex* “out of” and *patria* “native country” and refers to “an individual temporarily or permanently residing in a country and culture other than that of his/her upbringing or legal residence” (OED). In common usage, the term is most often used in the context of professionals or skilled workers sent abroad by their companies. This differentiation is usually a matter of socioeconomic factors, meaning that skilled professionals working in another country (e.g. teachers, business executives) tend to be described as expatriates, whereas a manual labourer who has moved to another country to earn more money is more likely to be labelled as a “migrant worker”<sup>4</sup>. In the Saudi context, most of those described in the literature as “expatriates” are American or Western European specialised technical workers, usually occupied in the defence and petrochemical industries whilst a significant number are teachers of English Language.<sup>5</sup> Although Egyptians have long migrated to Saudi Arabia to take up professional jobs such as doctors, nurses, teachers and engineers, as have Filipinos to work in the health, oil and manufacturing sectors, the term “expatriate” tends to be reserved for Americans and Western Europeans.<sup>6</sup>

Amongst Saudis, the term most commonly employed for those who come from other countries for the purposes of employment is “foreign workers,” with the Arabic word

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<sup>3</sup> *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families* (1990) .Available at: <[www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cmw/cmw.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cmw/cmw.htm)> [accessed on 03/01/ 2014]

<sup>4</sup> Shadid N. Bhuian, Eid. S. Al-Shammari, Omar A. Jefri, (1996) ‘Organizational Commitment, Job Satisfaction and Job Characteristics: An Empirical Study of Expatriates in Saudi Arabia’, *International Journal of Commerce and Management*, 6, 3/4, 57-80.

<sup>5</sup> W.H. Bowen, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> S. Zuhur, *Middle East in Focus: Saudi Arabia* (2012). ABC-Clio 211

الأجنبي emphasising the status of these non-Saudi workers as other or different. This term can carry derogatory overtones and stereotypically indicates an individual in a low-paid, low-status job of Asian origin, given that the vast majority of workers are migrants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

### 5.3 An Overview of Migrant Worker Trends

The period prior to the First Gulf War saw an increase in the number of workers of Asian origins in the Gulf States generally, as Robin Cohen notes:

The 1980s saw an eastward shift in the composition of Asian nationalities migrating to the Gulf. While the initial flows consisted almost entirely of Indians and Pakistanis, their share of the growing flows dropped very considerably over the years, first in favour of the oriental and more lately in favour of the Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans.<sup>7</sup>

This decade immediately proceeds the period which forms the focus of this study, namely 1990 to 2011, and it is relevant, therefore, to know the extent of increasing foreign workers' numbers in Saudi Arabia between those two dates. According to statistics provided in the book *Asian Migrant and Contract Workers in the Middle East*, the total number of workers from Asian countries in the Middle East region in 1992 was 18 percent higher than the total for 1989. This significant increase over a four-year period was related to security concerns in the Gulf States. Since the government of Yemen openly supported Saddam Hussain, over 270, 000 Yemenis who had been working in Saudi Arabia were sent home by the Saudi regime<sup>8</sup> and their places were filled by actively recruiting Asian workers. More will be said about non-Saudi Arab workers later in this chapter.

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<sup>7</sup> Manolo I Abella, 'Asian Migrant and Contract Workers in the Middle East', *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 420.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 423.

In the decade between 1990 and 2011 the number of workers rose not only in Saudi Arabia but also in the rest of the Gulf States due to the rise in the standards of living for citizens there. Thus, the presence of domestic workers became an integral part of Saudi life. In a well-known programme on the MBC network, broadcast in April 2013, the Saudi Minister of Labour, Adel Fakeih, confirmed that 7.5 million migrant workers were at that time legally employed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.<sup>9</sup> This huge number of foreign workers was composed of many different nationalities, from both Arab and non-Arab states, the latter being described as mainly Asians and “Westerners” (i.e. Americans and Western Europeans). As Lytras and Ordóñez de Pablos note; “Country of origin has been an important factor in determining foreign workers' occupational roles in Saudi Arabia. Saudi businesses have traditionally adopted an ethnically defined hierarchical organisation”.<sup>10</sup> This highlights the fact that migrant workers can suffer from varying degrees of social marginalisation in Saudi Arabia as this can be affected by their national origin, their government’s politics, economic factors and personal qualifications. Thus, when analysing how non-Saudi workers are portrayed and addressed by Saudi novelists in their writing, the experiences of several different types of foreign workers in Saudi Arabia will be considered in order to determine the ways in which different groups and individuals are subjected to social marginalisation.

Ibtihāl Al-Mukhālīd has likened some foreign workers in Saudi Arabia to modern-day slaves, basing her opinion on their lack of human rights and the fact that they are doubly exploited by both employment agencies and their employers.<sup>11</sup> Some Gulf

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<sup>9</sup> 'New Plan to Nab Illegals Revealed', in *Arab News* (Tuesday 16 April 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Miltiadis D. Lytras and Patricia Ordóñez de Pablos, *Knowledge Ecology in Global Business: Managing Intellectual Capital* (IGI Global, 2009), pp. 7-8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibtihāl Al-Mukhālīd, 'Al-Rriq fī Duwal Al-Khalīj: Al-Sa'ūdiyyah Namūdhajan' [Slavery in the Gulf states: Saudi Arabia as an example] ', (Al-Maqal, 2012).

States, including Saudi Arabia, operate the so-called *Kafālah* (sponsorship) recruitment system. Under this system, foreigners are not permitted to enter and take up employment unless they have a sponsor (*kafeel*) who must be a citizen of the state in question. Importantly, the law stipulates that the *kafeel* and employer of the foreign worker must be one and the same person. However, in recent times it has become increasingly common for the person acting as the sponsor to no longer fulfil the role as the employer of the foreigner under his or her sponsorship. Instead, the “sponsor” obtains a visa for a foreign worker and then sells this to him/her with the unwritten understanding that the individual will be free to work for an employer other than the sponsor. This practice operates either directly on a one-to-one basis or indirectly with “sponsors” selling visas to recruitment agencies in the potential immigrant’s country of origin.<sup>12</sup> There will be further discussion of the implications of this scheme in a later section of this chapter.

#### **5.4 Asian Workers in Saudi Novels**

In 2006, Khalid Al-Yusuf estimated that some 400 Saudi novels had been published since 1930 when Abdu Al-Quddūs Al-Anṣārī wrote his *Al-Taw’amān* (The Twins), and Al-Yusuf created a list of all of these.<sup>13</sup> Based on his list, not a single novel addresses the topic of Asian workers as a main topic or has an Asian worker as the sole central protagonist of the novel’s action. However, Saudi writers often refer to foreign workers in their novels as an indication of the dramatic social transformations which took place in Saudi Arabia over the course of the second half

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Ruhs, 'Temporary Foreign Worker Programmes: Policies, Adverse Consequences, and the Need to Make Them Work', (2002).42

<sup>13</sup> Khalid Al-Yusuf, 'Al-Ta'līf wa Al-Nashr Al-'Adabī fī Al-Mamlakah Al-'Arabīyyah Al-Sa'ūdiyyah li 'Am 2009 (Literary Publishing in Saudi Arabia Untill 2009)', in *Al-Jazeera* (Riyadh: Al-Jazeera 2009). Available at: <<http://www.al-jazirah.com/culture/2010/14012010/bblyo46.htm>> [accessed on 24/06/ 2014]

of the twentieth century, highlighting the increasing diversity of contemporary Saudi society.

In his book *Affluence and Poverty in the Middle East*, Mohamad El Ghonemy observes that Saudi Arabia was one of the poorest and most under-developed countries in the world when oil was discovered there in the late 1930s.<sup>14</sup> The Saudi oil boom required and created an unprecedented demand for industrial sectors, a need which was met by largely male foreign workers, especially those from Asian countries. Economic development led to a significant rise in living standards for Saudis, which in turn increased the demand for live-in domestic workers who would perform a variety of household tasks, including childcare, cleaning and household maintenance. Most of the foreign workers in this sector tend to be females. Saudi novelists reflect the roles played by these real-life male and female Asian workers in their characters, as is the case in both of Yusef Al-Mohaimed's novels, *Al-Qārūrah* (*Munira's Bottle*) and *Fikhākh Al-Rā'iḥah* (*Wolves of the Crescent Moon*).

#### 5.4.1 Dirty, Dangerous and Demeaning

In the opening scene of *Al-Qārūrah* (*Munira's Bottle*), which describes a cold morning in late February 1991, during the First Gulf War, the writer mentions six different Asian nationalities with different jobs:

The **Afghan bakeries** slowly come to life with **Pakistani** and **Indian workers** who slip out of the narrow alleys and newly constructed side streets on bicycles decorated with plastic flowers. **Indonesian** and **Filipina maids** descend from their rooms on the roof to mop cold rosa marble tiles and scrub stainless steel banisters. From downstairs rooms the voice of the Quran reciter, Abdul Baset Abdul Samad, floats up from the radio sets of Najdi grandmothers as they intone, "Glory be to God" and wait for the smell of

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<sup>14</sup> Mohamad Riad El Ghonemy, 'Affluence and Poverty in the Middle East'(London; New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 56.

fresh coffee spiced with cardamom, which the **Indian** and **Sri Lankan cooks** prepare so well (emphasis added).<sup>15</sup>

A number of points emerge from this opening scene which merit commentary as it acts as a snapshot of the lives of these Asian workers amongst Saudi society. Firstly, Al-Mohaimeed's description of the national origins of the workers in this scene is an accurate picture of the nationalities of Asian workers employed in Saudi Arabia. According to Andrzej Kapiszewski, an expert on international migration and development in the Middle East, the figures for Asian workers in Saudi Arabia were as follows in 2006: Indians: 1.3 million, Pakistanis: 900,000, Bangladeshis: 500,000, Filipinos: 500,000, Indonesians: 250,000, and Sri Lankans: 350,000.<sup>16</sup> Al-Muḥaymīd also provides details of the workers' gender, emphasising that although male and female Asian workers may find employment in different sectors they can both find themselves subject to social marginalisation.<sup>17</sup> The next section will pay particular attention to the novelistic representation of the plight of female domestic workers, since this highlights the overlap between different types of social marginalisation.

The opening passage of Al-Mohaimeed's novel reflects the social reality that all of the workers mentioned would be working in the so-called 3Ds Jobs which are typically performed by migrant workers, namely those which are classed by host societies as being Dirty, Dangerous and Demeaning.<sup>18</sup> Al-Mohaimeed mentions food preparation (the Afghan bakers and Indian and Sri Lankan cooks), manual labour (the Pakistani and Indian workers) and cleaning (Indonesian and Filipina maids).

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<sup>15</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Andrzej Kapiszewski, 'Arab Versus Asian Migrant Workers in the Gcc Countries', in *United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region, Beirut, May, (2006)*, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Although the gender of the non-Saudi workers mentioned here is not immediately obvious in the English translation, this is, of course, clearly marked in the original Arabic.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Attas, 'The Case of Guest Workers: Exploitation, Citizenship and Economic Rights', *Res Publica*, 6:1, (2000), 73-92.

In her *Gulf News* newspaper article about Afghan bakers in the UAE, Marie Magleby<sup>19</sup> offers a revealing insight into the lives of these male migrant workers, explaining that the number of bakers in the region hailing from Afghanistan is due to community networking, with many only learning how to bake bread after they have arrived. When they take extended trips home to see their families, the Afghan migrants explain what they are doing to friends and neighbours, who are then tempted to follow them, even though bakery jobs are difficult, particularly in the soaring summer temperatures of the region, with long hours for a relatively modest salary. However, this type of employment provides these workers with a kind of job security that their homeland of Afghanistan, racked by conflict and political turmoil for decades, cannot offer. As the journalist concludes; “It is difficult to say who depends on the bread more, the customers or the bakers themselves”<sup>20</sup>, is indicating the mutually dependent relationship between foreign workers and their host community.

This mutual dependence emerges as a further theme of the opening scene of (*Munira’s Bottle*), for the Afghan bakers produce the bread which for centuries was the mainstay of the cuisine of the Arabs’ nomadic lifestyle, whilst the Indian and Sri Lankan cooks have learnt to prepare the coffee (*gahwa*) in the traditional Saudi way, spiced with cardamom.<sup>21</sup>

The Pakistani and Indian workers emerge from “newly constructed side streets”, reminding readers that most of Saudi Arabia’s remarkable urbanisation is the result of labour by migrant construction workers and the luxurious interiors of Saudi

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<sup>19</sup> Marie Magleby, June 23, 2008. Available at:<<http://gulfnews.com/afghan-men-make-a-name-in-the-uae-as-expert-bakers-1.113330> n.p.>[accessed on 09/05/ 2014]

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission. ‘Saudi Arabian Food’. Available at: <[http://www.sacm.org/ArabicSACM/pdf/Sacm\\_Food.pdf](http://www.sacm.org/ArabicSACM/pdf/Sacm_Food.pdf)>[accessed on 12/05/2014]



homes are maintained by Indonesian and Filipina maids who lead parallel lives to their employers. Al-Mohaimeed hints that these Asian workers have become as much a part of the Saudi daily routine as the radio broadcast of Qur'anic verses<sup>22</sup>.

Al-Mohaimeed seems to be particularly adept at reflecting the reality of contemporary Saudi Arabia, portraying the socially marginalised Asian workers who fulfil those tasks which their Saudi hosts disdain but which are essential to their everyday lives. In most instances, as in Saudi society itself, these characters are usually relegated to mere walk-on roles in public places as they quietly go about their work whilst the novel's protagonist takes centre stage. Thus in the first example a foreign worker briefly interacts with Turād: "In the bus station waiting room a Bangladeshi cleaner in blue overalls asked him to lift his feet up"<sup>23</sup> whilst in the second, Munira momentarily focuses on a routine task being performed: "She looked at the Bengali cleaner in his yellow overalls as he swept up pieces of paper, empty drinks cans, and cigarette packets".<sup>24</sup> In both instances, the worker remains anonymous, simply a uniform-wearing, non-Saudi Other. Occasionally, Al-Mohaimeed represents foreign workers en masse, as an undifferentiated group who seem to be part of the urban landscape: "Outside, the square in front of the courthouse was heaving with Asian workers and toothpick sellers".<sup>25</sup> Even in such description, though, the author appears to emphasise that these foreign workers have become as omnipresent and as necessary as the toothpick sellers.

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<sup>22</sup> There will be further discussion of this theme of mutual dependence in the section about non-Saudi Arab workers.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, pp. 2-3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

#### 5.4.2 The Silent Witnesses

Occasionally, Al-Mohameed brings his socially marginalised characters out of their usual state of anonymity to play a brief but essential role in his novels. This is the case in (*Munirah's Bottle*), where it finally emerges that the character of Lillian, the Filipina housemaid, is the possessor of vital information about 'Alī Al-Daḥḥāl. Although Munīrah imagines that he is the man of her dreams, having been deluded by his stories about being an army officer, Lillian knows the truth about his lies and that, in reality, he is just a soldier, carrying out the orders of Munīrah's own scheming brother.

Reflecting later on events and trying to understand Lillian's behaviour, Munīrah believes that the Filipina was simply doing what domestic staffs are told to do:

All things conspired in his favour. Even Lillian's tongue was tied and she did not betray him. She confided to me after the scandal broke that she knew he was the same person who sometimes brought the newspapers and magazines from my brother's office, but she thought that we knew that too. To her mind there was nothing to prevent him from proposing to me, and in any case she knew not to bring up matters that were none of her business -for it was basic good manners that she did not discuss her employer's affairs. Thus Lillian witnessed the deceit but did not speak.<sup>26</sup>

By choosing to foreground Lillian's act of not speaking as being of central importance to the plot, Al-Mohameed cleverly demonstrates that the absence of the voice of the socially marginalised can sometimes speak volumes and that this silence can be interpreted in many different ways.

Munīrah herself offers several interpretations of the housemaid's choice to remain a silent witness. Lillian did it because she thought everyone else knew what she did; because she did not realise 'Alī Al-Daḥḥāl was not in a position to marry; because it

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

was nothing to do with her; because she was doing her duty not discussing matters which should not concern her as a mere housemaid. However, from her privileged position as a Saudi citizen, Munīrah does not stop to think that the Filipina housemaid may have remained tongue-tied for other reasons, relating to the vulnerability of the position that she is in as a foreign worker.

By drawing attention to this silence, Al-Mohaimed invites the reader to interpret events from the point of view of the voiceless. For had Lillian spoken, she would risk being disbelieved by Munīrah, and which Saudi woman would take the word of a mere Filipina housemaid in preference to that of her own fiancé? Lillian would also have faced the wrath of Munīrah's malicious brother and his co-conspirator for wrecking their carefully planned scheme. For Lillian as a foreign worker, the repercussions could have been dire. At best, she could have faced the loss of her livelihood; at worst, the loss of her liberty, or even her life.

In 2004, the international organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report about the exploitation and abuse of migrant workers in Saudi Arabia. It observed that the majority of these low-paid workers from Asia, Africa, and other Middle Eastern countries “silently accept the exploitation and deprivation of their rights because they view themselves as powerless” and are only able to relate their stories of suffering after returning to their homes.<sup>27</sup> Individual stories of abuse of foreign workers, in particular women working as domestic helps, regularly make newspaper headlines and reports from Human Rights organisations frequently highlight the vulnerability of Asian female domestic workers in Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>27</sup> Human Rights Watch, "'Bad Dreams:' Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Workers in Saudi Arabia', (2004), 5. Available at: <<http://www.refworld.org/docid/412ef32a4.html>> [accessed on 04/07/2014]

According to Amnesty International, in 2013 more than 45 foreign maids were being held on death row in Saudi prisons.<sup>28</sup> In January 2013, Rizana Nafeek, a young Sri Lankan housemaid, found guilty of murdering her employers' child was beheaded. At the time, Nisha Varia, from the Human Rights Commission, drew attention to a particular problem faced by foreign workers:

Migrants are at high risk of being victims of spurious charges. A domestic worker facing abuse or exploitation from her employer might run away and then be accused of theft. Employers may accuse domestic workers, especially those from Indonesia, of witchcraft. Victims of rape and sexual assault are at risk of being accused of adultery and fornication.<sup>29</sup>

Human Rights Watch also confirmed that a “lurking danger for all migrant workers is the perceived and actual power of Saudi employers – or other Saudi citizens – to orchestrate their arrest on false charges.”<sup>30</sup>

Although some foreign workers have legal protection under the provisions of the Saudi 1969 Labour Law, this “specifically excludes from its protection men and women in domestic service in private households, and many agricultural workers”<sup>31</sup>.

The media has pointed to the fact that foreign workers in Saudi Arabia face “arbitrary arrests, unfair trials and harsh punishments”<sup>32</sup> and that “defendants are

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<sup>28</sup> Charlotte Rachael Proudman, 'The Beheading of a Housemaid in Saudi Arabia Highlights Slave-Like Conditions', in *Independent*, (Independent, 2013). Available at: <<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/the-beheading-of-a-housemaid-in-saudi-arabia-highlights-slavelike-conditions-8451951.html>> [accessed on 07/07/2014]

<sup>29</sup> Gethin Chamberlain, 'Saudi Arabia's Treatment of Foreign Workers under Fire after Beheading of Sri Lankan Maid', in *The Guardian* (London: The Guardian, 2013). Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/13/saudi-arabia-treatment-foreign-workers> [accessed on 02/07/2014]

<sup>30</sup> Watch.86... Available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/412ef32a4.html> [accessed on 04/07/2014]

<sup>31</sup> For more information see; Katherine Scully, 'Blocking Exit, Stopping Voice: How Exclusion from Labor Law Protection Puts Domestic Workers at Risk in Saudi Arabia and around the World', *Colum. Hum. Rts. L. Rev.*, 41 (2009).

<sup>32</sup> Chamberlain. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/13/saudi-arabia-treatment-foreign-workers> [accessed on 02/07/2014]

rarely allowed formal representation by a lawyer and in many cases are kept in the dark about the progress of legal proceedings against them”<sup>33</sup>.

This is the harsh reality of the Saudi backdrop against which Al-Mohaimeed created the fictional character of Lillian, choosing to accurately reflect in her failure to speak out, the unpleasant truth that for millions of foreign workers like her in Saudi Arabia, bearing silent witness is a way of life.

## **5.5 Non-Saudi Arab Workers**

### **5.5.1 Initial Reactions to Incomers**

As Andrzej Kapiszewski has observed, “the employment of large numbers of foreigners has been a structural imperative in [the Gulf States], as their oil-related development depends upon the importation of foreign technologies and requires knowledge and skills alien to the local Arab population”<sup>34</sup>. When the oil boom first began in the Gulf States in the late 1930s, many workers from various neighbouring Arab territories came to those countries as the governments there needed to embark upon large-scale infrastructure projects and to implement desperately needed development programmes aimed at improving conditions for the population. Like the other Gulf States, Saudi Arabia sought help from migrant Arabs, encouraging them to take up professional jobs in various areas. Engineers were needed to help build the infrastructure necessary as Saudi began to rapidly urbanise, and to work in the oil

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<sup>33</sup> Proudman. Available at: <<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/the-beheading-of-a-housemaid-in-saudi-arabia-highlights-slavelike-conditions-8451951.html>>[accessed on 7 July 2014]

<sup>34</sup> Andrzej Kapiszewski 2006. ‘Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries’, United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region, Beirut, 15-17 May 2006 Available online at: <[http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02\\_Kapiszewski.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02_Kapiszewski.pdf)> [accessed on 23/06/2014]

industries. Large numbers of trained professionals were required to set up and then run government administration and educational facilities, and to help develop the Kingdom's health services.<sup>35</sup> The majority of those qualified Arab workers were Egyptian and Palestinian, whilst Yemenis occupied many of the other lower income jobs.<sup>36</sup> As Elizabeth Taylor notes, by the 1960s "Egypt was supplying the labour markets of the Middle East with professionals and administrators seconded by the government".<sup>37</sup>

It is interesting at this point to briefly mention *Al-Hizām*, a semi-autobiographical novel by Ahmed Abodehman,<sup>38</sup> which recounts his early years in the village of Al-Khalaf in the Assir Mountains, in southern Saudi Arabia close to the Yemeni border. Olivia Snaije notes that Abodehman's village memories are "almost anthropological" since as well as telling the story of the author's own coming-of-age, growing up in 1950s and 1960s Saudi Arabia, they also reflect some of the dramatic changes which took place during that period, transforming the traditional tribal way of life forever.<sup>39</sup>

Abodehman's novel captures the cultural shock which the villagers experience when teachers sent by the central government start to arrive in the region to introduce formal education. In this case, though, these Arab workers are not marginalised.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew J Gibney and Randall Hansen, *Immigration and Asylum: From 1900 to the Present* (ABC-CLIO, 2005), p. 404.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Taylor, 'Egyptian Migration and Peasant Wives', in Middle East Research and Information Project Report 124: Women and Labour Migration, May/June 1984. Available at: <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer124/egyptian-migration-peasant-wives> [accessed on 05/07/2014]

<sup>38</sup> Although Abodehman was born in Saudi Arabia, he originally wrote the novel in French (*La Ceinture*), later producing his own version in Arabic. See Olivia Snaije's interview with the author Ahmed Abodehman: 'I conjure a happy Arabia', March 12 2004, *The Daily Star*. Available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Art/2004/Mar-12/91250-ahmed-abodehman-i-conjure-a-happy-arabia.ashx#ixzz3Bs1eKULu> [accessed on 05/07/2014]

<sup>39</sup> Olivia Snaije, 'Ahmed Abodehman: "I conjure a happy Arabia"' March 12 2004 *The Daily Star* Available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Art/2004/Mar-12/91250-ahmed-abodehman-i-conjure-a-happy-arabia.ashx#ixzz3Bs1eKULu> [accessed on 05/07/2014]

Rather, as Abodehman recounts, the first contact with this new culture leaves the young narrator longing to emulate the style of the new arrivals:

The son of the village head turned up one day dressed in a pair of pants and a shirt which looked exactly like the ones worn by the teachers they had brought over from Egypt, Jordan and Syria. His outfit took my breath away. I was filled with envy and begged Father to find me a similar suit of clothes.<sup>40</sup>

When the teachers arrive to live alongside the villagers, the narrator records a series of impressions which detail the ways in which the newcomers' habits differ from those of the members of the tribe:

We all knew each other in the village. Everyone swam naked, the young and the old, and none of us had ever worn underwear. Hygienic facilities were non-existent, and this posed a problem for the newcomers who wore pants. Even animals were afraid of **these extraterrestrials**. There were reports in the village that they had been seen peeing standing up, **like devils**. They slept late into the morning. Their food smelled strange. They bathed daily and blew their noses into handkerchiefs that they then stuck back into their pockets. Even their excrement was different because they ate eggs and vegetables and all kinds of things we had never heard of. They introduced us to the concept of garbage. We never used to throw away anything before they came along, except for ashes.<sup>41</sup>

Apart from the two bolded phrases with their obviously negative connotations, in general the narrator's description portrays the child narrator's genuine curiosity about the lives of the incomers who arrive to work as teachers. Abodehman appears to use a technique here which is reminiscent of the accounts written by early explorers reporting their encounters with so-called "primitive peoples". The teachers effectively become the exoticised Other and although their mission is to bring education to the tribal people of the south, Abodehman pointedly notes that the first

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<sup>40</sup> Ahmed Benabid Nadia Abodehman, *The Belt* (St. Paul, Minn.: Ruminator Books, 2002), pp. 31-32.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

thing they teach the villagers about is the “concept of garbage” which was alien to their previous way of life in which nothing ever went to waste.<sup>42</sup>

### **5.5.2 A Change of Opinion**

In general terms, Abodehman’s account reflects the fact that originally, these non-Saudi Arab workers were welcomed because the similarities in their language (Arabic), culture (Arab) and religion (Islam) made them more compatible with the local population than other immigrants, particularly Westerners. However by the end of the 1970s, following yet another oil boom and an upsurge in numbers of foreign workers, there was a shift in attitudes towards migrant Arab workers in the Gulf States, with “Many GCC nationals [feeling] a detachment from Palestinians and Jordanians, a lack of respect for Yemenis, and mistrust and dislike of Egyptians.”<sup>43</sup> At the same time, Saudis and other host country nationals were growing increasingly concerned about the so-called “Egyptianisation” of local Arabic dialects and culture that they blamed on the predominance of Egyptian teachers in the education

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<sup>42</sup> In this context, Saudi Arabia’s transformation from zero-waste tribal society to urban consumer society is reflected in the fact that as a nation it now generates more than 15 million tons of solid waste per year, an estimated 1.5 to 1.8 kg per person per day. (See <<http://www.ecomena.org/solid-waste-management-in-saudi-arabia/>>) [accessed on 02/07/2014]

<sup>43</sup> J.S. Birks and C.A. Sinclair, *Arab Manpower: The Crisis of Development* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 116, cited in Andrzej Kapiszewski, ‘Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries’, United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region, Beirut, 15-17 May 2006 Available online at: <[http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02\\_Kapiszewski.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02_Kapiszewski.pdf)> [accessed on 27/07/2014]



system.<sup>44</sup> Naif Alromi suggests that the Saudi government first requested Egyptian assistance in establishing its educational system in 1925.<sup>45</sup>

Data collected by Sharon Russel and Michael Teitelbaum (1992) for the World Bank bear witness to the dramatic changes in the numbers of Arab workers employed in Saudi and the other Gulf States over the course of a decade. In 1975 some 72 percent of the foreign workers in the Gulf States were Arabs from neighbouring countries; by 1985, this figure had decreased to 56 percent. For the purposes of comparison, they comment that whereas in 1970, Asian workers made up just 12 percent of the foreign labour force in the Gulf, by 1985 this figure had risen spectacularly to 63 percent.<sup>46</sup>

Shaban *et al.* also note that political crises within the region can mean that the position of Arab workers from neighbouring states can sometimes be as precarious as that of their Asian counterparts, citing as an example the events of the second Gulf War. Any workers who came from countries where the government was supportive of Iraq were forced to leave the GCC states during the crisis and in its immediate aftermath. As a result, in addition to the previously mentioned Yemenis expelled

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<sup>44</sup> Liesl Graz, *The Turbulent Gulf: People, Politics and Power* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1992), pp. 220-221 cited in Andrzej Kapiszewski, 'Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries', United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region, Beirut, 15-17 May 2006. Available online at: <[http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02\\_Kapiszewski.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02_Kapiszewski.pdf)> [accessed on 27/07/2014]

<sup>45</sup> Naif Alromi, 'Vocational Education in Saudi Arabia' (Penn State University, 200).4

<sup>46</sup> Sharon Stanton Russel and Michael S. Teitelbaum, *International Migration and International Trade* Washington, D.C.: World Bank, Discussion Paper no. 160, 1992, cited in Andrzej Kapiszewski, 'Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries', United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region, Beirut, 15-17 May 2006 Available online at: <[http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02\\_Kapiszewski.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02_Kapiszewski.pdf)> [accessed on 03/08/2014]

from Saudi Arabia, 200,000 Jordanians and 150,000 Palestinians were also forced to leave.<sup>47</sup>

### 5.5.3 Survival of the Fittest vs Strength in Solidarity

As noted in previous chapters, Al-Mohaimeed is particularly adept at exploring the interconnections and relationships between different forms of social marginalisation in his novels. On the negative side, he illustrates how hierarchies and rivalries can exist amongst different marginal groups, reflecting the dog-eat-dog world of urban survival. However, he also tells more positive stories of solidarity amongst the victimised, in which one marginalised individual joins forces with another to overcome an oppressor.

In *Wolves of the Crescent Moon*, Turād, the disfigured Bedouin outsider, who is desperately seeking a job in the city, imagines possible forms of employment and views other foreign workers, including Arab workers from Lebanon, as unwanted competition:

I thought I would get a job as a porter on the docks, but when I went there I found the place full of Asian workers. I left and told myself I would get a job as sales assistant, but I was not qualified: I did not have a clean, fair, Lebanese face to entice female customers into the clothes shops or the perfume and cosmetics stalls. I thought about working as a labourer, a builder, or a tiller, but I would not be able to compete with the Pakistanis, nor would I be accepted by them.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Radwan A. Shaban, Ragui Assaad, and Sulayman Al-Qudsi, 'Employment Experience in the Middle East and North Africa', in *Labour and Human Capital in the Middle East: Studies of Markets and Household Behavior*, ed. by Djavad Salehi-Ishfahani (Reading and Cairo: Ithaca Press, with the Economic Research Forum, 2002), pp. 21-67 (p. 41), cited in Andrzej Kapiszewski, 'Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries', United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region, Beirut, 15-17 May 2006. Available online at: <[http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02\\_Kapiszewski.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02_Kapiszewski.pdf)> [accessed on 03/08/2014]

<sup>48</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, p. 157.

In Turād's hierarchy of workers, the most socially acceptable job, working in sales, is reserved for the light-skinned Lebanese migrants. Asian workers have already taken all the portering jobs whilst Pakistanis have cornered the market in low-status jobs, being willing to work in dangerous and dirty construction work as labourers, builders or tillers.<sup>49</sup>

As a last resort, Turād considers trying to compete “with the Indian and Bangladeshi car washers”.<sup>50</sup> However, like many Arabs, Turād finds it difficult to imagine doing what he perceives to be demeaning work, which does not match what he considers to be his social status. Al-Mohaimeed portrays the character attempting to reason with his own ego about the necessity to find a job in a very emotional monologue:

‘There is nothing dishonourable about it’, he told himself out loud, but the voice residing deep inside chastised him: ‘You, son of the free tribes, son of the wild lands and the wide canyons, how can you accept becoming a cleaner, a servant or a slave?’<sup>51</sup>

On one level, the fact that Turād equates a job as a cleaner with servitude or slavery reflects a commonly held belief in Saudi society, alluded to earlier, that work which involves cleaning or dealing with refuse of any kind is demeaning and even shameful. As recently as 2008, media coverage was given to a debate between four Saudi judges about the validity of testimony given in legal cases by those who are employed in jobs of this kind, illustrating the extent to which Saudi society can act in an exclusionary manner.<sup>52</sup> Andrzej Kapiszewski attributes the reluctance of the Saudis to take on this kind of jobs to the fact that like other nationals of the Gulf

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<sup>49</sup> Regarding the accuracy of this assessment of the job market made by Al-Mohaimeed's character, see Nasra M Shah, 'Pakistani Workers in the Middle East: Volume, Trends and Consequences', *International Migration Review*, 17:3 (1983), 410-424.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, p. 171.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>52</sup> See Hānī Al-zāhrī, 'Afsadūnī 'Alayk yā Ghāzī', *Alegtisadiah*, 5432 (2008).

States, they are “culturally disinclined” to enter low-skilled posts while at the same time, their educational system is not properly prepared to deal with the problem of reorienting traditional work values.<sup>53</sup> Al-Rasheed echoes this viewpoint about the nature of the educational system which has been criticized for its emphasis on religious knowledge and rote learning without providing useful vocational qualifications.<sup>54</sup>

On another level, Turād’s comment draws attention to the fact that the conditions faced by foreign workers in Saudi Arabia have frequently been compared to slavery by countless journalists writing in the media<sup>55</sup> and in numerous reports from international human rights’ organizations.<sup>56</sup> In particular the *Kafālah* (sponsorship) system has been heavily criticised for according to Gwenann S. Manseau, this can, in practice, amount to:

Debt bondage, where a worker’s labour is demanded as a means to repayment of a loan, or of money given in advance. Bonded labour has been defined as a ‘slavery-like’ practice that is banned by the International Labour Organization’s Convention on the Abolition of Forced Labour.”<sup>57</sup>

In “*Munira’s Bottle*,” the author directly addresses the abuses of the *Kafālah* system in Saudi Arabia through the story of the minor character of Jum’ah, the Egyptian

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<sup>53</sup> Andrzej Kapiszewski, ‘Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries’, United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region, Beirut, 15-17 May 2006 Available online at: <[http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02\\_Kapiszewski.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02_Kapiszewski.pdf)> [accessed on 05/08/2014]

<sup>54</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 152.

<sup>55</sup> Proudman. Available at: <<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/the-beheading-of-a-housemaid-in-saudi-arabia-highlights-slavelike-conditions-8451951.html>> [accessed on 7 July 2014]

<sup>56</sup> It was described by the international organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW). Watch. [accessed on 04/07/2014]

<sup>57</sup> Gwenann S Manseau, 'Contractual Solutions for Migrant Labourers: The Case of Domestic Workers in the Middle East', *Human Rights Law Commentary*, 3 (2007), 25-47 (pp. 29-30).

farm labourer. As Jum'ah's treatment at the hands of his sponsor shows, the *Kafālah* system allows foreign workers to be exploited in various ways. These can include charging foreign workers high fees to obtain employment visas before they arrive in Saudi Arabia, imposing overly demanding working conditions, often accompanied by verbal and physical abuse, and failing to pay the salaries agreed in the contract for the period of working. Sponsors also frequently keep workers' passports as a type of insurance for the money an employer has paid for a labourer's work permit and airfare.<sup>58</sup>

Munirah, the protagonist of *Munira's Bottle*, comes across a somewhat gruesome story of solidarity between victims whilst dealing with one of her clients, Maythā', a child bride and victim of domestic violence, who joins forces with Jum'ah, the Egyptian farm labourer working on her husband's farm, in order to rid them both of their hated oppressor.<sup>59</sup> Both have been abused by the same man but neither is in a position to simply leave, as the author explains:

Jum'ah knew her [Maythā's] tragedy well, for he too had suffered the brutality of his master, the old Sheikh,<sup>60</sup> and the late payment of his wages, but his desperate poverty left him with no choice but to put up with his lot.<sup>61</sup>

Unable to take any more of the ill treatment meted out to them, they jointly devise a plot to put an end to his tyranny:

Jum'ah prepared the meat cleaver, whetting the blade with the bottom of a porcelain coffee cup. Then Maythā' went back inside, leading the labourer, who walked behind her slowly, silently. As he raised the meat cleaver high into the air, the whole of Nature let out a huge cry [...] The meat cleaver rose

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-32.

<sup>59</sup> This story has also been analysed in detail to highlight the social issues of child marriage and domestic violence in Chapter Four.

<sup>60</sup> Sheikh has many different meanings. It can refer to a religious man, an Islamic scholar, or a man who is rich or advanced in years. In this context it refers to the character's age.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Mohaimed, pp. 108-109.

slowly, unsteadily, then fell, swooping down like a rock in the labourer's firm and calloused hand [...] The young woman, Maythā', and the Egyptian labourer, Jum'ah, worked together. They wrapped the body in a woollen blanket and threw it into a very deep pit where even the trained police dogs could not find it.<sup>62</sup>

Al-Mohameed's description of the murder scene is surprisingly non-sensationalist. Unlike the old Sheikh's outbursts of animalistic brutality against both his wife and his labourer, described in extended detail in the novel, this act of revenge is not a crime committed in the heat of passion. The preparations are meticulously carried out with both Jum'ah and Maythā' playing their own role but then "working together" in the final instance to dispose of the body. The reader is left with the sense that rather than a murder having been committed, an execution has been carried out. Jum'ah and Maythā', who have both suffered at the Sheikh's hands, have found him guilty and meted out their own form of justice for his crimes. The fact that he is dispatched with a meat cleaver, an implement normally used on an animal, seems to underline the symbolic nature of the killing: a man who behaved like a beast has died like one. Having found the strength in solidarity to achieve their aim of ridding themselves of their oppressor, Jum'ah and Maythā' then go their separate ways.

Social scientists have suggested that revenge is motivated by the desire to restore self-esteem, regardless of any other consequences. Injustice and social exclusion practiced against foreign workers can lead them to seek revenge which can raise the crime rate in those social classes that are given unfair treatment. Some studies confirm that revenge enhances the positive side in the lives of those people who have been subjected to social injustice.<sup>63</sup> Thus, from this perspective, it is clear why Al-

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 108-109.

<sup>63</sup> Mario Gollwitzer, Milena Meder, and Manfred Schmitt, 'What Gives Victims Satisfaction When They Seek Revenge?', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 41:3 (2011), 364-374 (p. 373).

Mohaimeed in his novel chooses the character of Jum‘ah to commit this crime with Maythā’. This probably confirms the claim of the spokesperson from Human Rights Watch that since Saudi law does not provide strong legal protection for foreign workers and their chance of access to justice is more remote” this may lead them to commit crime.<sup>64</sup>

Another Egyptian foreign worker makes a brief but telling appearance in Laylā Al-Juhanī’s *Al-Firdaūs Al-Yabāb* (*The Barren Paradise*). The character is a representative of the estimated one hundred thousand foreign drivers currently working in Saudi Arabia.<sup>65</sup> Al-Juhanī’s treatment of a character who is a driver makes for an interesting comparison with that of Al-Mohaimeed and deserves further consideration here.

In his novel *Munira’s Bottle*, as is the case with some of the other foreign characters Al-Mohaimeed portrays, these drivers who perform the crucial function of ferrying women and children about are mentioned as part of the everyday reality of contemporary Saudi Arabia, but the socially marginalised Asian workers who fulfil those tasks are portrayed as generic groups not individuals, largely ignored by their Saudi employers. Thus, for example, Munīrah Al-Sāhī, the novel’s protagonist, mentions that one of her female friends who works as journalist wants to be able to drive herself, rather than having to rely on “Indian, Bangladeshi, and Indonesian drivers”.<sup>66</sup> Elsewhere, her father, Hamad Al-Sāhī, is particularly irritated when he

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<sup>64</sup> Chamberlain. at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/13/saudi-arabia-treatment-foreign-workers> [accessed on 02/07/2014]

<sup>65</sup> The estimate comes from Andrzej Kapiszewski, ‘Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries’, United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region, Beirut, 15-17 May 2006 Available online at: <[http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02\\_Kapiszewski.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/11/P02_Kapiszewski.pdf)> [accessed on 13/08/2014]

<sup>66</sup> Al-Mohaimeed, p. 77.

finds himself as a Saudi man forced “to stand outside the park with the Indian and Bangladeshi drivers while only the women and children are allowed inside”.<sup>67</sup>

In the scene in Al-Juhanī’s novel, she paints a vivid portrait of the driver of Ṣabā, the protagonist. He is introduced to us in the following way.

حسن إمام!

المهندس المعماري الذي ترك المنصورة ليعمل سائقًا. يدخن بشراهة لا توازي شراهة عينيه وهو يتأملني في المرأة المعلقة بسقف السيارة.<sup>68</sup>

Ḥassan ‘Imām!

He is the architect who left Al-Manṣūrah to become a driver. He smokes greedily but there is more greed in his eyes when he is staring at me in the rear-view mirror of the car.

Here, Al-Juhanī presents a foreign worker as a named individual and he is given a succinct but revealing personal history. Ḥassan ‘Imām (the protagonist addresses him by his full name) is an Egyptian from Al-Manṣūrah, and presumably unable to find work in his own country in the profession for which he studied, he opted instead, like hundreds of thousands of his fellow countrymen, to seek his living as a foreign worker in Saudi Arabia. The way in which Al-Juhanī represents the power relations between Ṣabā and her driver is also striking. On one level, there is an unbridgeable gap between their social positions of Saudi employer and foreign employee but on another level, that of gender relations, the power relations seem more fluid.

Although Ḥassan ‘Imām cannot stare directly at Ṣabā, at the same time she cannot escape his gaze as he watches her in his rear-view mirror. Similarly, when Ṣabā strikes up a conversation with her driver, he uses this as an opportunity to flirt with her:

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>68</sup> Layla Al-Juhani, *Al-Firdaws Al-Yabāb* [The Barren Paradise] (Germany: Al-Kamal Verlag, 1999), p. 32



- عارف يا حسن, نفسي أزور إسكندرية. جميلة مش كده برضه؟“

والله يا ستي مش أجمل منك؟ يعني إيه هي إسكندرية؟ بحر وشوارع وبيوت ونوة شديدة في الشتاء. لكن إنت يا ست صبا, إنت حاجة ماتتقالش ولا تتوصف. وحياة المرسي أبو العباس إنت أجمل من الدنيا كلها!.”<sup>69</sup>

- Do you know, Hassan! I want to visit Alexandria. It's beautiful, isn't it?
- I swear Miss; it is no more beautiful than you! What's special about Alexandria? Nothing, except it's by the sea, with streets and houses and it's bitterly cold in winter. Whereas, Miss Şabā, you are something different. Something beyond description. I swear: you are more beautiful than life itself!

It is worth noting here that the English translation does not capture the fact that Al-Juhanī allows the character of Ḥassan 'Imām to speak for himself, in that his Arabic is infused with the distinctive grammatical elements and terms of phrase (such as المرسي أبو العباس) which mark him out as Egyptian. In a society where foreign workers are usually seen but not heard Al-Juhanī literally gives a voice to the voiceless.

By suggesting this fluctuating power relation, Al-Juhanī highlights the mutual dependency between foreign workers and the Saudi host community, as Al-Mohaimed does in his novels. However, in this case there is a specifically gendered element to this worker-employer relationship which has been created by the particular demands of Saudi society and which highlights the fact that both Ḥassan and Şabā are members of marginalised groups, both are subject to the restrictions that it imposes on them and each depends on the other, Ḥassan for his livelihood and Şabā for her mobility. For as Sara Obeid observes:

To most, having a chauffeur is a luxury. But to a Saudi woman, it is an obligation and her only means of transportation. Many Saudi women do not consider having a chauffeur a luxury, but rather a financial burden that

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 33

consumes 30% of their income and obstructs both their ability to work and get an education, each of which require commuting.<sup>70</sup>

## 5.6 Western Expatriates: The Gated Community

According to Laura Etheredge, most specialised technical workers in Saudi Arabia come from America and Europe<sup>71</sup> and this professionally qualified and skilled category represents approximately 15 percent of foreign workers.<sup>72</sup> Figures from 2007 estimated that the number of Western workers living at that time in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was almost 100,000.<sup>73</sup> (It is unclear if this numbers refers only to those given work permits (*iqama*) or also includes the family members who usually accompany high income Western professionals who are provided with accommodation for their whole family as part of their employment contracts). Admittedly there are considerably fewer numbers of Westerners in comparison to Asian and Arab workers from the region but it is noticeable that representations of these foreign workers, either as groups or as individuals, are also completely absent from the pages of the Saudi literature of the period being studied, despite the fact that there has been a Western expatriate community in Saudi Arabia for several decades.

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<sup>70</sup> Sara Obeid 'Being a Female in the Kingdom: Women Drivers in Saudi Arabia', November 7, 2013, Institute of Middle Eastern Studies. Available online at: <<http://imeslebanon.wordpress.com/2013/11/07/being-a-female-in-the-kingdom-women-drivers-in-saudi-arabia/>> For a humorous but thought-provoking viewpoint on the relationship between Saudi women and their drivers, see the blog by Saudi Woman: 'Saudi Women and Their Drivers' September 12, 2008. Available at <<http://saudiwoman.me/2008/09/12/saudi-women-and-their-drivers/>> [accessed on 18/08/2014]

<sup>71</sup> Laura Etheredge, *Saudi Arabia and Yemen* (New York, NY: Britannica Educational Pub. in association with Rosen Educational Services, 2011), p. 8.

<sup>72</sup> Anthony H. Obaid Nawaf E. Center for Strategic Cordesman and Studies International, *National Security in Saudi Arabia: Threats, Responses, and Challenges* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2005), p. 374.

<sup>73</sup> Wayne H. Bowen, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008), p. 6.

It can be argued that since expatriates from the West face few of the problems of exploitation and marginalisation which affect the other groups of foreign workers already examined in this chapter, they do not merit discussion in this context. However it is relevant to consider firstly how and why a social grouping which on one level has power and prestige disappears almost entirely from the literary landscape of the Saudi novels of this period, and secondly to analyse what their few appearances in novels can tell us about Saudi attitudes to this group of incomers.

As with the other categories of foreign workers, it was the discovery and exploitation of oil on the Arabian Peninsula in the 1930s by Western oil companies that originally caused an influx of Western professionals to the Gulf States. From the 1940s onwards in Saudi Arabia, the Arab-American Oil Company ARAMCO responded to this surge in demand for housing by building residential compounds for their employees.<sup>74</sup> As Glasze and Alkhayyal note, three different forms of compounds were established for Westerners in Saudi Arabia. The first type of compounds offered basic accommodation in portable, often prefabricated units for single unskilled or semi-skilled male workers. These temporary gated compounds were situated near to new infrastructure projects and removed when construction was completed. The second type of compounds consisted of simple lodgings with few amenities or support services aimed at single male semi-professionals or technicians. These were basic but designed to be more permanent. Finally, there were compounds designed for expatriate professionals accompanied by their families. These compounds were well maintained, landscaped, and offered a range of support

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<sup>74</sup> G. Glasze and A. Alkhayyal, Gated Housing Estates in the Arab world: Case Studies in Lebanon and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, *Environment and Planning B; Planning and Design*, 29: 3: 321-336 (p.325).

services such as childcare facilities and clinics, as well as social amenities like tennis courts and swimming pools.<sup>75</sup>

Saudi government policy promoted these developments, obliging non-Saudi companies with more than 50 foreign employees to provide housing for them. In her novel, *In the Kingdom of Men*, set in Saudi Arabia in 1967,<sup>76</sup> the American author Kim Barnes describes expatriate life during the period. On her website she explains:

Aramcons, as they called themselves, [...] lived inside closed compounds inside a closed culture inside a closed country. [...] In order to develop the massive oilfields of Arabia, Aramco imported workers from all over the world, including Americans, who were given segregated housing in three gated communities, each built to replicate the middle-class dream they were seeking: swimming pools, top schools, and the best medical care money could buy. [...] Inside the American “camps”, the women swam laps in trendy swimsuits and often gathered for cocktails dressed in designer gowns, their meals served to them by houseboys.<sup>77</sup>

Nicolas Bombacci has argued that these Western Housing Compounds<sup>78</sup> or Gated Communities<sup>79</sup> also functioned as a means of limiting and controlling the cultural influences of Western foreigners on Saudi society,<sup>80</sup> acting effectively as what Glasze and Alkhayyal call “cultural enclaves”. These compounds provided spaces where different social norms and institutions applied in comparison to the outside environment. Residents of these communities were able to enjoy a Western-style open environment, allowing them to escape from the strict cultural restrictions outside the gates, for example, within the compounds women were not obliged to comply with the dress code which is enforced outside. In some ways, as Barnes’

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 321-336 (p.325-326).

<sup>76</sup> The novel was partly based on the experiences of her uncle and aunt who lived in one of ARAMCO’s compounds during the 1960s.

<sup>77</sup> Kim Barnes, ‘A Note from the Author’: <http://www.kimbarnes.com/>[accessed on 10/07/2014]

<sup>78</sup> Cordesman and International.374

<sup>79</sup> Bowen, p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> Nicolas Bombacci. ‘Where foreigners know their place’. Available at:

<<http://mondediplo.com/1998/10/05saudi> Le Monde>Diplomatique October, 1998. N.p. [accessed on 16/02/2014]

description suggests, originally the lifestyle on these compounds was a privileged middle-class dream but in more recent times, things have changed dramatically. Although the Western expatriates still enjoy a privileged lifestyle, following the threats and actual attacks carried out on Western compounds in Riyadh by followers of Al-Qaeda in the aftermath of the events of 9/11, the Gated Communities now resemble self-contained high-security prisons. According to Glasze and Alkhayyal:

The compounds are guarded, generally patrolled by security guards. Access is strictly restricted to residents and their visitors. Administration and maintenance are provided through an on-site management structure, and Saudi nationals are mostly excluded from residing in these communities [...] To increase security measures both within and outside, these bigger compounds make use of high-security measures such as surveillance cameras and concrete barricades.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, Westerners do not consider it safe to come out of their gated community whilst Saudi locals are not allowed to go in. This almost typifies Rudyard Kipling statement; “East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet...”<sup>82</sup>

Given the physical seclusion and segregation which the gated community creates, it can be argued that by almost entirely omitting references to the Western expatriates, Saudi novelists do indeed mirror the social reality of the current situation. Equally, at the same time this absence takes on significance, in the same way that silence can speak volumes.

The only two references to Westerners which were found in the novels are in themselves telling ones. The first appears in “Munira’s Bottle” and reflects the greatest mass presence of Westerners in Saudi Arabia in recent times. However, in this case the individuals represented are not foreign workers but Western troops

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<sup>81</sup> Glasze and Alkhayyal, 321-336.

<sup>82</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *the Ballad of East and West* (1889).

(including Americans) who have arrived following the outbreak of the First Gulf War in 1990, when the Saudi government was forced to bring in this large military contingent to confront the Iraqi army. In the novel, Munīrah has been dining out with her fiancé in one of the luxury restaurants located in the centre of Riyadh when she has the briefest of encounters:

An American soldier from the joint forces, standing with his companion at the door of Hardee's, complemented me. I had paid particular attention that day to my kohl and dark grey shadow, and as we walked past them toward the Cherokee the soldier noticed me and announced, "Beautiful eyes".<sup>83</sup>

The soldier's complement is probably well-intentioned but given the context, his remark shows a lack of cultural awareness and is particularly inappropriate given the presence of Munīrah's fiancé, although she notes that he does not notice or possibly fails to understand what has been said. Given that American troops at that time had had limited contact with Islamic societies his behaviour is perhaps not surprising. However, this incident involving cultural sensitivity does perhaps hint at the lack of understanding which was to create future problems for the American forces in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. Opinion polls conducted by Gallup in the period 2006–2008 found that 52 percent of Saudis wanted American military bases to be removed from their country. Citizens polled in many other Muslim-majority countries also strongly objected to these military bases in Saudi Arabia.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Al-Mohaimed, p. 75.

<sup>84</sup> Julie Ray, 'Opinion Briefing: U.S. Image in Middle East/North Africa', in *U.S Foreign Policy Opinion Briefings*, (USA, 2009). Available at: <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/114007/opinion-briefing-image-middle-east-north-africa.aspx> [accessed on 01/08/2014]. For further information on the problems of cultural insensitivity in the US military, see Rochelle Davis, 'Culture as a Weapon', *Middle East Report*, 40 (summer) 2010, .Available at: <<http://www.merip.org/mer/mer255/culture-weapon>> [accessed on 20/08/2014]

The second reference to the Western community can be found in Al-Juhani's *Al-Firdaws Al-Yabāb*, and again the mention is only a fleeting one, in which she writes about her love-hate relationship for Jeddah:

ربما كان يجب أن أخلص ل جدة وحدها وأكتب عنها. عن التناقض الذي ترفل فيه ويجعلها جميلة “  
أحيانا. عن الشوارع العريضة بمعالمها المتباينة: الكنداسة، السيف، الدراجة، النورس، عمارة الملكة،  
فتيحي، الجمجوم. أو ربما كتبت عن الأمريكيات “وربما كن أوروبيات. لست أدري في ذلك العمر  
كانت كل امرأة بشعر أشقر و عيون ملونة: أمريكية” أجل الأمريكيات اللاتي كن يقدن سياراتهن في  
شوارع جدة منذ زمن بعيد. وربما منذ أكثر من عشرين عاما. الآن يا خالدة ، لا الأمريكيات ولا غير  
الأمريكيات يحلمن بقيادة سيارة واحدة في شارع خلفي من شوارع جدة”<sup>85</sup>

Perhaps I had to be loyal to Jeddah and just write about it, about its contradictions that sometimes make it beautiful, about its wide streets and its different sites such as Al-Kindārah, Al-Sayf, Al-Darrāh, Al-Nawras, 'Amārat Al-Malikah, Fitayhī and Jamjūm. I may have to write about American women (or they may have been European women, I did not know at that age who they were, I thought all women with blond hair and eyes of a colour unlike mine were American); yes, the American women who drove their cars through Jeddah streets a long time ago, may be more than twenty years ago. Oh Khalidah, now neither American nor non-American women can dream of driving a car through the back streets of Jeddah.

In this case, too, the reference by the narrator is to the mass presence of US troops in the Saudi capital but this time the author remembers the American females who, although forbidden at that time to serve in the frontline, were drafted in to act as tank mechanics, cargo-plane pilots, doctors, nurses and ammunitions haulers and could often be seen driving on the streets of Riyadh.<sup>86</sup>

The narrator freely admits that her contact with Western women has been limited, and that as a young girl unfamiliar with cultural difference, she was unable to distinguish between European and American women. However, the point that she makes is not about the differences between women but about their similarities, for

<sup>85</sup> Al-Juhani, p. 10.

<sup>86</sup> Kim Storment. 'GI Jane: Female U.S. Soldiers Affecting Saudi Arabia'. Available at: <http://www.holysmoke.org/fem/fem0155.htm> [accessed on 20/08/2014].

she argues, regardless of nationality, whether women are Saudi locals or Western incomers, they all face the same social marginalisation due to gender.

### **5.7 A kingdom of Strangers?**

In 2012, American writer Zoe Ferraris penned a crime novel set in Riyadh which she entitled *Kingdom of Strangers*, a deliberately ambiguous title which referred not only to the literal presence of strangers (foreigners) in Saudi Arabia's cities but also to the fact that many of these different groups and individuals remain strangers to each other, leading parallel lives. The novelists whose work has been discussed in this chapter also highlight the fact that Saudi citizens often know little and care less about the lives of the millions of incomers who may clean their houses, drive their cars or perform the myriad tasks which they themselves refuse to do. Using various techniques, these writers draw society's attention to the plight of these omnipresent yet seemingly invisible strangers, giving a voice to those who all too often remain voiceless.

### **5.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted the different types of terminology which is employed to refer to those who work in countries other than the ones of which they are citizens, and the various connotations which these expressions embody, particularly in the Saudi context. It has given an overview of migrant worker trends in Saudi Arabia. It also has mentioned the socioeconomic factors and recruitment practices which have influenced the flow of foreign labour to the Kingdom



In addition, this chapter has illustrated how Al-Mohaimeed incorporates small but telling details into his writing in order to reflect the nature picture of foreign workers within Saudi society as they go about the tasks which Saudi citizens consider too dirty, dangerous or demeaning to perform for themselves. This has been followed by discussion of novelistic representation of the plight of female domestic workers, probably the largest of the foreign worker communities who are woven into the very fabric of everyday Saudi life.

Then, the chapter has focussed on shifts to non-Saudi Arab workers and contextual information is provided on the changing demographics of this workforce which has become to be replaced in recent years by the growing numbers of Asian workers due to changing social and political attitudes amongst the Saudi host community. These changes have been illustrated by references to Abodehman's positive account of the arrival of Arab teachers from neighbouring countries in the 1950s in "The Belt", and to the account of the exploitation of Egyptian agricultural workers under the Kafālah system in the more contemporary setting of Al-Mohaimeed's "Munira's Bottle". The themes of solidarity amongst marginalised groups and the mutual dependency of foreign workers and their host community have been also discussed.

Finally the chapter has examined the reasons for the lack of representation of Westerners in the Saudi novel during the period in question and examined how the seclusion and segregation afforded by gated communities has led to lack of contact, then to fuelling misunderstandings between Saudis and Westerners.

# CONCLUSION

*Fiction is a web of lies that attempts to entangle the truth.*

*Nicholas Delbanco*

## 6.1 Major Research Findings

This study focused on analysing the phenomenon of social marginalisation in a selection of Saudi novels endeavouring to bring to light new findings on this topic that would appeal to those with an interest in this issue and its fictional representation. It also aimed to situate the novels which were analysed both in their socio-historical context and more generally to place them within the framework of recent developments in this literary genre in Saudi Arabia. It therefore sought to contribute not only to the literary study of Arabic fiction but to produce an innovative exploration of social marginalisation and the novelistic representation of topics considered sensitive or taboo within Saudi society.

It is hoped that the study achieved its aims by reviewing relevant literature in the fields of Social Sciences and Literary Studies relating to social marginalisation and the Saudi novel. Then, after charting the transformations in Saudi society in the period from 1990 to 2011, the study presented the results of an interdisciplinary analysis of the chosen sample of Saudi novels, the major findings of which are provided below, followed by a number of proposals regarding future research in this area.

The first key finding was that Saudi novelists employ different textual strategies and literary techniques when writing about social marginalisation. For example, Al-Dosari's male narrator presents a multiplicity of voices expressing diverse reactions

to a protest by Saudi women drivers without taking any stand. Al-Mohaimeed, in contrast, uses his female narrator to voice her opinion. Internal monologue is used to allow socially marginalised characters to reflect on their personal experiences, without fear of external censorship, meaning they can break social taboos whilst apparently addressing only themselves. Flashbacks are also often used to evoke past events, and explain how marginalisation has evolved.

Secondly, some Saudi novelists have drawn links among characters, the literary process and the emergence of novel writing. This confirms what Seth said about the character<sup>1</sup> of the foundling being a useful literary device to help writers produce a novelised version of the reality of social marginalisation.

With respect to the depiction of the marginalisation of Saudi women, novelists imply that the obstacles and difficulties which they document are not attributable to Islamic teachings, but to the imposition of tribal customs and traditions. Saudi female writers cite Islamic teachings when demanding the rights which their faith grants them whilst tribal traditions deny these.

Analysis also established that the concept of the tribe and Bedouin identity, and all this entails, continue to play a central role in Saudi society. It is also clear that these “irregular individuals” without the requisite tribal credentials are condemned to face social marginalisation in a society which places enormous value on an individual’s provenance as a means not only of validating their identity but also of assessing their social status and ultimately their worth as human beings.

The topic of marriage in the sample of novels studied is also used to explore class, race, ethnicity and tribal identity in the context of the Saudi society.

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<sup>1</sup> Seth, p. 4.

Close reading of the works established that several of the characters represented suffer from more than one type of marginalisation, for example someone exiled from his tribe for reasons relating to disability then finds that as a Bedouin he does not belong inside the city.

Analysis also highlighted that some groups of marginalised people found in Saudi society still do not feature prominently or at all in Saudi novels, for example, disabled individuals or members of religious sects like Shiites. The representation of this topic in selected novels has not been addressed clearly. It can be seen that there are some signs inside the texts but they are not prominent enough to reveal how the experience of Shiite marginalisation has been reflected in the literary production of Saudi Arabia. In the study period of this thesis, there is lack of representation of this issue in the Saudi novel. However, this study has discussed this theme theoretically and that can help further studies in the future to analyse it in-depth. In addition, this could mean that Saudi novelists have certain priorities related to the depiction of marginalised individuals or that they may be self-censoring for political and social reasons.

This study found that some Saudi novelists have a personal purpose for writing. For example, Yousef Al-Mohaimeed is the most prominent Saudi novelist to feature socially marginalised groups in his works, including women, Bedouins, *Bidouns* and foreign workers. He manages to raise questions about those marginalised people in many parts of his work. In addition, both of Layla Al-Juhani's novels, *Al-Firdaws Al-Yabāb* (The Barren paradise) and *Jāhiliyyah* (Ignorance), are set in Jeddah, where

she grew up and she uses this setting which is well known to her to explore the phenomenon of social marginalisation.<sup>2</sup>

Most Saudi novelists do not have a direct personal experience of social marginalisation within their own communities, unlike some other Arab novelists.<sup>3</sup>

This raises questions about their motives for tackling this subject and suggests that a comparative study of the motivations of Saudi and other Arab novelists for writing about the subject of social marginalisation in Arab societies could be a useful future project. This can be considered as a suggestion for future research in addition to the following list of suggestions.

## 6.2 Suggestions for Further Research

This conclusion also provides the following suggestions for further research in the area of social marginalisation in fictional works by Saudi writers:

As previously noted in 2.3, this research focused on novels which were written and/or published in the period from 1990 to 2011. It would be useful, then, to study the same phenomenon in literature written post-2011, especially given the key importance of the events of the Arab Spring. Whilst it is true that the Kingdom did not see the degree of transformation which took place in other Arab countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen, nonetheless, it was affected by

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<sup>2</sup> This is reminiscent of Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz, whose first three novels tell stories about several Cairo families across three generations. Mahfouz is the most important Arabic fiction writer of the last century. Born in 1911, his long and prolific writing career represents the evolution of the novel genre in Arabic literature. His books are a rich record of the tragic tension attendant on a nation's quest for freedom and modernity. In 1988, he won the Nobel Prize for literature. See *Rasheed El-Enany, Naguib Mahfouz the Pursuit of Meaning* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 2, and 'Mahfouz, Naguib', in *Africa: An Encyclopedia for Students*, ed. by John Middleton (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2002), (p. 45).

<sup>3</sup> Mohammad Shukri (1935-2003), born in Beni Shiker in the Nadhor region of Morocco, did not learn to read and write until the age of twenty. As a boy, he was sold by his father to a hashish addict. Aida A. Bamia, 'Shukri, Mohammad [1935-]', in *Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa*, ed. by Philip Mattar (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), (p. 2060).

those events due to its geographical proximity with some of these countries. It also has strong political and economic ties with them in addition to sharing religion, language and Arab identity. The Saudi regime did enact some political and economic reforms, improving salary levels for Saudis, introducing new job schemes for the unemployed and allowing women to engage in political participation as members of the Saudi Shura (consultative) Council for the first time in 2013. All these changes touch upon the subject of marginalisation, indicating that there are some segments of Saudi society facing difficulties which have not been addressed in this study.

According to the figures provided by Khalid Al-Yousef, the period from 1990 to 2011 saw an unprecedented growth in the number of published Saudi novels. However, not only the quantity but also the quality of the Saudi novel has changed, as evidenced by the fact that Abdo Khal won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2010 for his novel *Tarmī Bi Sharar* (Spewing Sparks as Big as Castles) followed by fellow Saudi Rajaa Alem and her novel *Tawq Al-Ḥamāmah* (The Dove's Necklace) in 2011. This suggests that Saudi novelists have also started to innovate in terms of literary techniques and may provide new models of representing the subject of social marginalisation.

Many of the novelists discussed here are also journalists (including Abdo Khal, Yousef Al-Mohaimed, Rajaa Alem, Ahmed Abodehman and Zainab Hifni) who also express their views about social issues within their newspaper articles. Therefore, it would be possible to conduct a comparative analysis of their journalistic and novelistic writings to explore how they discuss social marginalisation in both. This might also raise interesting issues concerning self-censorship and freedom of expression and how writers deal with the topic of marginalisation in these two different writing forms.

A number of novels about life in Saudi society have been written by foreign writers, many of them focusing on aspects of marginalisation. Zoe Ferraris has completed a critically acclaimed trilogy of novels *Finding Nouf/The Night of the Mi'raj* (2008), *City of Veils* (2010) and *Kingdom of Strangers* (2012) featuring Palestinian desert guide Nayir Sharqi and Saudi forensic scientist Katya Hijazi which uses the crime genre to explore as the author puts it “all the nooks and crannies of [Saudi] society”<sup>4</sup> *The Ruins of Us* (2012) by Keija Parssinen and *In the Kingdom of Men* (2013) by Gin McPheare both provide an American viewpoint on the experiences of the marginalisation of expatriate Westerners. The British novelist Hilary Mantel, twice winner of the Man Booker Prize, wrote *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* (1988), a semi-autobiographical novel based on her experiences of living in Jeddah with her geologist husband in the early 1980s.<sup>5</sup>

In 1973, Egyptian writer Ibrahim Abdul Majeed penned *Al-Baldata Al-Ukhrā* (The Other Place) talking about his experience while working in north of Saudi Arabia. Also, an Indian writer, Benyamin, has written a novel *Goat Days* (2008) which tells the story of an abused migrant worker in Saudi Arabia. Both of these authors represent external views about social issues in Saudi society, in particular the phenomenon of social marginalisation. It would be revealing to analyse novels written by non-Saudis and study them using the same interdisciplinary method to draw a comparison between the views of external and internal writers on the subject of social marginalisation in Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>4</sup> As previously mentioned in Chapter Six, “Social Marginalisation and Foreign Workers”. For further details see, <http://www.zoeferraris.com/>

<sup>5</sup> The novel was re-issued in 2004, due to interest both in the author’s work and in Saudi Arabia. see Hilary Mantel, “Veiled Threats”, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/sep/11/featuresreviews.guardianreview23>

### **6.3 Final Thoughts**

Author Nicholas Delbanco's quote regarding the purpose of fictional writing seems to encapsulate much of what this exploration of the contemporary Saudi novel has demonstrated, namely, that authors can use fictional discourse to help individuals to gain a deep and meaningful understanding of aspects of the contemporary reality which surrounds them. Moreover the highly subjective viewpoint of a novelist can often be more effective at conveying a truth about the nature of the human condition than the supposedly objective statistical data of the social scientist or the journalistic article providing coverage of a social issue such as marginalisation. This is particularly true when the issues being explored are considered to be sensitive or taboo within a society for political, ideological, cultural or religious reasons.

Skilled writers are able to weave their narrative threads in such an imaginative way that they succeed in revealing hidden stories and giving voice to the voiceless while evading the censorship imposed by authoritarian regimes. At the same time, by presenting images which challenge existing attitudes and perceptions, literature may help to play a role in reshaping interpersonal and intergroup relationships and, in the process, contribute to improving the position of socially marginalised groups within society albeit by bringing awareness about their ordeals.



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