**UNIVERSITAT DE VALÈNCIA**

**DEPARTAMENT DE**
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**Programa de Doctorat**
**en Llengües, Literatures i Cultures i les seues Aplicacions**



**LITERARY ACTIVISM IN ANGLOWAITI WRITING:**

**GENDER IN NADA FARIS'S LITERATURE**

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València, Octubre 2020

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# Resumen

En el mundo occidental, las mujeres árabes musulmanas son generalmente estereotipadas como reprimidas y pasivas, además de carentes de voz y agencia en la sociedad, pero algunos textos de ficción muestran lo contrario. A lo largo de la historia, las mujeres árabes musulmanas de la región de Oriente Medio siempre han encontrado diferentes formas de luchar por sus derechos y promover el cambio social en sus comunidades. Una de las muchas formas en que muchos escritores árabes eligen emprender fue y sigue siendo la literatura. Para muchos, la literatura representó no solo un reflejo de las condiciones culturales, sociales y políticas, sino también una forma de cambiar mentalidades y crear nuevas alternativas. Las autoras kuwaitíes apelaron a la escritura como una forma de apoyar, promover el feminismo y crear conciencia sobre las hegemonías dominantes y reafirmar la agencia, un medio para expresar su condición. La escritora kuwaití y contemporánea Nada Faris expone magistralmente a lo largo de su obra literaria algunos de los problemas y luchas más importantes de las mujeres kuwaitíes en el siglo XXI. Esta investigación sostiene que las heroínas de Nada Faris son representadas como resistentes y subversivas al dominio patriarcal, representando figuras revolucionarias que es lo contrario de la creencia común. Esta categoría de mujeres encarna el cambio que Nada Faris prevé para la sociedad kuwaití. Al analizar la literatura de Nada Faris, este estudio intenta contribuir a la popularización de la literatura kuwaití, que ha recibido poca atención en la academia occidental, y más precisamente de los escritos de Nada Faris, una representante relevante dentro de las tradiciones literarias femeninas kuwaitíes contemporáneas. Los textos de Nada Faris constituyen un recurso invaluable del siglo XXI del escenario literario kuwaití debido al inmenso conocimiento social, cultural y político que estos textos literarios representan cuando se enfrentan a los lectores occidentales.

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# INTRODUCTION

Why Kuwait? Why Nada Faris's literary texts? Who is Nada Faris? What underlies these questions that people often ask me while working in the State of Kuwait as a teacher in a private university constitutes one of the aims of this study: to focus on the Gulf region literature, and more precisely on one of the renowned contemporary Kuwaiti writers whose name is Nada Faris. While many studies have been focused on the feminist literature of Arab women writers from North Africa (especially from Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco) and the Levant (particularly from Lebanon, Palestine, Syria) very few studies, especially in the Western academia, have been conducted on the feminist literature by women from the GCC states, which comprises the following nations: United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sultanate of Oman, State of Qatar and State of Kuwait. Therefore, this study attempts to contribute to the analysis of Kuwaiti (and by extension Arabian Gulf) literature and specifically of the writings of Nada Faris, a relevant representative within contemporary Kuwaiti female literary traditions.

In the Western world, Arab Muslim women are generally stereotyped as being suppressed, submissive and passive as well as lacking voice and agency in society. But some fictional texts depict the contrary. This research tries to demonstrate that throughout history until the present day Arab Muslim women in the Arab world have always found different ways

to fight for their rights and to encourage social change in their communities. One of the many ways that contributed to a social reform in society and that many Arab Muslim women writers choose to undertake was and is still writing. For many Arab women, including men as will be discussed in Chapter One, writing represented not only a reflection of the cultural, social and political conditions but also a way to change mentalities and create new alternatives distant from unprogressive and traditional ones.

In Chapter Two, it will be discussed that Kuwaiti women writers have always shown disagreement about their lack of rights, showing defiance toward their patriarchal system and have struggled for a more empowering status and emancipation in spite of the unfavourable consequences that many of them encountered along the way. It is also true that the state of Kuwait represents the country where the gender gap is the lowest, in comparison with other Gulf countries. However, many social and legal limitations are still an issue of concern in Kuwait as I attempt to reflect through the analysis of Nada Faris's literary works.

For this study I tried to include information from media reports, sociologist and historians' accounts from Middle East region as well as international institutions and organizations which are combined with the writer's voice in order to give a broader spectrum of women's lives and struggles through Faris's literature. That is why I consider her writings an invaluable resource of the contemporary Kuwaiti literary scene due to the immensely social, cultural and political knowledge that these literary texts represent when confronted by Western readers.

As a relevant note, this is a pioneering research that focuses on analysing Nada Faris's literary texts. Chapter Three, Four and Five will be devoted entirely to the analysis of her literature. Nada Faris does not try to hide or cover the most important issues of the state that

concern Kuwaiti women. In comparison with other contemporary writers in Kuwait, Faris started approximately a decade ago to diligently exhibit throughout her literary texts, which I often describe as art, the status and struggles of the Arab Muslim woman in the contemporary Kuwaiti society. Nada Faris, as a writer, feels she has the duty to "elevate her society" by using literature as a vehicle for a positive change. Throughout her literary texts, it is made evident that the main goal is to promote a social change in which gender inequalities and other forms of discrimination and oppression against women are dismantled. In other words, central to Faris's literary productions is the use of art as a tool to raise social awareness about many of the legal and social limitations on women's rights that discriminate Kuwaiti women in the twenty-first century.

My selection from among the emanating narrative corpus of Nada Faris is not arbitrary. Three of the fictional works selected for this study cover a variety of feminist concerns that expose women's situation in Kuwait. These fictional texts are two short stories "Raising Jenna" and "30 Years Marriage" and a novelette *Fame in the Adriatic*, all of them published in 2013. However, attempts are also made to include information from the writer's non-fictional texts to emphasize the social purpose of her art. Although some of Faris's literary productions are described as fictional texts and set in backgrounds or periods other than the modern times of the country, they hold a strong relation with the present day of the State of Kuwait. The reason why some of these fictional texts are not set in her own country is due to a possible ban of these stories in the State of Kuwait.

The literature of Nada Faris offers a perspective on many issues that affect Arab Muslim women and girls in the contemporary era, where gender roles, gender discrimination, gender and body image, gender inequality, racism, forced marriage, gender violence constitute constant concerns in Kuwait. Activism does not involve protesting on the streets with signs and chants

(though protesting is an important part of feminist activism), but also literary activism can contribute to promote social changes that favour not only women, but society at large, and lead them toward progress and a more developed world. Throughout this research, I argue that Faris's heroines, who represent the post-oil generations of Kuwaiti women – born in the second half of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century – are portrayed as resistant, subversive of the patriarchal dominance, and/or revolutionary figures, contrary to the common notion of their stereotypical indifference and submissiveness. Faris's heroines engage, in their respective ways, in a constant struggle against male social oppression and discrimination. This category of women embodies the change that Nada Faris envisions for the Kuwaiti society.

**Methodology**

Central to this study is feminist theory. Throughout its extensive history, feminism (for while the word may only have come into English usage in the 1890s, women's conscious struggle to defy patriarchy goes much further back) has sought to disrupt the complacent certainties of such a patriarchal culture, to state a principle in sexual equality, and to eliminate sexist domination in changing society (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker, 2005, 115.). French feminist Simone de Beauvoir spoke of women as the 'second sex'. In *The Second Sex*, she highlighted the issue of women's oppression. Influenced by Marxist conceptions of myth as ideology, De Beauvoir identifies a set of archetypal myths of woman, which are actively present throughout Faris's fiction, and that "have been invented by men for the specific purpose of keeping women in their place" (Fallaize, 2007, 88). Furthermore, she indicates "how cultural myth operates in conjunction with economic and social factors to reinforce the oppression of women as a group (Fallaize, 2007, 88) to sustain patriarchy.

Feminist and social activist bell hooks (1984) defines feminism as the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to help solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to change in a significant way all our lives (hooks, 1984, 26). bell hooks further explains that currently feminism seems to be a term without any clear significance and any approach to the definition of the word has rendered it practically meaningless (23). Most attempts at defining feminism reflect the class nature of the movement. Definitions are usually liberal in origin and focus on the individual woman's rights to freedom and self-determination, rights that some of Faris's characters lack of. In Barbara Berg's *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism* (cited in hooks 1984, 23-24), this scholar defines feminism as a right to gain greater individual freedom:

> It is the freedom to decide her own destiny; freedom from sex-determined role; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Feminism demands the acceptance of woman's right to individual conscience and judgment. It postulates that woman's essential worth stems from her common humanity and does not depend on the other relationships of her life. (24)

This definition of feminism is almost apolitical in tone; yet it is the type of definition many liberal women find appealing.

This study draws ideas from feminist literary criticism that it is based on a series of creative oppositions, of critiques and counter-critiques, and that it is constantly and innovatively

in flux – challenging, subverting and expanding not only other male theories but its own positions and agenda, grounded in specific cultural-political needs and arena, like class, gender and race (Selden et al.). Tyson (2006) examines the shared belief of many feminists on how patriarchal ideology works to keep women and men in traditional gender roles and thereby maintain male dominance. Tyson (2006) states that traditional gender roles usually cast men as rational, strong, protective, and even to some degree aggressive, whereas women the irrational, weak, nurturing and submissive. In every domain where patriarchy governs, woman becomes the other. Thus, she is diminished and marginalized, defined only by her distinction from male norms and standards, defined by what she (purportedly) lacks and that men (purportedly) have (Tyson, 2006, 92). These gender roles have been used very successfully to validate inequities, that still occur today, such as dismissing women from equal access to control and decision-making positions, and persuading women that they are not appropriate "for careers in such areas as mathematics, engineering and science" (Tyson, 2006, 85), as Faris's describes in *Fame in the Adriatic*. "Patriarchy is thus, by definition, sexist, which means it promotes the belief that women are innately inferior to men […] based on biological differences between the sexes" (Tyson, 2006, 85). Feminists do not deny the biological differentiations, but they do not accept that such distinctions as physical size, shape, and body chemistry make men innately greater or superior to women (Tyson, 2006). Rather, these gender categories are constructed by society (Lorber, 1994; Butler, 1990). According to feminism, the idea that men are superior to women has been used to defend and preserve the male domination of positions of economic, political, and social power, in other words, to keep women ineffective and helpless by refusing them the educational and occupational means of attaining economic, political, and social power. That is,

the inferior position long occupied by women in patriarchal society has been "culturally, not biologically, produced" (Tyson, 2006, 86).

This study also draws ideas from Marxist feminism that is organised around the basic conflicts between capitalism versus patriarchy and class versus gender oppression (Madsen, 2000). Marxist feminism believes that it is the mode of production that creates the 'private' and 'public' dichotomy of women's and men's domains. Marxist feminists blame the capitalistic mode of production as one of the main causes for male domination and women's oppression in society. Capitalism is regarded as "sexually and economically exploitative; capitalist patriarchy is seen as the source of women's oppression, the patriarchal ownership of the means of production and reproduction, and the construction of women as a class of passive consumers" (Madsen, 2000, 65). In *Sex, Class and Culture* (1978), Lilian Robinson, one of the prominent Marxist feminist thinkers, makes a distinction among the issues that must be addressed by "contemporary as opposed to historical works of art, arguing that mass culture need to be taken seriously examining the art addressed to working people, the forms it uses, the myths it creates, the influence it exerts, and seeking a new audience for criticism among those people who are the chief actors in history" (cit. Madsen, 2006, 74).

Even though different branches of feminism focused on different perspectives, all of them state that women are oppressed and there is a need to bring women out of this oppression. "All feminist activity has as its ultimate goal to change the world by promoting women's equality" (Tyson, 2006, 92). According to Deborah Madsen, feminism deals with women and their status in society and asks questions about oppression, consciousness and gender. Madsen further explains that many texts by women express the same concerns as feminist theory: "the notion of female consciousness; the definition of gender that limit and oppress; and the cause of

women's liberation from those restrictions" (ix). Thus, all feminist activity can be regarded as a form of activism even though the word is usually related to feminist activity that directly stimulates social change through political movement (public demonstrations, boycotts, voter education and registration) (Tyson, 2006, 92) but also feminist writing can play a crucial part to help promote a social change in society as Faris hopes for a better world.

## ABBREVIATIONS

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

GCC – Gulf Cooperation Council

AWDS – Arab Women's Development Society

WCSS – Women's Cultural and Social Society

ICCPR – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

**CHAPTER ONE**

**MODERN ARABIC FICTION IN KUWAIT:**

**EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Introduction**

This chapter presents a historical survey of the literary activity in Kuwait, from its emergence to the development of it. Beginning with a short note on the geography, demography and history of Kuwait from its consolidation to twenty-first century, mentioning social and political characteristics that describe Kuwait, the chapter proceeds to outline the rise and growth of literary activity in the country. Kuwaiti literature encompasses a wide variety of literary works including poetry, drama, fictional and non-fictional narratives. The main focus of this chapter is to trace the development of the short story and novel from its early stages to the present day.

The State of Kuwait, as it is officially known lies in the northwestern part of the Arabian Gulf. Its north-west borders are with Iraq, and its south and south-west borders are with Saudi Arabia. Its shores of the Arabian Gulf lie on the west. This special location provided Kuwait with a commercial importance. It is a natural outlet for northwestern part of the Arab Peninsula. The total area of Kuwait is 17.818 square Kilometers (Kuwait Government, 2020) consisting mostly of barren, sandy desert land. Kuwait's strategic position at the head of the Persian Gulf has had a long standing power on its history.

**Kuwait in History**

Beginning in the twentieth century, Kuwait's enormous petroleum assets brought equally vast economic thump to this small desert country. Kuwait also became the epicenter of the world's attention in 1990 after being attacked and occupied by Saddam Hussein's Iraqi armored forces. A military coalition led by the United States subsequently expelled the Iraqi invaders and quickly reestablished the land of Kuwait to its rightful owners (Casey, 2007). Beyond these facts, few people know much else about Kuwait or the Kuwaiti people. The urban history of Kuwait can generally be divided into two periods: the pre-oil and post-oil periods, which both include their own stages. The former was the period from the time of the foundation of Kuwait up to the middle of the 20th century; the latter began with the oil boom in the 1950s and 1960s. The Iraqi occupation of the country—from August 1990 to February 1991—introduced a third stage: 'post-war', which can still be included in the post-oil era (Tijani, 2009).

Al-Durae stated that "a recent research proves that Kuwait existed as an independent political entity as early as 1613 – not 1752, as previously believed" (as cited in Galloway, 2009, 154). The nomads who established Kuwait were identified as the Banī ʿUtub (people who wandered or moved) originally from the Najd region of Central Arabia (Casey, 2007). Banī ʿUtub was the group of Arab tribes that travelled from Central Arabia and established in the small, northeast coastal area of the Arabian Peninsula now acknowledged as Kuwait and consisted of the al-Ṣabāḥ, al-Khalīfa and al-Jalāhima tribes (Tijani, 2009). Written accounts generally refer to the area as Qurain, which comes from the Arabic word for high hill (qarn). On most early European maps, the name was typically spelled phonetically as "Grane". Approximately, between 1672 and 1680, Sheikh Barrak bin Ghuraif of the Bedouin tribe identified as the Bani Khalid, which then governed eastern Arabia, built a smallish fortress home

on the spot. The Arabic word for fort is *kut*, a diminutive of which is Kuwait, or "small fort." Since the late 1700s, the zone has most usually been acknowledged as Kuwait, though occasionally spelled alternatively as Kuwayt (Casey, 2007).

Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, Kuwait developed from a small town, to a vibrant and wealthy city, whose residents adopted commercial and ship-building occupations. Also, due to the strategic location of the town, Kuwait advanced into one of the most important port-cities of the Gulf. Pearls were the only natural supply, and therefore, shipbuilding became a vital industry before the oil exploration. Kuwait's natural pearling industry run the world and generated implausible wealth for Kuwaiti manufacturers. Nonetheless the supremacy held by this small country didn't last for too much since the growth of cultured pearls in Japan crushed that power preceding the Second World War. Other than petroleum and natural gas, the only natural resources found in significant quantities in Kuwait are fish and shrimp, but even these once flourishing local productions are now moderately minor in scale.

Kuwait is notable not only for its wealth but as well for its stability since it has been ruled continuously by leaders from one family, the Sabah family since it was established in the eighteenth century (Crystal, 2011). One of the most famous and powerful rulers of Kuwait was His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah. During Al-Sabah's tenure from 1950s to 1965, Kuwait became an affluent and powerful country (Galloway, 2009).

The 22nd of February 1938 was an important day for Kuwaiti history. It was the day that oil was first discovered four years after the first concession agreement had been signed with the Gulf Oil Corporation and Anglo-Persian Oil Company (now Chevron and BP respectively) (Aseri, 2016). Despite the destruction caused by the Second World War, Kuwait's oil production developed rapidly and by 1953 was the largest producer in the Gulf. The discovery of oil in 1938

raised Britain's interest in Kuwait and led to it taking full control of Kuwait and its larger neighbor Iraq in 1941 (Aseri, 2016). By the late 1930s and the mid-1940s, oil was becoming the country's primary cause of profits. The "period of luxury"[1] had begun during the reign of Shaykh Abdullah al-Sālim al-Ṣabāḥ (1950–1965), Kuwait town began to change from "a sun-baked adobe town [. . .] to a modern metropolis of the most contemporary design and [. . .] architecture" (Tijani, 2009). By means of its oil wealth, Kuwait developed from a tribal entity into a state, moving from subsistence to state-sponsored welfare, and from a nation of little importance to one of significant power in regional and international affairs. Oil lifted Kuwaiti society out of its traditional economic environment of hunting, pearl-diving and limited trade. The entire way of life of Kuwaitis changed in a very brief period. While in 1946 Kuwait's income from oil did not exceed $760,000, by 1971 it had risen to $963 million, and by 1977 to $8,9 billion. It is within this context of rapid economic development that new social forces emerged in Kuwait (Alessa, 1981). Alessa (1981) further stated that it is difficult to classify Kuwait's economy as developed or underdeveloped since Kuwait could be said to fall somewhere in between. On the one hand, Kuwait is renowned for the highest per capita income in the world − in 1976 it was approximately $11,000 or KD 3,197. The growth rate ranges between 8 and 10 per cent annually. The country also enjoys a high rate of savings and a consistently favourable balance of payments. On the negative side, however, Kuwait resembles many of the less developed countries. It is totally reliant on a single resource − oil − which constitutes 98.1 per cent of total government revenue. It also suffers from a severe overdependence on imports because Kuwait produces very little besides oil, it imports almost

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[1] Social and economic conditions improved, and the government provided all basic services, giving special attention to the health and housing sectors, and approving social support for poor families (Al-Sanousi, 1995).

everything (material goods, foods, etc.) from abroad. Finally, it suffers from an inadequate indigenous supply of labor and technically skilled workers.

Kuwait became a British protectorate in 1899, but in 1961 gained its independence. Its system of government is both monarchical and partially democratic, as parliamentary elections began to take place in the country from the 1930s. Islam and Arabic are the official religion and language, respectively (Tijani, 2009). While many noncitizens within Kuwait are also Muslims, those from other areas, such as South Asia, generally bring with them a host of other religious beliefs. Although Kuwait does not engage in the kinds of aggressive measures that some other Muslim nations employ to limit the exercise of faiths other than Islam, Kuwait is still home to very few Christians or Jews (Casey, 2007).

**Demography**

Official information on the population of Kuwait is lacking before the first census in 1957, but it has been estimated, however, that before the discovery of oil in 1938 the population was 75.000 (Alessa, 1981). From the onset of the country's development process sustained by oil wealth, labor immigrants were called upon to build the national economy and infrastructure, and the population growth-rate became one of the highest in the world, with an annual increase of 9.8 per cent (Alessa, 1981). Foreign residents outnumbered Kuwaiti citizens as early as 1960 (De Bel-Air, 2013). The last official census recording the population of Kuwait occurred in 2005 and showed 2,213,403 million people living in the country, but in 2018 the population was estimated at 4.20 million (Kuwait Population, 2018). According to the GLMM (Gulf Labor Markets and Migration) program 2010-2016, 70 percent of residents in Kuwait were non-national, whereas only 30 percent constituted Kuwaiti citizens (Percentage of nationals and foreign nationals in

GCC countries' populations, 2018). Most foreigners come from Asia and especially from India or Sri Lanka and are mainly involved in the domestic, public services and craft sectors, while Arabs coming from Egypt, Lebanon and/or Jordan usually fill managerial posts. De Bel-Air (2013) stressed that despite of their contribution in Kuwait's development process, most foreigners are hired as contract workers and, therefore, not entitled to any social and political rights or to naturalization. Additionally, the duration of stay in the Gulf countries is restricted to that of the labor contract. Furthermore, Kuwait's stateless residents, called Bidūn, have been compelled to emigrate since 1985, while those still in the country are considered illegal residents due to suspicions of conspiracy with political enemies in the region, mainly Iraq.

One of the latest statistical reports shows that women constitute almost half of the population of Kuwaiti citizens; over 67% of university graduates are women; and women constitute one third of the labor force. With a high (77.50%) level of literacy, Kuwaiti women have held and continue to hold a lot of high-ranking positions in government and private organizations and institutions. Nevertheless, they continue to be marginalized politically. They were enfranchised— granted the right to vote and be voted for—by the parliament only recently in 2005 (Alzuabi, 2016). The first election in which women had the right to vote was in 2006, but no female MPs were voted into power and female candidates faced strong opposition from tribal and Islamist groups (Ghabra, 2017). After women received full political rights, four women were elected to the National Assembly in 2009, and two women won seats in 2013 (Shalaby, 2015). There were no women in the government in 2012 and only one in 2015. As women are half of the Kuwaiti population, the problem of fair or/and equitable social and political participation is noticeable, menacing social cohesion and unity (Ghabra, 2017).

**The Beginnings of the Literary Tradition in Kuwait: mid-1840s–late 1920s**

It is the general belief that the beginnings of the Kuwaiti literature are closely connected with the figure of ʿAbd al-Galil al-Tabatiba'i, the first Kuwaiti literary symbol, who played a relevant role in the transference and establishment of the Arabic poetic tradition to Kuwait. ʿAbd al-Galil al-Tabatiba'i (1776–1853), of Persian origin, founded a school, a religious circle – al-halqa al-diniyya -, where he used to share with his students, knowledge on different areas and poems written in classical Arabic. In this way, he was bringing closer the Arabic cultural inheritance to Kuwaiti citizens (Michalak-Pikulska, 2000). Some of his Kuwaiti scholars, who included Abdullah al-Faraj, Khālid A. al-ʿAdsānī, and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Rushayd, are considered the pioneers of Kuwaiti intellectualism (Tijani, 2009).

It is noteworthy mentioning that the first stories in Kuwait originated in the form of public tale and myth, developing progressively into the level of story we are familiar with today. The art of story-telling is one of the oldest arts. The Kuwaiti story in the pre-literate period was all about old Kuwaiti society, embodied by the openly voiced story which put into view unpretentious standards about sea and desert and in which imagination played a great part (Al-Sanousi, 1995). Most of these were legends, but in them we can feel the idealistic expectations of individuals in Kuwait at that time. They found in their telling liberation and pleasure. The myths were largely acknowledged all over the social order as they provided clarifications for the severe and often unsafe environment people lived in whilst they also stated the people's respect for the desert and the sea. They were also used as cautionary tales often told by mothers to their children to prevent them from wandering too far from home. Later, these tales became less irrational in nature and were founded more on reality, telling about escapades, war or about the sea and the menaces, trials and complications faced by their protagonists. Up until this phase the stories were

all handed down from one generation to another orally as there was no printed activity (Al-Sanousi, 1995).

Kuwaiti literature started to develop at the beginning of the twentieth century due to Kuwaiti intellectuals before mentioned (Tijani, 2009). Until just before the First World War, there was no organized public educational system in the country. Education was limited to a few small *Katatib* (a place where children received teachings) established by their owners for profit, and students learned reading, writing and mathematics in a very constrained manner. In 1912, the first real school was established, and was called the al-Mubarakiyya school. It lasted until 1937 when it was substituted by a new system based entirely on professional professors. Shaykh Yusuf al-Qingr was appointed headmaster, whereas the teaching staff consisted of educated Kuwaitis as well as teachers from other Arab countries (Al-Sanousi, 1995). Its curriculum was mainly traditional, but later on other subjects such as commercial correspondence, book-keeping and English language were added. Another school, al-Ahmadiya, was opened in 1922 with public contribution (Ansari, 1998). This is the starting of a new period in which education provides evidence of a new conceptual rebirth in Kuwait (Al-Sanousi, 1995).

Another accountable factor for the appearance and evolution of Kuwaiti literary works was the founding of al-Jamʿiyya al-khayriyya [The Charitable Organization] by a group of rich Kuwaiti men. Formed in 1913, the primary aim was to encourage scholarship and intellectualism amid Kuwaiti citizens (Tijani, 2009). Funders of this society helped to the foundation of the Kuwaiti national library – instituted in 1923 (Tijani, 2009) and established in the house of Alial-Amir. It also took out subscriptions to journals such as *al-Baligh*, *al-Ahrim*, *al-Muqattam* and *al-Qabas* from Egypt. The foremost purpose of this library was to generate a conceptual forum for investigation and analysis (Al-Sanousi, 1995).

Of great importance for the development of Kuwaiti literature were also the creations of the literary clubs. In 1924 one of the Kuwaiti pioneers' intellectuals, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Rushayd co-founded the Literary Club al-Nadi al-Adabi in Kuwait, which became a relevant club for sharing and exchanging ideas. The foundation of this club represents the real era of a literary movement in Kuwait (Michalak-Pikulska, 2000).

According to al-Naser (2001), the diwaniah[2] is another significant social institution that contributed greatly to the country's literary field. It is a place where men gathered on a specific day of the week for all-purpose conversation related to social, political, cultural and religious matters being regarded as part of the communication system. Kuwaiti citizens became more interested in literature and many of the diwaniahs specialized in different fields. For example, the al-Mulla Salih diwaniah was concerned with old literature, while modern Arabic literature was discussed in the Khalid al-Musallam diwaniah (Al-Sanousi, 1995). The diwaniah has continued to exist and flourished up to the present day playing a significant and dynamic role in Kuwaiti society. A written account about women's diwaniah in Kuwait, printed in the *al-Watan* newspaper, November 1991 underlies the many social changes that have taken place in the last several decades and how these have given rise to a much more liberated society. Women now have their own diwaniah, where they gather and socialize. For this purpose, societies for women, women's clubs, and aid organizations have been formed all over Kuwait. Under the sponsorships of these diwaniahs, which are still sometimes called *harims*, many humanitarian missions and

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[2] The *diwaniah* is the "nucleus" of the political system and hence some of the *diwaniahs* buildings are being demolished beginning April 2008 accused of inciting political instability in the country (Tijani, 2009). However, its popularity over the last decade has spread so that nearly every household has a small section set aside as a *diwaniah.* In some homes, the interpretation of the social institution has expanded so that the space where men meet to socialize may even include the porticos or gardens. The *diwaniah* usually begins in the early evening through midnight and staying till the early morning hours during weekends. For more on *diwaniah* see Al-Naser, F. (2001). The Diwaniah: A Traditional Kuwaiti Social Institution in a Political Role. D*igest of Middle East Studies* 10.2: 1-16.

social care services have been nurtured for the needy in Kuwait and other countries (Al-Naser, 2001).

Al-Sanousi (1995) underlined that the beginning of Kuwaiti literature was also promoted by the creation of the Literature Society established in 1924 by the young author Khalid b. Salman al-Adsani. Its chairman was Shaykh Abdulhih al-Iabir. The literary club, located in the Diwan of Muhammad Salih aI-Juan, became an outstanding literary forum oriented toward literary and scientific notions for debate. In other words, it defines the beginnings and the starting of a new and powerful era of literary movement in Kuwait. Tijani (2009) distinguishes the period between the mid-1840s and the late 1920s as the commencement of literary activities in the country, whereas the one that followed was identified as the formative stage of Kuwaiti fiction.

**Development of Kuwaiti Fiction: The Formative Stage: late 1920s – mid- 1950s**

The growing period of Kuwaiti fiction is considered to have started in the late 1920s and concluded in the mid-1950s. The new literary works particularly benefited from the advent and evolvement of journalism in the country. The short story was the first 'modern' genre to emerge in Kuwait and several factors contributed to its cultural growth (Tijani, 2009).

One of them was the foundation of the first journal, *al-Kuwayt* [Kuwait] in 1928 by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Rushayd. Conceivably because of the lack of skills or presses in Kuwait, the magazine was printed in Egypt. During its short publishing time (1928-1931) *Al-Kuwayt* issued, among other things, literary works which ranged from poetry, prose fiction and non-fiction to articles on literary history and criticism. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Rushayd rejected the use of the rhyming prose and substituted it with a narrative style without any embellishments that could

hinder the reader's understanding of the writing. For the first time, new concepts and ideas started to spread around and reached larger areas through the help of local presses. *Al-Kuwayt* published the short story called "Munira" in 1929 by Khalid al-Faraj. This literary piece is looked upon as the first short story in the history of Kuwaiti literature as well as in the Arabian Gulf area literature (Michalak-Pikulska, 2000). As stated by Al-Sanousi (1995), al-Faraj accentuates some of the most central topics distressing Kuwaiti society at the time. The protagonist, on her family's guidance, marries her cousin. She is, however, desperate because she cannot have kids. This triggers her profound crisis as a woman and as a member of Arab society. Tragedy is furthered by her husband's persistent complaints about the absence of a successor. Munira driven to hopelessness resorts to several approaches, turning to magicians and accepting their treacherous incantations. Toward the end of the story Munira is ruined emotionally and physically and in a desperate manner she commits suicide. Hence, the author wanted to point out that these kind of cheaters and healers should be stopped, and secondly, to show a distinction between Munira's thoughts and those of her husband's, representing civilization and awareness. After this short story and the demise of *al-Kuwayt Magazine*, publishing in Kuwait ceased for about eighteen years. Many Kuwaiti writers abandoned story writing in support of poetry, which represented a much more traditional form of Arabic literature (Tijani, 2009).

Fiction writing started again in 1946 with *al-Batha Magazine* [The Mission] founded by some Kuwaiti students in Egypt. Gradually the magazine was concerned with Kuwaiti affairs and conflicts that society was suffering at that time. One of the stories published is called "Tafaninal-qadr" [Variations of Destiny] whose writer is not known, which was followed by "Bayn al-ma'wa-al-sam"a [Between Water and Sky] by Khalid Khalaf. This reappearance represented a new beginning for the Kuwaiti short story. The story describes a significant issue related to the

Kuwaiti society at the time, which is the danger faced by people who risked their life for pearl-diving as their only means of economic survival (Al-Sanousi, 1995). Along with this theme, Khalaf portrays two souls with two different mentalities present in Kuwait at that time. One man embraces the old traditions of the society while the other shows interests in development and even making Kuwait part of it before the discovery of the oil. This kind of stories represented a key stage in the development of the Kuwaiti short story during this period. *Al-Batha Magazine* stopped in 1954, and its publication is relevant since it included the production of Kuwaiti authors such as Fadil Khalaf, Fahd al-Duwayri and many others who are outstanding as a vital source for authors from the late 40s to the early 50s (Al-Sanousi, 1995). After the end of this journal, other magazines emerged which attracted broader audiences. The first magazine to appear was *Kazima* [Kaẓima] in 1948. It gained cultural, literal and social attention due to its national emphasis and its editor-in-chief was Ahmad al-Saqqaf. Unfortunately, this magazine concluded before even finalizing its first year, the last issue being in March 1949 (Al-Sanousi, 1995). After *Kazima*, many other literary magazines followed. One of them is *al-Bath* [The Resurrection], which appeared in 1950, but it lasted only three months. Later on, *al-Raid* [The Pioneer] was published in 1952 by Nādī al-muʿallimīn (The Teacher's Club). The goal of the magazine was to regulate all the unjust differences that were dominant in Kuwaiti society at the time. Its last issue was published in January 1954. In 1953, *al-Iman* [Faith] magazine was established by the National Club of Culture. Its main objective was to write about Arab matters. There was also *al-Irshad* [Guidance] magazine created in 1953 under the supervision of the Islamic Guidance Society (Al-Sanousi, 1995).

Another factor that contributed to the development of Kuwaiti literature was the constant relations with other Arab countries like Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Europe (Michalak-Pikulska,

2016). These relations consisted of either sending Kuwaiti students abroad to study or having teachers coming to Kuwait for instruction. As Tijani (2009) noted, the coming of foreign teachers from abroad to instruct Kuwaiti students was very supportive since it helped the Kuwaiti society not only toward an enhancement and improvement of the education sector, but it also implied a progress of Kuwaiti journalism as well as of literary activities.

In addition to journalism, education played a significant role in the emergence and advance of Kuwaiti fiction at the beginning of the twentieth century. Kuwaiti students were provided with high education scholarships to neighboring countries like Iraq, Baghdad in 1938, Lebanon and Egypt, speedily increasing to several other countries around the world. Five students from both Al-Mubarakiya and Al-Ahmadiah schools were sent to become teachers and they returned home in 1942. Afterwards, in 1950, some fifty students were sent to Cairo for university education. In addition to exposing young men and women to other cultures and fostering their independence and understanding of the world beyond Kuwait, the main purpose of Kuwait's education program was to transform the state of Kuwait into a progressive generation of Kuwaiti intellectuals (Al Sharekh, 2017).

As indicated by Tijani (2009), in this formative era, the general feature of the writers was to experiment with the writing of the short story in its contemporary Western way. Some cases of story writing by Kuwaitis appeared in the form of writing either original stories, translated stories or adapted from foreign languages and cultures into Arabic. These stories were dispersed in different magazines until 1982. An example of a compilation of fictional and non-fictional narratives written by Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis Arabs up to 1955 is entitled *Qiṣaṣ yatīma fī al-majallāt al-Kuwaytiyya 1929–1955* [Orphaned Stories in Kuwaiti Magazines: 1929–1955], written by the Kuwaiti historian and writer Khālid S. al-Zayd. He collected many of the stories

from old journals for this anthology. A notable writer that contributed to Kuwaiti literature was Fāḍil Khalaf (1927-1959) who translated several Western stories and included them in his first story collection entitled *Ahlām al-shabāb* [Dreams of Youth]. Fāḍil Khalaf was a pioneer of Kuwaiti short story, interested in analyzing the circumstances and the problems that families faced. As indicated by Al-Sanousi (1995), Khalaf was a master at analytical portrayal of events and characters, like in "Hanan al-Umm" [Mother Sympathy] where he closely looked at the case of the Kuwaiti woman and at the discord between a wife and her mother-in-law. Khalaf was also attracted to the financial differences among Kuwaiti families and criticizing simple and unsophisticated beliefs. Another prominent figure within the Kuwaiti fictional scene is Farḥān Rāshid al-Farḥān (1928 -1975) who impressed his readers about women's issues but in a different way than Fādil Khalaf. According to al-Sanousi (1995), al-Farḥān was concerned about the problem of romantic love, a subject disregarded by most of the Kuwaiti writers at that time. He wanted to introduce the love of a man for a woman or vice versa, especially considering the issue of the impact of tradition and how it can deprive a woman of her rights. His stories are challenging and thought-provoking to his conservative society and its people's beliefs. Short stories that exhibit criticism of society's restrictions and persistence on reforming them can be found in Fahd al-Duwayrī's stories collection as well. Fahd al-Duwayrī (b. 1921) presents the two different mentalities between the young and modern generation and the older one represented by grandfathers and fathers who persuade them into keeping their old traditions and resisting progress. Kuwaiti stories of this period are marked for their realism (Al-Sanousi,1995). Writers were concerned with extracting the symbols from daily life and projecting them in their stories. They reflect essential aspects of Kuwaiti life and the economic and social conditions an individual or family faced. Another recurrent theme included love and matrimonial difficulties,

women's conflicts with old traditions, the sorrow of Kuwaiti women, women's rejection of education and the fight between the conservative and the blossoming new system of life and civilization (as a cause of the oil exploration). As Tijani (2009) stated, the stories of the formative stage share some similarities like the form, content, style and topics. Some of them are educational, and approach religious and social ethics issues.

Journalism in general has always played a great role in highlighting the word and has always been the best way to distribute knowledge and literature. Even though these magazines were published temporarily, they influenced many of the writers to take on a literary path. The press included works from authors such as Ahmad al-ʿAdwāni who wished to enhance the short story, ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Husayn, Yūsuf al-Shāyjī, ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Mahmūd, Muhammad Musaid al-Salih as well as many others (Al-Sanousi, 1995). The story writers in these first stages publicized their views on the state of Kuwaiti society. The press must be acknowledged as one of the most important channels that printed those works and pushed the Kuwaiti story onward. It offered literature the possibility to become more popular and at the same time authors felt strengthened in their efforts to tell the truth as they perceived it. Consequently, Kuwait's intellectual writers were recognised, and Kuwaiti literature blossomed with more extensive stories, in the form of novellas or long short stories, in the period that followed.

**The Mature Stage: late 1950s to 1985s**

Kuwaiti fiction began to develop and reach its maturity stage in the second half of the twentieth century with the production of daily newspapers and magazines, and the creation of literary societies and governmental organizations (Tijani, 2009). In 1958, more magazines were founded, one of them was *al-Mujtamaʿ* [The Community]. Its aim was to ease the delivery of social, economic and cultural studies and research in Kuwait. The other magazine was *al-ʿArabī* [Pan-Arab], published in the same year by the Ministry of Information, and it is still published nowadays. Its main topics were concerned with the social, cultural, sciencific, historical and literary subjects, as well as health aspects (Al-Sanousi, 1995). According to Tijani (2009), Kuwaiti print media developed extremely quickly and became stronger in the 1960s and 1970s through the founding of daily newspapers: *al-Raʾy al-ʿāmm* [The Public Opinion] (1961), *al-Waṭan* [The Nation] (1961), *al-Siyāsa* [Politics] (1965), *al-Qabas* [Firebrand] (1972) and *al-Anbāʾ* [The News] (1976). Apart from these newspapers, Michalak-Pikulska (2000) adds a few more like *al-Hadat* (1961), *Usrati* (1965), *al-Yaqza* (1967), *al-Nahda* (1967) and *al-Ra'id* (1970). The main goal of each magazine was not only political but also cultural, and all contributed to increase the number of the readers and the possibility of fictional writing in the country.

According to Al-Sanousi (1995), the mature stage of the Kuwaiti fiction made it possible to establish the Author's Union in 1965. Although it is supported by the government, the union periodically attempts to 'censor' the works of its affiliates. Kuwaiti women's writings are affected more by the censorship because the texts venture into the description of sexualized themes, a taboo in Kuwait society (Tijani, 2009). However, despite persistent male contempt and neglect as well as domestic constraints, women continued to write. To avoid censorship, some

Kuwaiti writers have their works published in another country, like Syria, Lebanon, and/or Egypt (Tijani, 2009). Among those responsible for the blossoming of Kuwaiti fiction one should not exclude Layla al-'Uthman, Thurayya al-Baqsami, Su'ad al-Sabah (women writers discussed later in chapter 2), Muhammad al-Ajmi and Walid al-Rugayyib. The youngest generation is represented by Muna al-Safa'i, Aliya Sa'ib and Hamad al-Hamad. The writers meet weekly at the Union's premises where they discuss their work and recall their literary pioneers (Michalak-Pikulska, 2000). The Union has published a monthly magazine called *al-Bayan* [The Clarity/Bulletin] since 1967. It prints articles appropriate to the subject areas of Kuwaiti, Arabic and world literature, and it is a leading literary magazine in the country up to the present day (Tijani, 2009).

According to Michalak-Pikulska (2000), a new stage in the cultural development of Kuwait began after the Second World War linked with the fast-growing economic situation as a result of the discovery of oil. After the independence in 1961, the government contributed economically with considerable amounts in the educational area. In 1966 Kuwait University was opened, representing the first institution of higher education in the countries of the Arabian Gulf. The Kuwaiti government played an important role in promoting the national literature and supporting the young Kuwaiti talents through scholarship and different kinds of funding encouraging arts, literature and culture. For instance, the Kuwaiti government instituted al-Majmaʿ al-waṭanī li-l-thaqāfa wa-l-funūn wa-l-ādāb [The National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters] (1974), and Muʾassasat al-Kuwayt li-l-taqaddum al-ʿilmī [Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences] (1976) (Tijani, 2009). These two organizations have continued to hold literary and cultural events and festivals annually. Some of their programs include the International Book Fair, usually organized between December and January, and Mahrajān al-

Qurayn [al-Qurayn Festival]—regularly held in February to designate the anniversary of Kuwait's National Day - 25 February (Tijani, 2009). Prizes are granted to writers and these organizations either print or sponsor the publication of literary works by Kuwaitis. For instance, Al-Rabitat publishes novels, short stories and poetry collections, as well as scholarly monographs (Tijani, 2009).

By 1962 the pillars of the Kuwaiti short story were strongly established. Kuwaiti story writers of the mature stage were influenced by real events that happened in society. As Tijani (2009) stated, three additional aspects that have helped the writing and publication of fiction include 1) the fortuity of oil discovery that changed not only Kuwait as a country but also its people's perspectives; 2) the contact with the foreign literature, especially English and Russian, which was more noticeable through the education and translation of other works into Arabic; 3) the interest in political, philosophical debates and the increasing nationwide awareness. The mature existence of the Kuwaiti story-writing was being reflected by authors such as Sulaymān al-Shatti (1942 -) in 1962, with "Al-Daffaf" [The Rudder] and Sulaymān al-Khulafī in 1964 with a story entitled "New Visions in the Society of the Great". These writers, along with Thurayya al-Baqsumi and Layla al-Uthman, used the past as a symbol to handle recent and modern matters of Kuwait society (Al-Sanousi, 1995). Thus, the simplicity and purity of the past remained engraved in their hearts and inspired them to write symbolically. According to Al-Sanousi (1995), Sulaymān al-Shatti's literature projects the political and social consciousness at a moment of growth and advance in all aspects of development in Kuwaiti history after the discovery of oil. "The Rudder" and other stories published by Sulaymān al-Shatti in his collection *al-Sawt al-Khafit* [The Low Voice] (1970) concentrate on the impossibility of the old Kuwaiti society to accept progress. His stories reflect his dreams of a Kuwaiti society during the

1960s and put forward relevant political issues undiscussed in literary works in previous periods. He embraced the idea of a society where citizens' views and perspectives are not only shared but as well considered by the leading system, rejecting the exclusive decision-making of the ruling class. Accompanying the rapid growth of the new rich districts in Kuwait, al-Shatti achieves to express a mixture of feelings among the older inhabitants. This is exemplified by the short story "Al-hājis wa al-ḥuṭām" [Phantoms and Ruins], in which the protagonist, an old bricklayer, feels pain and sadness after the buildings that he himself once built are demolished and new buildings are constructed, a fact that reflects the abundance in society's new affluence. In "Wajhān fī 'atma" [Two Faces in the Darkness] the author again transmits sad feelings for the disappearance of an old and valued profession in the Gulf countries, which is that of a trader. New components were imposed on Kuwaiti society after the discovery of oil and these factors are visible in Sulaymān al-Khulafī's stories. A relevant issue for him was that of expatriate workers coming to Kuwait hoping for a better life economically, who soon realize how their dreams fade away quickly in the society they encounter. Al-Khulayfī presents different aspects of life in his stories, and concentrates on the suffering of the poorer classes, on romances that involve the servants and the masters of the house as in "Ya'kulūna 'alāsufra sākhina" [They Eat at a Warm Table], a topic included in the range of taboo subjects in traditional Arab society. The imposition of marriage is still one of the greatest issues in Arabian Gulf countries and is projected in one of al-Khulayfī's stories, titled "Zawāj" [Marriage], in which a rich merchant marries a girl chosen by his nephew. Beside these topics, al-Khulafī sees old Kuwait as pure and simple, and this is greatly reflected in "al-Sanādīc" [The Boxes], a story that shows a deep link between past and present, and how important it is to combine the two to reach improvement. Despite the differences in content, Sulaymān al-Shatti and Sulaymān al-Khulafī were both recognized for their symbolic style and

their aim to raise awareness in contrast with the solely realistic style that dominated the stories of the past.

In terms of its form, the maturity stage also saw the rise of the novel. Kuwaiti writers' enthusiasm to narrate longer stories started already in the late 1940s and early 1950s with "Ālām ṣadīq" [A Friend's Suffering] (1948) by Farhan Rashid Al-Farhan (1928 – 1975) and "Āshiq al-ṣūra" [The Picture's Lover] (1950) by Ali Zakariyya al-Ansari (d. 2011). These two stories are considered novellas since they are longer than those written previously. Al-Ansari is considered to have introduced a new writing style in the Kuwaiti fictional field of the 1960s after having studied English literature abroad (Tijani, 2009). Another novella *Qaswat al-aqdar* [The Mockery of Fates] is said to have been published in 1960s by a Kuwaiti woman, Sabiha al-Meshari. Nonetheless, very little is known about the work in the Kuwaiti fictional terrain at that time, and it is often disregarded by most of the historians.

What is widely acknowledged as the first major Kuwaiti novel is *Mudarrisa min al-Mirqab* [A Teacher from Mirqab] by Abdullah Khalaf, written in 1959 and published as a separate book in 1962. The story is presented in the form of simple lessons given to some students by their instructor to reflect the writer's thoughts about the unfriendly conditions predominant in the pre-1960s Kuwait society. One of the thoughts that really concerned the author was the place of woman in society. He felt that she wasn't exercising any will of her own, and she didn't have enough liberty and freedom to enhance herself. To highlight this issue, he placed a heavy emphasis on a character, Najiba who becomes a representation of every woman without the free will of choice nor the permission to express her feelings. In this story, not only Najiba feels the urge to change the mentality in her society at that time, but secondary characters are also called upon to present their ambitious determination for women's freedom and

emancipation since they cannot endure more the worn-out traditions of their community. The purpose of this story was to project the social problems of Kuwaiti society. According to Al-Sanousi (1995), Abdullah Khalaf was an expert at describing the issues society suffered and at providing solutions to them. Khalaf wrote as well about the feeling of desolation describing families' suffering while the father was away on pearl-diving risky trips. He also pointed out the differences between the pre-oil and post-oil society, bringing into view the fortune granted by oil discovery and its effects on the mindset of some individuals (Al-Sanousi, 1995). Khalaf tried to change his society, and stressed the fact that it was important to fight those traditions that limited people's perspectives if they wanted to progress.

The issue of expatriation and disillusionment is masterly reflected by Walīd Al-Rujayyib's[3] short story entitled "Ta'luq nuqṭa tasquṭ… ṭaq" [The Drop Rises and Falls…Drip, Drip], in which the protagonist experiences a mental crisis after he realizes he will not accomplish his dream. Finally, the hero convinces himself to work as an unskilled worker, a job which will bring neither money nor assure him a quick return home. In other stories, the author depicts citizens who experiment unfair treatment by their employer who exploits them barely assuring them a vegetative existence. Al-Rujayyib concentrates on the general matter of underprivileged people that suffer from mistreatment and injustices of a wealthy society. He exhibits his concern in a collection of stories named *Irādat al-Mabud fi Hāl Abu Jāsim dhi al-Dakhl al-Mahdūd* [The Will of Allah in the Situation of Poor Abu Jasim], stories devoted to people of a very low income. The same topic is continued by Fahd al-Duwayrī in the short story "Rajul al-fundūq" [The Man from the Hotel], in which the main character takes the path of stealing in order to survive because of a lack of work (Michalak-Pikulska, 2016). Muhammad al-

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[3] Walīd Al-Rujayyib (b.1954) is a remarkable Kuwaiti writer; his first collection of stories was published in 1983, called *Ta`alluq Nuqta ... Tasqut Tak* [A Point Supended ... Falling Tak] and his latest collection, in 1994, entitled *al-Rīh Tahuzzuhā al-Ashjār* [The Skaking of the Trees by the Wind] (Banipal.co.uk, n.d.) [Accessed 11 January 2018].

'Ajmī[4] is another eminent Kuwaiti author writing about the same subject in the story "Tamazzuq muzdawij" [Double Laceration]. Here we meet the immigrant who feels happy to have residence in Kuwait, but soon is confronted by other issues, which make his life doomed. The character is obliged to live with other workers of different nationalities in the same room, where he feels that life is intolerable. However, he must adapt to live with them and survive.

**Kuwaiti Fiction – Late Twentieth Century and Beginning of Twenty-First Century**

The literary scene in the late twentieth century and the beginnings of the twenty-first century in the Gulf region is rich and includes all literary genres. Authors write fervently and persuasively on common issues that are regarded as vital to human life and experience, revealing their own country's character and traditions. The most recurrent themes include subjects such as love, loss and sorrow, identity, personal development, travelling and working, being diverse within a society, as well as thought-provoking issues involving inequality, discrimination, tradition and modernism, country and town, contrast between old and new customs, and the breach between generations. One of the topics that still proliferates and continues in Arabic fiction is the one related with migration stories; the ambitious and skilled westerners that come for a better wage with tax free salary and the unqualified laborers that come in anticipation of wealth and a new life only to find themselves challenged with a long list of obstructions and frustrations. The literary field considering the issue of the immigrants is minor, considering the fact that they make up the majority of the Kuwait population. Stimulating encounters between Arab people and Western communities have generated some of the most popular topics of

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[4] Muhammad al-'Ajmī (b. 1956) published his first collection of stories in 1983 and was entitled *al-Sharkh* [The Split]. His second collection of stories was published in 1988 and was called *Tadārīs al-Wajh al-Ākhar* [Landscape of the Other Face] (Banipal.co.uk, n.d.) [Accessed 11 January 2017].

identity, modernity and the other in modern Arabic fiction. Many modern Arabic novels describe Egyptian, Lebanese, and Palestinian characters who moved to the Gulf as early as the 1950s, soon after the extraction of oil became a global commodity. Workers were needed to operate hospitals, schools, and services that emerged because of the advancement in infrastructure and the rise in consumerism. Additionally, a considerable number of domestic workers were needed, and most of them were from Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and other regions.

In 2013 the young Arab and Kuwaiti writer Saʿūd al-Sanʿūsī[5] won the prestigious International Prize for Arabic Fiction (Elayyan, 2016) with the novel *Bamboo Stalk* (Sāq al-Bambū, 2013). This novel features all of the characteristics of realistic fiction, as Sanʿūsī' was very careful in giving precise dates and specifics about the protagonist's life. With outstanding wit, the author portrays two different families with different cultures. ʿĪsā talks about the story of his life being the son of a Kuwaiti father and a Filipino woman working as a housemaid at the family house, where she met her husband. He recalls, how their parents got married, but at his grandmother's prayers his father sends her with their son to Philippines, promising to bring them back to Kuwait in the future. ʿĪsā spends his early years in Philippines enduring the hard and poor life conditions with his mom, aunt and his constantly drunk grandfather. Attempting to get in touch with the father, they only found out that he passed away during the Gulf War. Nevertheless, the man's best friend helps him with the necessary papers to put him in touch with his Kuwaiti relatives. Hoping for a warm welcome into his Kuwaiti family, he only discovers rejection as being recognized as an inferior, and he is relegated to a small room in the servants' quarter and his presence is kept secret for the fear of society. When he is in Manila, the narrator is called José, and sometimes "the Arab". In Kuwait, he is called Isa, and sometimes "the

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[5] Saʿūd al-Sanʿūsī is a notable novelist and journalist, born in 1981. His first novel *Sijeen al-Maraya* [Prisoner of Mirrors] (2010) won the fourth Laila Al-Othman Award for Young Creative Talent in Fiction (Banipal.co.uk, n.d.) [Accessed 11 January 2017].

Filipino". He has the appearance of a Filipino person but has his father's voice. ʿĪsā chooses to leave the family house and become an independent person striving to know more about his father's country, searching at the same time for his lost identity. He feels himself to be what the title says: "a bamboo plant, which doesn't belong anywhere in particular … and it grows without a root, without a memory". His hope for a rootless existence can be seen as a post-modernist acknowledgement of an expatriate identity, as a new life style for millions of people, and a hope for a more open society, but it can also be a wish for an easy solution, a hope to socialize and blend in with the rest of the society. If *Bamboo Stalk* is an inquiry into personal, national and spiritual identity, it is a coming of age novel too. As such, it depicts its protagonist's journey towards a mature self-knowledge. And as surely as José/Isa achieves this, so does Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf in general, through al-Sanʿūsī's writing.

Another remarkable novel written by Saud al Sanousi is the 2015 bestselling narrative that was banned in Kuwait when it first appeared titled *Fi'ran Ommi Hissa* (Mama Hissa's Mice). This is a brilliantly written philosophical and perceptive novel envisioning a Shia Sunni civil war in Kuwait. "Saud al Sanousi was only ringing a bell through fiction", explains Ghabra (2017). In close reference to this affirmation, it is relevant to mention the June 2015 Da'ish (Islamic State, ISIS) suicide bombing at the famous and well-attended Shiite Imam Sadiq mosque in the heart of Kuwaiti City which contributed to heightening tensions and fears. In Kuwait, dozens of worshippers were killed, and more than 200 people injured. The state and His Highness Emir of Kuwait reacted with sensitivity to unite Kuwaitis at least for the short term (Ghabra, 2017). A closer look at the religious curricula reveals that it is similar to those in other Arab Gulf states with a strong Sunni emphasis, where those who practice different rituals are considered heretical. The religious curriculum is taught according to Sunni doctrine in all school

grades in Kuwait, even if it is dominated by Shiites. These practices indicate a lack of empathy and compassion towards the Shiites' understanding of religion. It is also relevant to mention that most of the Shiite youth advocate the adoption of civil society values as a way to improve the future. They are concerned about the application of strict Salafist interpretations of Islam, which clash with their understanding of religion and rights (Ghabra, 2017). Furthermore, the Shiite young people in Kuwait are more open to emigration. However, they are considered "a fifth column" of the nation (Ghabra, 2017, 29). Consequently, many of them feel a great sense of discrimination.

Through discourse and defined contextual acts a number of works explore romantic fantasy, the agony and happiness of love and the suffering of disloyalty amid a husband and wife, between parents and daughter, and the realism of agreed marriages, as in Laylā Al-'Uthmān's *The Eid Bisht*, Badriya al-Bishr*'s Love Stories from al-A'sha Street* and Jokha Alharthi's *Women of the Moon*. Only a couple of authors move into the genre of enchanted realism as Taleb Alrefai's[6] short stories. His short stories are concerned with the national struggle during the Iraq-Kuwait war, with the complex relationship between a man and a woman especially when a fight arises between them in marriage, or with the local environment. His first novel published in 1998, represented for him a great change especially because he started writing about real issues and aspects of his own life using his real name for the main character. His fourth collection of stories published in 1999, blends reality with phantasy and is about the public life in the Kuwaiti society. His second novel is written in the first person to hold on to an image of daily realities of Kuwaiti society, unveiling the cruelty of women oppression tolerated

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[6] Taleb Alrefai is a remarkable and outstanding Kuwaiti short story writer and novelist. He wrote seven short stories, five novels and a play. In 2002, Taleb Alrefai won the Kuwait State Prize for Letters for his novel, *Ra'ihat al-Bahri* [TheScent of the Sea]. He was Chair of Judges of the 2009/2010 International Prize for Arabic Fiction, and founder of the fortnightly literary salon Al-Multaqa [Cultural Circle], which recently established the Multaqa Prize for the Arabic Short Story. (Writinguniversity.org, n.d.) [Accessed March 15, 2017].

at distinct periods of their lives. According to Taleb Alrefai, the world can change making a call to them through writing and changing the painful reality that only persists through violence and injustices around the country (Michalak-Pikulska, 2016).

Short stories devoted to domestic workers are to be found in a considerable number in the output of writers of Gulf countries. Their protagonists are regular Indian or Asian domestic workers. This matter is the consequence of the massive arrival of labor force from Asian countries with the purpose of making money. The authors in their narratives projected the problems related with their presence in Arab houses, and as a result, they were acquainted with the secrets of their masters and mistresses or were even tangled in personal relations with their employers. It is worth highlighting here the works of outstanding and remarkable Kuwaiti authors, such as Ismāʿil Fahd Ismāʿil with the short story "Munā 13" [Muna 13] and Laylā Al-ʿUthmān with "Ṭufūlatī al-ukhrā" [My Second Childhood]. In "Muna 13" a poor servant girl is used by a rich master and the employer's wife starts being jealous accusing her of coming home late. As a result of her severe objection against the master's advances, he cuts off her long hair depriving her of the symbol of femininity (Michalak-Pikulska, 2016).

The dramatic events of the 2nd of August 1990 in Kuwait, the course of the war as well as its results became the basis for rich short story output. Men and women were prompted to express their emotional state and opinions about armistice and war narratives. The war narratives have known a substantial increase in number and become one of the most proliferate topics nowadays, due the negative effects that they had on the country and its people's lives. An illustrative war story is the one written by Walīd Al-Rujayyib, "Talqa fī sadr al-shamāl" [1992, A shot in the Chest of the North], which is not a novel, but a collection of short stories connected by a feature of the old Iraq-Kuwait fight, which concluded in the 1990 attack. Thurayyā al-

Baqṣamī's (b.1952) "Shumūʿ al-sarādīb" [1992, Cellar Candles] is another noteworthy narrative that describes abundant features of the war, including the women's part throughout it.

The war also produced the latest stage of the novel in Kuwait. Since every war novel favours historical accounts, most of Kuwaiti war novels follow three chronological stages of Kuwait's history: pre-war Kuwait, Kuwait during the war and post-war Kuwait. Among the novels dedicated to the 1990-1991 Iraq-Kuwait conflict is *Ismāʿīl Fahd Ismāʿīl*[7] [1996, Occurrences of the Time of Isolation], a novel comprised of seven parts that can be divided into two parts: fictional and nonfictional. The fictional feature represents the story of Sultan who sacrifices and participates in the resistance war movement. The fictional part is dispersed with the nonfictional part of the story, which includes political and military advertising of the assaulting power, as well as that of the US-led redeeming forces (Tijani, 2009). Sulayman al-Khulaify ventured into novel writing and published his first novel in 2004 entitled *ʿAziza*. The novel fictionalized the war, using the conventional linear of events with suitable discourses in the local Kuwaiti dialect. Thematically, *ʿAziza* embodies the repetitive themes of love, marriage and divorce, but more significantly it describes Kuwaiti women not just as sufferers of the war, but also as dynamic contributors in the resistance movement (Tijani, 2009). Another illustrious active writers of the war narratives include Ḥamad Al-Ḥamad, Munā Ash-Shāfaʿī, Laylā Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ and Laylā Al-ʿUthmān.

A relevant and controversial theme that appears more deliberately on the Kuwaiti literary scene in the twenty-first century is the problem of the so-called Bidūn (stateless) or people

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[7] Ismāʿīl Fahd Ismāʿīl (b. 1940) is considered the spiritual father of the Kuwaiti novel and since the appearance of his first novel, *The Sky Was Blue* in 1970, has published 27 novels, 3 collections of short stories and 2 plays. He obtained the Kuwait State Encouragement Award for the Novel in 1989 and for Literary Criticism in 2002. His support for numerous story writers and novelists and his motivation of new creative skill had an important impact on the Kuwaiti and Arab literary scene (Retrieved from: Banipal.co.uk, n.d.). [Accessed March 16, 2017].

without citizenship. The Bidūns ("the nationless") are people who ask for Kuwait ancestry, but they are not officially documented as citizens of this county, and therefore, they are deprived of the privileges and benefits they deserve (Tijani, 2009). Even though many writers contribute to the rising of the economy and culture of Kuwait, many of them are considered nationless, and cannot obtain the Kuwaiti citizenship. Ghabra (2017) writes that the Bedouin in Kuwait are mainly from northern tribes with Iraqi roots and this may explain the intensity of the reaction against them, especially after the invasion. The state, having contributed to the creation of the problem, is now exacerbating it by leaving it as is. Ghabra (2017) further explains that groups like Da'ish and al-Qaida find the circumstances under which the Bedouin live a perfect environment for enrollment, and several people from the tribes and Bedouin were implicated in the bombing of the Shiite mosque in Kuwait City. Some of the authors are Ṭālib Al-Rifāʿī, Laylā Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ, Saʿdiyya Mifraḥ, Nāṣir Aẕ-Ẕafīrī, ʿAlī Al-Masʿūdī, Jāsim Muḥammad Ash-Shamrī. Despite their lack of nationality, they feel themselves Kuwaiti having no intention of leaving their home country. This major problem has been included in the literary scene of the Arab States of the Gulf equally among authors without citizenship as those with it. Some of them include Jāsim Muḥammad Ash-Shamrī. In the short story "Al-alam…al-amal wa antenna" [Pain…Hope and You] the write condoles with the slight probabilities for the bidūns in the new order that exists in Kuwait after the Iraqi attack (Michalak-Pikulska, 2016).

The Bidūn is a common problem in several other Gulf countries. By the end of the 1980s the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia had dealt with these problems too. In Kuwait the problem continues to remain unsolved. In Kuwaiti literature, it is rarely spoken, mainly due to its controversial political nature. However, writers such as Tayyiba al-Ibrāhīm had examined the topic in *Mudhakkirāt khādim* [1995, A Servant's Diary]. Her approach is moderated, making it a

sub-topic of the novel, emphasizing more on themes like love, class and gender in post-oil Kuwait (Tijani, 2009). The Bidūn topic is extensively examined in Bothayna al-Eissa's first novel, *Irtitam lam yusmaʿlahu dawiyy* [2004, A Tumble Whose Reverberation is Unhear] and Nāṣir al-Zafirī's *Al-Sahd* [2013, The Heat]. In al-Eissa's Irtitam, we meet Dārī, the Bidūn protagonist, who disappointed with his undervalued position within the modern Kuwaiti sociopolitical system migrates to Sweden, where he is treated with the proper deference that befits him as a human being. Although he has achieved Swedish citizenship, he still has Kuwait at his heart (Tijani, 2009). Such works allow the reader to explore extraordinarily original and imaginative circumstances that blend thoughts, history, memories and true-to life sceneries, creating much food for thought.

**Conclusion**

Kuwaiti fiction has progressed and improved rapidly right from its beginnings. Several factors contributed to its growth, and right from the very start education was the main element of stimulus, preceded by the development of journalism which generated the publication of numerous narratives. Starting with 1950s, the oil-engendered economic affluence greatly encouraged the productions and consumption of literary works. Nowadays, Kuwaiti fiction is a literary art at a high level in its developed stage and there are many young Kuwaiti writers who offer great potential for the continuation of development at the level of both content and form. The next chapter discusses the emergence and growth of the female literary subculture in Kuwait.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**FEMINISM IN THE ARAB MUSLIM WORLD**

**Introduction**

This chapter addresses gender inequalities that prevail in the Middle East and women's agency subverting patriarchal authority. The chapter begins with a general summary of the Arab woman in the MENA region. Subsequently, it outlines the struggle of women for achieving equal rights and their challenge of the patriarchal social structures through constant vehement presence as well as their fight for their rights either in real contexts of life or issuing from feminist writings.

**An Overview of Muslim Arab Women in Middle East**

The status of women in Muslim communities and especially in Arab countries has long been a topic of concern and research by feminists and those working in the field of women due to her inferior position in the Arab society. However, the Middle East is not the only region in the world where there is a gap of gender inequality. In Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe, and North America women experience gender-based impediments to the full realization of their privileges. Nevertheless, in the United States, the status of women developed considerably since the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but even today they earn roughly 23

percent less than men and make up only 3 percent of the Fortune 500 chief executives (Moghadam, 2004a). It is, however, in the MENA region where women lag behind men, much severely and noticeably in areas such as social and economic autonomy, labor force involvement, political representation and health. It is worth noting that literature on women in the Middle East has grown substantially since 1960 when there was a production of only 5 books and 10 journal articles, whereas between 2000 and 2009 the publications increased by 170 books and 670 articles. Countries like Egypt and Turkey have received a lot of attention for a long time. Due to the dramatic political progress, Iran and Palestine have also received attention.

This study is centered on gender inequalities in relation to Muslim women in the Middle East and North Africa, which I describe as confined by Morocco on the west, Iran on the east, Turkey on the north, and Yemen on the south, but more specifically on women in Kuwait. The ground of gender in the Middle East arose in American academia with two pioneering edited collections published in the late 1970s: *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak* (1977) by Elizabeth W. Fernea and Basima Qattan Bezirgan and *Women in the Muslim World* (1978) by Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie.  The collections started the process of exposing the legend of the inactive, inferior, mistreated, silent and helpless Muslim woman by bringing to the surface women's voices from the Middle East and proving these women's agency when subverting the patriarchal culture long established in Arab countries. They resounded with the involvement of feminist writers such as Fatima Mernissi (1987 [1975], 1991) from Morocco and Nawal El Saadawi (2007 [1980]) from Egypt, whose corresponding literatures had a major influence and power in and out of the academy. The issue of gender in the Middle East became popular internationally when the 2003 Nobel Prize for Peace went to Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian lawyer and activist supporting the rights of women and children. For her part, Miriam Cooke (2001) has created the term 'Muslim

woman' to suggest a singular identity used to obscure distinctions by class, country, or ethnicity and imposed on women that are deprived of their independence and manifestation. "Deeply entrenched societal norms, combined with conservative interpretations of Shari'a (Islamic law), continue to relegate women to a subordinate status" (Kelly, 2010, 2). In the 1970s and 1980s, literature associated the elevated rates of illiteracy, fertility, maternal mortality and limited labor force participation detected in Muslim nations to the low rank of womanhood. This inferiority was attributed to a pervasiveness of Islamic laws and norms in Muslim societies (Offenhauer, 2005). The Arab world has been identified in part for its affection to religious and also cultural customs, for its restricted political and civil rights and for delayed or decaying progress, whether measured by financial or social signs. Pamela Paxton's and Melanie M. Hughes's 2014 study *Women, Politics and Power: A Global Perspective* argued that the slow enhancements in women's rights can be accredited to the lack of democratic practice (i.e., institutional factors). In support of this view, Helen Rizzo's, Abdel-Hamid Abdel Latif's and Katherine Meyer's study "The Relationship Between Gender Equality and Democracy: A Comparison of Arab Versus Non-Arab Muslim Societies" (2007) has also revealed that Arab cultures (vis-à-vis more democratic Muslim states) sustain fewer egalitarian opinions on gender roles. The academics determined that low levels of gender equality in the MENA region are mostly an "Arab" singularity rather than an Islam-related one. In the same vein, feminist scholar in Middle Eastern studies Valentine Moghadam (1993) argued that "the low status of women and girls is a function not of intrinsic properties of any one religion but of kin-ordered patriarchal and agrarian structures" (6).

In the Middle East as elsewhere, women encounter complicated challenges related to fertility because of the rigidities between social laws and state policies. Marcia C. Inhorn's 1995

study *Infertility and Patriarchy: The Cultural Politics of Gender and Family Life in Egypt* explained that women who are incapable of conceiving may be detested by other women as abnormal and even dangerous. In addition to these prejudices they have to confront worries of marital and financial uncertainty because women's rank is closely linked to fertility and motherhood. It was argued that due to the constant significance of values such as family honor and modesty, women's collaboration in nonagricultural or paid labor carried with it a social stigma and profitable employment was not observed as part of women's role. As noted above, women in the Arab world either suffer from the worst case of invisibility around the world or are indeed the least economically active women in comparison with their male counterparts (Graham-Brown, 2001). Their perspectives share a common belief and attach great importance to their cultural identity, and to the relevant position of women in the family in keeping this identity. Many Arabs regard family as the basic column of society, and women as the nucleus of the family. Hence, it is accorded preference to the work of women who dedicate their time to family and home affairs to assure the continuity of generations, the transmission of knowledge, values and norms from one generation to another. Women's power in society is basically articulated through traditional structures, such as in family ties, where women's impact and status intensify with the age and the number of children they bear, and through women's organizations. Women in the Middle East continue to face systematic discrimination in senior positions in politics and the private sector, and in several countries, they are totally missing from the judiciary system (Kelly, 2010).

Kuwaiti women's presence in Parliament continues to drop as they secured only 6 percent of the seats in December 2012, and female candidates struggled to preserve this slim presence in the legislative arena, and the current Kuwaiti Parliament—elected in July 2013—

does not have a single female candidate; the sole elected female MP, Safa al-Hashem, resigned in May 2014 (Shalaby, 2015). Kuwait is ranked 184th out of 193 states with 1.5 percent in terms of female representation in the parliament. It is well below Saudi Arabia which has 19.9 percent female representation with a rank of 96 (Cohn, 2016). The lack of organized political parties with clear agendas, absence of affirmative action in favour of women, lack of political expertise and financial recourses among women's organization, corruption, and political polarization have slowed the motivation of women's political emancipation (Das, 2017). The most severe obstacles have been the cultural and religious elements in terms of religious–tribal perceptions and dominant patriarchal attitudes that attribute a limited role to women in society, and women are seen as a weaker political role model (Cohn, 2016; Shalaby, 2015). Nonetheless, important improvements have been made for empowering women over the past few years, and 14 out of 17 countries have recorded some relevant improvements.

The members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have made major improvements, lessening the gap between them and the rest of the region on some matters (Kelly, 2010). In Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the first women judges were appointed in 2006 and 2008, correspondingly (Kelly, 2010). Women have also become more participative in public life, education and business across the region and as well in Saudi Arabia (Kelly, 2010). A historic moment in Kuwait was in July 2020 when Kuwaiti Attorney General approved the promotion of eight female prosecutors to the rank of judge, among some 54 chiefs prosecutors, who were nominated for judicial positions. They will become the first eight women judges in the history of Kuwait. Nonetheless, these appointments are opposed by the Salafi bloc, arguing that it is against the law and contradicts the nature of women (Salama, 2020). In a country where

women do not have the right to divorce, they argue that the judiciary is a general mandate that only men can assume (Salama, 2020).

Education has been the leading area of advance for Muslim women in the region, and it is a relevant field for their progress toward a wider equality. Since the 1990s, women in all eighteen MENA countries have made improvements in access to education, university admission, literacy, and the diversity of academic fields accessible to them. That tendency has been continuous over the past years. The female literacy rate has grown by 5.3 percent in Algeria, 6.8 percent in Iran, 3.6 percent in Morocco, and 5.8 percent in Yemen (Kelly, 2010). In several countries, women are more numerous than men at the tertiary education level, and Qatar and the UAE have the highest female-to-male university matriculation ratio worldwide. Even though women are usually advised to study in female disciplines such as teaching and health care, they have begun studying new fields, including engineering and science. For instance, in Qatar, women were registered for the first time in 2008 in areas of study like architecture and engineering. In Saudi Arabia three academic foundations began to allow women to study law in 2007 although the graduates are only permitted to act as legal consultants to other women and are forbidden from serving as judges and advocates in court (Kelly, 2010). In countries like Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt, where women have long been able to register in any course of study, educators report increasing numbers of female students in their traditionally male classes, such as maths and science. Notwithstanding these developments, many obstacles to true gender equality in education persist, while new measures projected to cap surging female enrollment threaten to undermine the progress to date. In Kuwait and Oman, women are required to achieve higher grade-point averages (GPAs) than men to enroll in certain disciplines at the university level. For example, female students in Kuwait must get a 3.3 GPA to be admitted to the

engineering department, while male students need a GPA of just 2.8. As women make up almost two-thirds of the student body at Kuwait University, the difference in admission requirements is described by university administrators as reverse discrimination, intended to raise the proportion of male students in certain fields (Kelly, 2010; Shah, Al-Kazi, Husain, 2018). Likewise, Iran has newly implemented a regulation demanding an equivalent number of male and female students in specific fields like medicine (Kelly, 2010). "The discrimination in GPA for admission to medical fields was university policy in Kuwait, but it is no longer in practice after a Kuwaiti female filed a case stating that it is unconstitutional" (Shah et al., 2018, 128) being allowed the entry of men at lower grade point averages (GPA) than women. In many countries, universities are segregated by gender. It is not clear to how much the segregation affects the quality of education, but in at least some countries, like for example Saudi Arabia, the amount and variety of classes accessible to male students are much greater than those offered to female students. In Kuwait in 2008, three years after women got the right to vote and a year before the election of first female lawmakers, Kuwaiti legislators issued a law mandating gender segregation at private universities to be implemented by 2013.

Regarding domestic abuse, very few comprehensive studies have been conducted on the nature and extent of it in the Middle East region. Nevertheless, domestic violence is believed to be wide-ranging in the region, with its presence usually enclosed and reserved within the family. In general, women do not feel comfortable and secure talking about personal family issues with anyone else outside their family. They feel that they cannot discuss family matters without destroying their family honor and their own status. When they do choose to file complaints with the police, they usually must deal with officers who are unwilling to help in what is perceived as a family matter and encourage reconciliation rather than legal act. In Saudi Arabia in particular,

guardianship laws make it complicated for abused women to find a safe shelter. For instance, Kelly (2010), cites the case of a girl who "sought police protection after being sexually molested by her father, only to be turned away and told to bring her father in to file the complaint" (9). In a study conducted in Kuwait, 344 women were asked to report about their experience of verbal and physical violence from their husbands, a significantly larger proportion of those with less educated husbands and lower family income had experience violence (Shah, et. al., 2018) within their families. Another form of domestic violence, which is considered the most extreme one, is the honor killing. It allows the man to murder his relative for suspected extramarital sexual relations or some other conduct that is regarded a slight to the family's honor. Such murders have been reported in Jordan, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and Yemen, but are not exclusive to the Middle East; they also occur in South and Central Asia, and to a minor degree to another places. Commonly, the committers of honor killings attend minimal time in prison due to legal discretion and regulations that recommend clemency for murders committed in the heat of passion (Kelly, 2010). Shah et al. (2018) mention that "some GCC countries have plans to establish shelters for abused women and the Social Affairs Ministry in Kuwait is currently reviewing plans to open such shelters" (134).

Related to political rights, throughout Middle East, both female and male citizens lack the power to change their government democratically and enjoy limited rights to pacifically assembly and freedom of speech. According to Kelly (2010), in all 18 countries, gender-based barriers to women's involvement in public life persist deeply entrenched in the society. Politics is a man's world, and female leaders must contend with cultural attitudes that resist the idea of being politically represented by a woman. Kelly (2010) mentions that in Yemen, for instance, a group of Salafist clerics published a handbook that go against gender-based quotas in political

life. It is claimed that "opening the door for women to leave their houses and mix with men will lead to sexual chaos" (Kelly, 2010, 11). In Egypt, one of the more progressive countries in terms of women's rights, a former grand mufti released a fatwa (religious opinion) in 2005 that banned women from estimating the profession of president. In UAE, eight women were assigned and one secured election to the 40-member Federal National Council (FNC), a suggested figure to the hereditary rulers of the seven emirates. Previously, no women had served on the FNC, which until 2006 was fully appointed by the seven rulers. In other countries, such as Oman and Bahrain, the government has selected a cumulative number of women to unelected positions, comprising cabinet and diplomatic posts. Saudi Arabia remains the only country in which women are not allowed to vote or run for designated office (Kelly, 2010).

Women are still refused equality before the law, and apart from Saudi Arabia, all countries in the MENA region have articles in their constitutions that assure for the equality of all citizens. Definite requirements calling for parity between the sexes have been implemented in Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Libya, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Syria, and Tunisia. While the constitutions of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Morocco, the UAE, and Yemen do not include gender-based nondiscrimination clauses, they do declare that "all citizens are equal under the law" (Kelly, 2010, 12). Regardless of constitutional guarantees, women throughout the region encounter legal forms of discrimination that are methodical and permeate every aspect of life. For example, in most of the 18 countries, women do not enjoy the same citizenship and nationality rights as men, which can carry grave consequences for the choice of a marriage partner. Under these laws, a man can marry a foreign woman with the understanding that his spouse can become a citizen and receive the related welfares. By contrast, a woman who marries a foreigner cannot pass her citizenship to her spouse or their children. Children from such marriages must obtain special

residency certificates, renewed yearly, to join public school, qualify for university scholarships, or find employment. In contrast, some other countries have made it possible for foreign husbands or children of female citizens to obtain citizenship. In Tunisia, Algeria and Iraq, a woman can now pass her citizenship to her husband and children, awaiting approval from the respective ministries, whereas male citizens need no such approval. In Egypt, the parliament revised the nationality law in 2004 and consented the children of Egyptian mothers and foreign fathers to attain Egyptian citizenship, but the law still bans such children from joining the army, the police, and some governmental positions. Similarly, the Moroccan nationality law, which was established in April 2008, allows women married to noncitizens to pass on their citizenship to their children on the condition that the marriage takes place in agreement with the Moroccan personal status law (Kelly, 2010). These reforms, although not entirely complete and with full rights, are regarded as important steps forward. However, where gender inequality is mostly observed is within the personal status codes, which relegate women to a subordinate level within marriage and the family, electing the husband as the head of the household. Under the family law of most Middle Eastern countries, a husband is allowed to divorce his wife at any time without a stated motive, but a wife looking for divorce must either meet very concrete and severe conditions or return her dowry through a practice known as *khula*. The law requiring women of having a guardian in order to travel was withdrawn in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. These laws, properly implemented, have the full potential of improving the women's privileges in Arab societies.

**Women's Activism in Middle East**

Women's activism started to take shape in the final third of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century. Pioneering women were actively involved in different forms of feminist activism competing at distinct levels, for powerful posts and leadership in the Middle East (Fernea, 2000). Women represent at least half of the population of the Middle East region. They refuse to be regarded as passive recipients of a status quo and ideology that downgrades them to a subordinate level. They are actively contributing and struggling at every level for jobs, promotions, better standards of living and political clout. Women are struggling to reverse their domination by their traditional patriarchal society and this is being contested by different social practices. The division between the public and the private (the public space dominated by men, and the private sphere by women), for example, is slowly being shattered. Women have started to work outside the home, a fact that has caused not only achievements but problems as well. This is probably the biggest alteration in the Middle East, a change that has extensive and positive implications for politics as well for the labor market and for family cohesiveness. Incomplete figures from Tunisia, Morocco, and the Gulf, suggest that nearly a third of Middle East women from these nations work full-time outside the home, and that most of the rest work part-time in or out of their family unit (Fernea, 2000). Considering the colonial history of most states in the region, women's movements developed in a close yet complex relationship with nationalist struggles. Some women, mostly from the upper-class backgrounds (Baron 1994; Mariscotti 2008), made their voices heard and found a form of collective solidarity, especially in Egypt (Al-Ali 2000; Badran 1995, 2009; Baron 1994). Usually, however, nationalism relegated women's issues to the back burner on the grounds that nothing should break the harmony essential to the anticolonial fight, as for example in Algeria (Lazreg, 2000).

Nevertheless, women have struggled for the development of programs and discourses in certain areas, such as social work or charity, under the idea of anticolonial fight. In the field of work and finance, women's great ability for ingenious resourcefulness has allowed them to resist the adversities of low wages, poor predictions for employment and the effects of neoliberal organization (Charrad, 2011). Since the 1980s in the vast majorities of territories, in part due to the growth of mass education succeeding the end of colonialism, women's associations, organizations, and activities have advanced, covering a variety of discourses and political directions (Rizzo, 2005; Meyer, Rizzo & Ali, 2005). Yet, most groups distinguish themselves from Western feminism, which has been observed in the region as a legacy of colonialism and Western hegemony, having little significance to the Middle East (Badran 2009; Treacher & Shukrallah 2001, 13). Their discourses range from open secularism, to human rights advocacy, to democracy, to a language that blends Islam and modernity, and to Islamism (Charrad, 2011).

The Muslim woman is usually perceived by the Westerners as being passive and silenced, especially in politics. On the other hand, through the 1990s, Hanan al-Ashrawi demonstrated to be a sophisticated and articulated spokesperson for the Palestinian in the international arena. Regarding this aspect, politicians from Islamist groups in Algeria place women in a level that forbids them to work outside home, let alone participate in politics (Charrad, 2011). These clashing images mirror wider conflicts and disputes in the Middle East over the nature of society and the position of women. These disputes arise in part from the growing impact of a century of powerful economic change and social dislocation that has engendered crises that have become mainly severe over the last decade. Women have been dynamic political players throughout this progression. They have not always gained their battle, but without any doubt they have put a lot of effort and have organized themselves for different social, cultural and political causes.

As early as 1911, Egyptian writer Malek Hifni Nasif stood up "in an all-male nationalist congress and demanded that women have the right to be educated to whatever level" (Graham-Brown, 2001, 23) they wished for. Malek Hifni Nasif, under the pen-name Bahithat al-Badiya, a name meaning "Seeker in the Desert", published a collection of articles and speeches in a book titled *Al-Nisaiyat* – 'a term connoting feminism' because "nisaiyat", conventionally signifies something by or about women. The content of *Al-Nisaiyat* revealed its feminism: it advocated improvement of women's lives, including new education and work opportunities, and the recuperation of lost freedoms understood to be granted by Islam (Badran & Cooke, 2004). Ninety years later women enjoy a wider variety of rights, including voting rights, much greater opportunities to education and work, and other positive changes have been created in laws boosting family and individual status.

However, there has been no simple, linear improvement. Economic changes have altered expectations and patterns of family life, but not always to women's benefit. The extent and effect of financial, social and legal changes differ significantly according to social class, geographical location and ethnic or national group. Nowadays, there is still a relentless debate on who should rule women's lives in the family and in the nation (Joseph and Slyomovics, 2011). According to Moghadam (1993), social and economic transformation from the mid-nineteenth century onward usually required that women should play a more active role in Middle Eastern societies. Nevertheless, male feminists were also emphasizing and struggling for women's status. Among the earlier generation of male women's rights advocates are Egypt's Qassem Amin (author of the 1901 study *The New Woman*), Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and also the Egyptian Murqus Fahmi (*Woman in the East*, 1984); Iran's Malkum Khan and Iraq's Jamal Sudki Azza Khawy (who in 1911 advocated banning the veil); Turkey's Ziya Gokalp and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk;

Afghanistan's Mahmud Tarzi (1866-1935); and Tunisia's Taher Haddad (*Our Woman, Islamic Law, and Society*, 1930). These men argued that Arab society was backward because women were backward, and women were backward because of the lack of education and of social constraints, such as veiling and seclusion practiced in the middle and upper classes. These pro-feminist men demanded that women be liberated from bondage to constraining social practices so that their countries might advance. Badran & Cooke (2004) argue that it is important to distinguish between the feminism of women and the feminism of men. Margot Badran has noted fundamental differences between early female and male generated feminist discourses in Egypt. Men's pro-feminist stands arouse out of contact with European society in which women were generally visible, whereas women's feminism was initially an upper-class phenomenon, and it grew out of expanded learning and observation of their own lives during times of great change. "Muslim women argued that Islam guaranteed women rights of which they had been deprived because of 'customs and traditions' imposed in the name of religion" (Badran & Cooke 2004, xxvii). Through the correct understanding and practice of Islam women could regain basic rights, and their families and societies would also benefit (Badran & Cooke, 2004). Moghadam (1993) explains that although male reformers were instrumental in the process of woman's emancipation, women activists have been the main agents themselves of legal and political change.

In the early, modern-period, well-known women activists included Iran's Qurratul Ayn, the famous Baha'I leader who fought in battles and caused a scandal in the 1840s by going unveiled; Egypt's Huda Sharawi, "who formed the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923 and dramatically threw her veil into the sea", and Turkey's Halide Edip (1883-1964), a nationalist who had served in Mustafa Kemal's forces. Furthermore, "the earliest organized women's

movements emerged from Turkey, Iran, and Egypt in the first decade of the twentieth century"
(Graham-Brown, 2001, 24). Their demands consisted in reforms for personal status law and
family law governing issues such as marriage, separation, child custody, and inheritance, and
more work opportunities and more rights and access to education (Graham-Brown, 2001). As
stated by Graham-Brown (2001) another important aspect of women's movement was "to end
the strict segregation and seclusion of women practiced by the upper and middle classes. Women
from poor families often had to work both inside and outside the home, and complete seclusion
was impossible for families sharing small and cramped living space" (24). Most women involved
in the early reform movements arose from well-to-do urban families, were brought up in
seclusion or semi-seclusion, and were educated at home. They present an ironic counterpoint to
the usual Western label of such ''harem'' women as inactive, ignorant, and subject to male
whims. The progress of women's movements was linked to wider actions for political change
and national independence. In Iran and Turkey, women's organizations advanced quickly after
the downfall of repressive governments in 1906 and 1908 respectively. In the period of
comparative openness that followed, women participated in political protests and wrote in the
press. Issues surrounding women's status, mainly education, were vehemently discussed, and
women contributed to these arguments (Graham-Brown, 2001). "After World War I,
authoritarian nationalist governments emerged in both Iran and Turkey and began to coopt
previously independent women's movement, and in both countries, women were used as
symbols of national modernity and secularization" (Graham-Brown, 2001, 24-25). While this
enhanced their status in specific aspects, the state did not allow autonomous action and therefore
relegated women's own initiatives (Graham-Brown, 2001). In Turkey, Kemal Ataturk's
government started a reform and secularization of the personal status law and disagreed on

veiling and seclusion of women. In Iran, Reza Shah's administration employed much more limited modifications of women's status: compulsory elimination of veiling in the mid-1930s and developments in access to education. In both countries, the women's movement was summarized to symbolic authorized organizations (Graham-Brown, 2001). In contrast, Egypt was under British colonial rule from the 1880s forward, and there an independent women's movement was established. Before World War I, women's assemblies had created for a variety of resolutions, from education and intellectual discussion to benevolent labor. "By the 1920s, leading women activists such as Huda Shaarawi[8] and Nabawiyya Musa[9] had made contact with the international feminist movement" (Graham-Brown, 2001, 25). Women formed their activist identifications during the Egyptian nationalist rebellion against the British between 1919 and 1922. Women from different classes joined street demonstrations. The Egyptian Feminist Union, established in 1924, emerged from the realization that very few male politicians were campaigning for women's demands. Over the next twenty years, the Union achieved limited practical successes but regarded as a great step forward and also contradicted the image of women as passive and ignorant. As a direct result of the women's implications in the movements and manifestations, women's legal status improved significantly (Graham-Brown, 2001).

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[8] Huda Shaarawi (1879–1947) was an Egyptian feminist who influenced not only women in Egypt but throughout the Arab world. She was a pioneer in feminism and brought to light the restrictive world of upper-class women in her book The Harem Years, published in 1987. In 1923, Huda Shaarawi founded the Egyptian Feminist Union, which is still active as a non-profit today. They focused on various issues, including women's suffrage and education. Huda was also passionately against restrictions on women's dress and freedom of movement, which was a central part of harem life (Engel, 2018). http://www.amazingwomeninhistory.com/huda-shaarawi-egyptian-feminist/ [Accessed 21 June 2018].

[9] Born on December 17, 1886, Nabawiya Musa was the first Egyptian girl to have a high-school education in 1907 and for 21 years later she was the only Egyptian girl to have this degree. For nearly forty years (1904-1946), women's education was her main cause. Thanks to her, women were able to go through all the posts of the education process. Her name is imprinted on the history of education in Egypt. For many reasons she was said to be the pioneer of women's education in the country. She wrote a very important book called *Fruits of Life in Girl's Education* which, in 1908, was adopted as a curriculum by the then Ministry of Education (Arabwomenwriters.com, 2018). http://www.arabwomenwriters.com/index.php/2014-05-03-16-01-55/n/nabaweya-musa [Accessed 21 June 2018].

**Feminist Writings in the Middle East**

Another way that women in the MENA region contributed to civil society is through literary efforts, including the publication of books, journals and films. However, it is not easy to be a woman writer in Arab societies. As the Egyptian novelist Salwa Bakr (1998) explains, that is a "heavy tax on many levels, especially in a society in which most individuals are illiterate, a society which is conservative by nature, whose values are static, and which does not respect women in the first place" (Bakr, 1998, 39). Despite these issues, Bakr together with other Arab women writers have chosen to write as a means of resistance and self-preservation and to protect themselves "from either madness or suicide" (39) since the world created in their stories describes the total freedom from many points of view, a freedom that cannot be totally enjoyed in real life. The freedom which derives from writing explains the popularity of fiction and poetry among Arab women writers. Novels, short stories, and poems can be influential vehicles for feminist thought, particularly when invisibility and non-accountability are pursued (Abudi, 2011).

A collection of autobiographical compositions by contemporary Arab women writers, emblematically named *In the House of Silence Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers*, presents several voices and testimonies that try to write away the fear, the prison, and the silence. The Iraqi novelist Alia Mamdouh stated of her creative impulse: "I fought in a metaphorical sense to defend my freedom and independence, and I used an intangible weapon writing - in order to hold in my hand something different, something tender-my own book" (Mamdouh, 1998, 66). Nawal El Saadawi[10], one of the most outspoken Arab feminists,

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[10] Nawal El-Saadawi was imprisoned in 1981 along with other Egyptian intellectual under Anwar Sadat's administration. She was released after Sadat's death and shortly after she established the Arab Women's Solidarity Association, an international organization devoted to "lifting the veil from the mind" of Arab women. Her books,

exemplified this attitude in her public as well as private life. Refusing to be silent, she declares: "My pen was more important to me than my husband since by way of the pen I was able to express myself and realize my humanity" (Faqir & Eber, 1999, 117). Along with the scholarly texts by Fedwa Malti-Douglas (1995), her writings represent a discourse of rebellion directed against patriarchy and all other forms of domination.

For Arab women writers transforming the silence into words involves a new attitude to language and speech by women writers who need to get their ideas understood. In *Love Song for Words* Nazik al-Mala'ika illustrates the dual potential of words to cause fear and suffering as well as to cause joy and hope. Only through a selection of brave use of words people can weave their dreams and find a purpose and meaning in life (Abudi, 2011). Al-Mala'ika highlights the creative and liberating power of words, which can inspire people to take actions that change their destinies and transform their social realities (Abudi, 2011). Although Arab women writers represent a small minority, their voices resound loud and clear. "The words are being spoken now, are being written down; the taboos are being broken", declares Adrienne Rich (1996, 24-25) of women under patriarchy. No longer are old habits and ideals believed as self-evident truths. The search for authentic selfhood drives Arab heroines to discover different careers and lifestyles. As Beauvoir argued that women's situation is open to change and as an existential situation, women are accountable for changing it. Liberation must be women's work. It is not an issue of appealing to men to provide women their freedom, but a matter of women finding out their solidarity and discovering the pleasures of freedom, [...] men will eventually recognize women as free subjects (Bergoffen, 2018). In Samar Attar's *Lina: A Portrait of a Damascene Girl*, the youngest daughter rejects a life of passive domesticity and pursues other avenues of

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articles and lectures have been crucial in shaping ideas about women's oppression in Egypt, creating a feminist address that delve for redefining patriarchal structures of history, culture and identity.

self-fulfillment than marriage and motherhood. The heroine of *The Open Door*[11] by the Egyptian Latifa al-Zayyat, faces obstacles in her struggle for authentic selfhood, notably a conflicted relationship with family constraints and patriarchal oppression. Similarly, Nawal El Saadawi's autobiographical novel *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* projects the same objective. The text describes a young Egyptian daughter that rebels against family and society to study medicine. She then becomes a successful physician, demonstrating everyone that a woman's place is not necessarily at home (Abudi, 2011). According to Marnia Lazreg (2000), "at first glance, a shift seems to have occurred, from portraying Other women as victims to portraying them as individuals endowed with agency" (38).

Arab women writers have decided to remove the veil of silence and they have ventured into a forbidden field which is the private life of Arab families. In doing so, several women from the Arab world have written about their personal lives documented in autobiographical works (Abudi, 2011). To describe the subgenre of autobiographical writing, Rita Felski (1989) has coined the term "feminist confessional literature" which presents "the most personal and intimate details of the author's life" in order to create a bond between "female author and female reader" (88). For an Arab woman, writing an autobiography supposes a feeling of unease since they have to disclose aspects of their "private" lives to the "public", which is not a very common tradition in Middle East. A Muslim's (male or female) life is considered an *awra* (an intimate part of the body), and *sitr* (concealing) is imperative. Arab women do not usually speak in public, let alone speak about their private lives (Golley and Cooke, 2007), but this "confessional writing is an indispensable aspect of a process of critical self-understanding which constitutes part of

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[11] Despite the greater diversity in values and outlooks that characterize contemporary Egyptian society, as well as the many transformations that have taken place in women's lives, *The Open Door* remains a popular feminist text. Indeed, it has been called the "gender-and-politics classic" of modern Arabic literature. al-Zayyat acknowledged that *The Open Door* contains a lot of autobiographical material (Abudi, 2011).

feminism's emancipatory project or […] a self-discovery [that] engenders an ever more frantic pursuit for a kernel of authentic self" (Felski, 1989, 88). The Moroccan writer Leila Abouzeid decided to take up the pen and start projecting her own perspective about her country's reality through an autobiographical literary work. In Abouzeid's texts, as in so many postcolonial Arab women's autobiographical works, the private lives of women are exposed to be closely associated both to the lives of other women around them and to the public events that shape national politics. Describing herself as a modern Moroccan woman, she allows her voice to join the voices of other postcolonial Muslim women whom Miriam Cooke (2001) calls 'Muslim feminists' in *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism Through Literature*. Like so many other Muslim women, autobiographical writers such as Leila Ahmed, Nawal el-Saadawi, Fatima Mernissi, and Assia Djebar, Leila Abouzeid celebrates the value of female oral narratives as a shaping force in her life. To that end she incorporates the voices of her mother and grandmother (Abudi, 2011). Fatima Fernissi's *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1995) recounts the author's early experiences in the family harem in 1940s Morocco, a time of intense political and social transformation. She writes on issues related to women and Islam and while depicting the path to her own modern, academically inflected feminism, Mernissi also presents the feminist ambitions of many of the older women of the harem.

In contrast to this view, Inge C. Boer (1995) writes that Western feminism had the implicit idea that there was no feminism in the third world, and that there was a tabula rasa as far as feminist activism was concerned. Along these lines, Mernissi highlights the ironic connection between male fundamentalist Muslim and Western feminists who erroneously believe that women wither love or are unaware of their deprivations under such a system. In contrast, *Dreams of Trespass* projects the influential feminist outlook even among allegedly traditional,

older, illiterate women of the harem. The author introduces a variety of voices to verbalize the words, thoughts and wishes of many of the older women. In this way Mernissi breaks the silence of the harem by giving a louder voice to its various women, presenting them not only as victims but as complex human beings. She thus claims a public position and record for these earlier silenced individuals and illustrates different methods of feminist activity at work in non-Western settings. There is a notable similarity in examples of Muslim's women's autobiographies because they usually involve the rhetorical illustration of other women as a way of exposing their own stories. The author frequently manages to self-define in sympathetic relation to others, as is true, for example, of Mernissi, Bouthaina Shaaban, and Assia Djebar. Thus, the demands of truly reconstructing the voice of the Other are vehement, whether she is illiterate grandmother, aunt or former slave. Many of the writers dynamically interrogate and examine the challenges and association of precisely this project. For example, in her novels, Assia Djebar delves the hybrid postcolonial situation with a different focus on the linguistic identity of individuals and the distance created between them as a result of linguistic distinction. It is noteworthy to emphasize the fact that Arab women's aim of writing autobiographies should not only be seen as a way of exploring their personal lives, but as well as an implication in the political and social movement in order to create empathy in the reader and to protest. Arab women write "because they have no other weapon, no other power. They write to remember and to forget. Writing can be a way of 'writing away the prison'" (Hamida Na'na in Faqir 1998, 91) – which can be interpreted as both metaphorical and literal. Writing from a feminist perspective, according to Assia Djebar, constitutes "a voice in hell of a woman called Paradise – a night murmur, a lament across the hurdles of twilight that finds birth in a suddenly lit private interior of heaven" (Abudi, 2011, 265). *The Story of Zahra* (1980), written by the Lebanese writer Hanan al-Shaykh describes the

internal dynamics of an Arab Muslim family in Beirut before and during the civil war. The author breaks the silence by illustrating different aspects surrounding family matters and other sensitive issues such as female sexuality and war (Abudi, 2011). Margot Badran (2009) highlights the fact that many of the early female autobiographers were feminists or otherwise entertainers whose lives were already public, and "in shaping the narratives of their life-stories they, like the feminists, assumed agency" (97). She sees much of women's early practice of autobiography, as exemplified by pioneering autobiographers such as Huda Shaarawi and Nabawiyya Musa, as a feminist act of assertion, of one's individual identity as opposed to and distinct from the social identity within the group – an act of defiance – both personal and political as it is highlighted by Golley and Cooke (2007).

Another topic that has remained shrouded in mystery and silence is the mother-daughter bond within the Arab family circle. "The cathexis between mother and daughter--essential, distorted, misused--is the great unwritten story" (225), wrote the poet and feminist Adrienne Rich in her seminal book, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986). In the quarter century since the publication of this book, numerous studies on this topic appeared and the theme has emerged as a salient issue in feminist inquiry in the Western world. In the Arab world, however, "those who violate the sacrosanct of the family run the risk of being accused of disloyalty and betrayal" (Abudi, 2011, 3). Yet, Arab women writers have tried to illuminate the traditional and evolving nature of mother-daughter relationships within the Arab families which is frequently conflicted and stressed, whereas the mother-son connection is usually close and solid. The conflict between mother and daughter is seen as inevitable, but essential to the full development of the daughter into an adult since independence comprises the denial of parental identifications and authority. O'Reilly and Abbey (2000) and Joseph (1999)

argued that some feminists have defied the statement that separation from the mother, both literally and developmentally, is the mark of mature individuation. Psychoanalytic theory adopts the powerful influence of unconscious forces that may drive mother and daughter apart (Abudi, 2011). The daughter's development coincides with the mother's aging course, which generates feelings of anxiety and jealousy in the mother. Eventually, the mother will confine her daughter's freedom, albeit imposed by the strict moral code, which is experienced as repressive and controlling by the daughter (Abudi, 2011). In *The Second Sex* (1949) Simone de Beauvoir emphasizes the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship. De Beauvoir stated that the daughter is for the mother at once her double and another person, the mother is at once overweening affectionate and hostile toward her daughter; she saddles her child with her own destiny: a way of proudly laying claim to her own femininity and also a way of revenging herself for it. On the one hand, the mother cannot bear to have her daughter become her double, a substitute for herself. On the other hand, she cannot bear to have her double become another. In De Beauvoir's perspective, the conflicts from which women suffer owing to their lesser status in the patriarchal system take an intensified form in the connection between mothers and daughters. In many texts the daughters seek to rebel against her mother, whereas the mother condemns her daughter to obey age-old customs and traditions, and insists on following conventional gender roles and models of behavior. Abudi (2011) mentions that such struggles between mothers and daughters are reflected in fiction of, for example, Nawal El Saadawi and Emily Nasrallah. They are dramatized in novels as early as Layla Ba'labakki's *Ana ahya* (I Am Alive, 1958) and as recent as Miral al-Tahawy's (*Blue Aubergine*, 1998). In these literary works, the role model that the mother offers for her daughter is one of helplessness, compliance, servitude, dependence, silence and ignorance. Not surprisingly, the daughter discards everything the mother stands for.

In a notable poem entitled "A Pearl", Fawziya Abu Khalid unites the mother line across several generations. In joining the past with the future, she celebrates the continuum of women. In this poem, the mother reassures her daughter of the ultimate liberation of Arab women, who will rise to power and influence (Abudi, 2011). A recent anthology of short stories by Arab women writers illustrates this abrupt and painful transition of girls from childhood to adulthood, as De Beauvoir (1949) remarks that each stage is experienced as traumatic and demarcates her more and more sharply from the opposite sex. As the girl's body matures, society reacts in an increasingly hostile and threatening manner. De Beauvoir talks about the process of becoming flesh, which is the process whereby one comes to experience oneself as a sexual, bodily being exposed to another's gaze. In the story "That Summer Holiday" by the Palestinian Samiya At'ut, a ten-year-old schoolgirl is forbidden by her mother to wear shorts again or to play in the street because her breasts have started to develop (Abudi, 2011). In "The Parting Gift" by the Saudi Umayma al-Khamis, a teenage girl is withdrawn from school by her mother because she accepted a gift from a suitor. In "Let's Play Doctor" by the Egyptian Nura Amin, a university student is severely beaten by her father and shut up at home because she dared to fall in love with a fellow student. These stories show that when it comes to women's chastity and the family honor, elements of modernity, especially education, do not prevail in the face of traditional attitudes.

Another recurrent theme in Arab literature is the custom of arranged marriages. The practice of endogamy favours marriages contracted within a close circle which can be the same family, group, community, village or neighborhood. Marriage outside one's own group is discouraged and sometimes prohibited or even chastised. Soraya Altorki (1986) depicted the marriage methods within the high social classes of Saudi Arabia in the mid-1980s, and wrote that

women, as mothers and sisters, offer the groom and his father with information about suitable girls and their family. The attitude of mothers toward their daughters's arranged marriages differs significantly. Some mothers may not even notify their daughters until shortly before the marriage is celebrated (e.g. Huda Shaarawi's mother in *Harem Years*, 1947); other mothers may pressure their daughters to agree to an arranged marriage (e.g. Bahiya's mother in Nawal El-Saadawi's *Two Women in One*, 1975); and others may promise their daughters not intervene in their decisions (e.g. Samar Attar's *Lina: A Portrait of a Damascene Girl*, 1982). The dates of publication of these novels reflect the impact of social change on this old tradition within the Arab society. As Leila, an educated woman in *Three Mothers, Three Daughters*, confirms, nowadays the parents do not control their siblings's marriage so much. Children are much freer to choose who they want (Gorkin & Othman, 1996). Nevertheless, there are still instances of daughters who try to rebel against an arranged marriage. The short story "The Assassination of Light at the River's Flow", by the Saudi writer Khayriya al-Saqqaf, describes the severe measures employed by parents to get their daughter's approval to an arranged marriage. Similarly, Samira Azzam's short story "Fate" describes the emotional pressure that the parents put on their daughter to accept an agreed marriage (Abudi, 2011). Driss (2005) highlights Raja' Alim's novel *Khatam*, a story about taboos and prohibitions in the Gulf. Khatam is the sixth child of a family and is brought up as a girl, but she is treated as a boy. She adopts masculine and feminine roles depending on the situation. The writer dramatizes an old tale, that individuals become gendered subjects in the patriarchal society of Saudi Arabia. This reaffirms what Judith Butler (1990) asserts: "gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (9-10). Thus, Khatam assumes a feminine behavior

corresponding to his-her naming and not sex. Writing Saudi Arabia against the grain and in terms of resistance and subversion are 'Alim's major concerns in this novel (Driss, 2005).

Nowadays, the technology and social media offer direct contact within the youth community. Rajaa Alsanea's novel *Girls of Riyadh* (2007) illustrates the popularity of e-mails as a confidential means of communication among the elite classes in modern Saudi society (Abudi, 2011). The internet is a place where young Kuwaiti women and men can overcome the social boundaries of their communities and avoid any misjudgments (Al-Mughni & Tétreault, 2004). Many surf the internet for new ideas, information and consumer products. "Half of all internet users in Middle Eastern Arab countries live in this tiny country" (Giddens, 2006, 65). Young Kuwaiti people turn to internet in the evenings for social interaction, unlike their parents and grandparents who meet at someone's home or the local diwaniya (male social clubs) (Fedorak, 2009). Internet offers a way to avoid gender restrictions otherwise strictly imposed in Kuwaiti society, thus creating a sense of gender autonomy (Fedorak, 2009). Wheeler (1988, cited in Giddens 2006) mentions that in Kuwait, there is an ethos that states that "having and/or pronouncing a political opinion publicly is bad. No one wants to talk on the record or to be quoted. The idea makes people scared or nervous. Only those who are elite feel they can speak freely/openly" (67). Wheeler concludes that "Kuwaiti culture, which is hundreds of years old, is not likely to be easily transformed by simple exposure to different beliefs and values on the Internet" (67). It is also relevant to mention that internet also crosses sectarian lines – in Kuwait, Shi'i and Sunny belong to the same virtual communities and chat rooms (Fedorak, 2009). Hence, the internet offers a sense of being one with the world, which may provide some freedom from cultural restraints, but at the same time brings discontent and "concern within the conservative Kuwaiti adults, who fear that this introduction to new ideas will counter traditional, cultural and

religious teachings" (Fedorak, 2009, 53). Cyberdating has caused a great deal of concern in cultures where families traditionally choose a spouse for their children. Despite all these concerns, the internet has become an essential part of Kuwaiti youth subculture as a leisure activity and a way to evade gender restrictions. "They use the Internet as a medium for cultural resistance and as a challenge to pre-existing value systems" (Fedorak, 2009, 53). For many Saudi young writers, fiction has become a strategic maneuver in order to manage the repression and domination that "prohibit independent civil society organisations, promote conservatism, apply strict religious beliefs, and enforce endless surveillance of women in public places" (Al-Rasheed, 2013, 176).

In order to escape punishment or condemnation for daring language or taboos exposed many Muslim writers claim that their novels are pure fiction rather than autobiography (Al-Rasheed, 2013, 177). Nonetheless, many of the new novelists go against the restrictive standards of society and religious teachings. They engage in severe critique of their community and its ancient social codes. Many Saudi women writers search for bridges at the level of experience with other non-Saudi women. In their novels, the citizen is no longer portrayed as Arab/Islamic but divided into several layers of Najdi, Hijazi, Arab, Asian, and Western, in a way to exhibit the evolving cosmopolitanism of Saudi society, its contentious relations with foreign elements, the perseverance of patriarchal constructions and racism, the impact between Saudi religious tradition and those of the other and the bridges that women build with non-Saudi women and men (Al-Rasheed, 2013).

Arab women writers are conscious that women's independence is not possible without an essential change in the predominant stance on women and their status in society. The leading female Iraqi writer, Daisy al-Amir illustrates this point in "The Eyes in the Mirror." The story

tells of a professional woman who stays in a hotel in connection with her work. Her problem starts when she is told she cannot have dinner sent up to her room and must eat in the hotel restaurant. This piece of news unsettles her: "Whenever I am alone in a restaurant, I eat breakfast early and in a hurry and never feel relaxed. How would I feel at dinner?" (Badran & Cooke, 2004, 116). Hunger cramps outweigh her reluctance, and she finally decides to go to the dining hall. She finds it packed with men without a single lady amongst them. Although she sits at an isolated table in a dark corner, all eyes begin to stare at her. The unfriendly eyes gaze at her with weird doubts, condemning her, stabbing her, wondering about "this strange bird" (Badran & Cooke, 2004, 116). In that moment the heroine thinks: "I wished that I were a snail carrying its home on its back, a home into which it can enter whenever it wants and then close the doors behind it" (Badran & Cooke, 2004, 117). The longer the gazing lasts, the more furious and restless she becomes. "My clothes are modest […] What is my sin? To be the only woman in a hotel restaurant teeming with men? Is hunger a disgrace?" (Badran & Cooke, 2004, 117). Incapable to endure the social pressure, she finally forgoes her dinner and goes back to her room, where she calms her hunger with cups of water. Paradoxically, the heroine's job is to give advice and guidance to women: "Yes, I deal with women's problems, take care of their circumstances and help them overcome their obstacles. So who will solve my problem of eating dinner in a hotel restaurant whose walls are filled with eyes?" (Badran & Cooke, 2004, 118). Obviously, Arab women cannot enjoy their hard-won right to use public spaces unless traditional male attitudes become more progressive (Abudi, 2011).

Writing remains for Arab women a significant method of subverting dominant hegemonies and reasserting agency. Yet, social figures of oppression assert that feminists like El Saadawi should be silenced lest they reveal dark secrets about the Arab world to non-Arab

readers (Malti-Douglas, 1995). The involvement of Arab women writers to the clarification of the Arab family is colossal, if we bear in mind the intense privacy surrounding this valued foundation in Arab societies. Their poems, stories, novels, essays, memoirs, and autobiographies are not only literary goods to be treasured by their own right but also significant social documents. These documents strongly serve as a model for future generations to avoid any kind of mistreat or discrimination.

**The Rise of the Feminist Movement in Kuwait**

Women in Kuwait, like many other women in other parts of the Arab regions, had to struggle against the male-oriented patriarchal system. A reflection of Kuwaiti social history discloses some of the indicators that influenced the progress and efflorescence of the Kuwaiti feminist movement in the second half of the twentieth century. Those signs included education and job opportunities, class affiliation, the press, and the formation of women's societies. Education was the most relevant factor that caused the upsurge of Kuwaiti feminism. Before the discovery of oil in the 1930s, most women received education in Islamic schools known as *kuttab*, which taught Arabic to enable the reading of the Quran as well as the basic components of mathematics. After the creation of a Council in Education in 1936, followed by a Department of Education in 1938, the first two public schools for girls were opened in 1937 and 1938. Although public schools for boys were free of charge, girls were required to pay a fee to attend. By late 1960s, over 5,000 women were attending adult education institutions and educations was free at all levels, for both men and women. In 1966 the University of Kuwait was established, and education was made compulsory up to the age of 14 (Kirdar, 2006). Education propelled

Kuwaiti women to a new and significant place in society. Educated career women were regarded as a valuable icon striving for the modernization and progress of the country. Women were enabled to work on a more equal basis, enjoying wages similar to those of men. In the labour force, Kuwaiti women's involvement climbed considerably from 3% in 1970 to 10% in 1980 (Al-Sabah, 2013). Women started to occupy positions of noteworthy influence and moved up the career ladder. In academia, business and science, a generation of bright female graduates reached the higher echelons and emphasized the fact that Kuwaiti women were intellectual, diligent and well-educated (Al-Sabah, 2013). "Educated career women were regarded as a symbol of Kuwait's modernization, participating in and contributing to their country's progress" (Kirdar, 2006, 201). It was educated women in Kuwait who discarded their veils, and it was even reported that in 1956 some senior girls in secondary school burned their *boshias* in protest against the veil (Kirdar, 2006, 200). Kirdar further notes that "For a male-dominated society of the Arabian Gulf, this was a real revolution" (2006, 201). Just as in Egypt, the class-affiliation aspect was linked to the role of women's organizations in the rise and development of Kuwaiti feminism (Tijani, 2009). There are similar features in the history of the rise of feminism in the Arab countries.

Not only education played an essential part in rousing feminist consciousness, but also class affiliation was an important aspect in the progress of Arab feminist movements in the twentieth century (Tijani, 2009). Badran and Cooke (2004) have highlighted the fact that middle- and upper-class women were the champions of Egyptian feminism, and that their activism started becoming noticeable when they founded The Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923[12]. Newly-

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[12] For the role of middle and upper-class ladies in Egyptian feminism see Badran and Cooke 2004, xxvi. These authors divide the history of feminist movements in the Arab world in general into three periods. The first period started from the 1860s to the early 1920s which was almost unnoticeable. Nevertheless, it began more remarkable through public organized movements during the second period from the 1920s to 1960s. The third period from the

educated Kuwaiti women of the 1960s/1970s generation were classified into two main traditional class systems: the upper-class women coming from rich merchant families, and the middle-class women from less wealthy families. Some individuals from each of these classes started to campaign for equal rights and for women's liberation from social injustice. Their activism started to become obvious during the 1960s with the formation of two women's organizations: The Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS) and the Arab Women's Development Society (AWDS), both established in 1963. Whereas the former was founded by women of the upper class, the founders of the latter belonged to the middle class. According to Rizzo (2005) women's organizations in Kuwait can be classified into two main types based on their goals and techniques: service (voluntary) such as WCSS and professional (activist) organizations as for example AWDS. The difference between them is that the purpose of the service organizations is to extend welfare through charitable activities and as Moghadam (1993) pointed out they also focus their attention for the benefits for women in education, health, family planning and related activities. On the other hand, professional organizations are more involved in political and social change and focus their goals in gender equality (Rizzo, 2005). The AWDS challenged official policies on women's status, demanding the extension of political rights to women; equality in all fields of employment; the appointment of women as special attorneys to draft family law; the provision of child payments to married women; and the restriction of polygamy. In 1973, 10 years later, the AWDS succeeded in forcing the all-male National Assembly to discuss an equal rights bill, provoking the stormiest debates in the history of the assembly. Adversaries of the bill, who formed a majority, requested for the preservation of the patriarchal integrity of the society, claiming that Islam gave men and women different accountabilities and made men superior to

1970s to the present observed a renaissance of feminist expression in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq and other North African countries. Kuwait and other countries of the Gulf "began to witness the emergence of their first wave of feminism" only during the third period.

women (Al-Mughni, 1996). The Girls' Club, formed by a group of upper-class women in 1975, sided with the AWDS to put pressure on the government to comprise suffrage in the laws that promoted women. In 1980s the government dissolved the AWDS and accused its energetic and intelligent leader, Nouria al-Sadani, of a crime and exiled her (Keddie, 2007). The AWDS presidency was reassigned to a female government official; however, the AWDS members refused to attend any meetings and the organization was disbanded in 1980. In spite of Nouria al-Sadani's efforts to form another women's association, her application for its license was being rejected by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor on the grounds that there were already two women's societies in Kuwait (Tétreault, Meyer and Rizzo, 2009). According to Keddie (2007) since then there has been little autonomous women's organization allowed. These organizations, nevertheless, provide role models for young women and have the power to challenge patriarchal system. Also, the two organizations AWDS and WCSS contributed to the promotion of literature among Kuwaiti women. For instance, the Arab Women's Development (AWDS) organized in 1970 the First Kuwaiti Women's Day, which was marked by an extravagant festivity. One of the foremost major events was the award of the Kuwaiti Women's Medal. The fact that one of the awardees of this medal was a female creative writer, named Mūdī al-ʿUbaydī, might have helped as an encouragement for future Kuwaiti women writers (Tijani, 2009).

In relation with the press as an agent in the origin and rise of Kuwaiti feminism, two elements were involved. First, the Kuwaiti print media promoted the writing of feature articles by any woman or man who encouraged the increasing tension for women's freedom in the mid-twentieth century. Women's articles were especially welcome, and one of the magazines at the time was *al-Baʿtha*, mentioned in the preceding chapter, created "Rukn al-marʾa" [Women's Corner] in its monthly issues, starting in February 1950 (Tijani, 2009). The second element that

backed the progress of the feminism in Kuwait is the fact that women were allowed to work in media-houses- print and electronic- as freelancers and as sub-editors. The advantage of women's working position as sub-editors, enabled the formation of separate magazines owned and controlled by women themselves. *Usratī* [My Family], one of the earliest magazines in the country, was created between 1963 and 1964 by Ghanīma al-Marzūq, who has been its publisher and editor until nowadays. It also has an online version named *Bawabat al-marʾa* [Women's Gateway]. Another women's magazine – and one of the most feminist and critical weeklies in the country – was established in 1970 by Hidāya S. al-Sālim (1936–2001), *al-Majālis* [The Sessions]. Until her death – she was murdered in 2001 for her strong criticism and disapproval of some cultural practices that are still practices in some parts of the Kuwaiti contemporary society – al-Sālim was the editor of this magazine, which continues to be published to the present day (Tijani, 2009).

Margot Badran (2009) has made the distinction between invisible and visible feminism. This distinction, she argued, rescues feminism from being understood as an exclusively public and explicit phenomenon, and thus provides an analytical framework within which to locate and explain the more comprehensive feminist historical experience (Badran & Cooke, 2004). Scholars often define the Kuwaiti women's struggle as a first wave women's movement in western terminology because of the focus on women's suffrage, legal reform in the areas of divorce, inheritance and property, and citizenship, as well as the improvement of educational and employment opportunities. Nevertheless, the deep divide between these women's organizations represents the conflicting ideologies they uphold on the one hand, and suggests the incompatibility of Islam, democracy, and women's rights on the other (Dianu, 2002).

**Feminist Narrative in Kuwait**

Kuwaiti women have been notable as academics, critics, poets, short-story writers, novelists, biographers, and folklorists. Poetry seems to be the most common literary genre among Kuwaiti women writers. Some of the most famous women's names in Kuwaiti poetry include Princess Suʿād al-Ṣabāḥ (1946–), Janna al-Qarīnī (1956–), Kāfiya Ramaḍān (1948–), Ghanīma al-Ḥarb (1949–), Fāṭima al-ʿAbdullah (1961–) and Nūra al-Mulīfī (1966–) (Tijani, 2009). Many writers have used poetry but as well other genres to express their grievances and register their sufferings against patriarchal authority. As Simone de Beauvoir highlighted, "It is natural for women to try to escape this world where they often feel unrecognized and misunderstood" (1949, 839). Kuwaiti women authors have used their pens to promote feminism and make women aware of their oppressed and inferior social condition in society. Contemporary Kuwaiti women, who have become famous as fiction writers and have published at least two collections of short stories and/or novels, include Laylā al-ʿUthmān (1945–), Munā al-Shafiʿī (1946–), Fawziyya Shuwaysh al-Sālim (1949–), Thurayyā al-Baqṣa mī (1952–), Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm (1952–), the above-mentioned Fāṭima Yūsuf al-ʿAlī (1953–), Laylā M. Ṣāliḥ, ʿAliya Shuʿayb (1964–), Khawla al-Qazwīnī, Fawziyya al- Suwaylim, Wafāʾ al-Ḥ amdān, and Latī fam Batī. These women constitute the older generation of women writers in contemporary Kuwait and their narratives cover a wide range of thought-provoking themes focusing on the topic of women. They successfully project in their writings a diversity of challenges towards conservative standards existing in society, and they make these aspects visible to society through their writings.

Starting with 1960s, women realized about the importance of writing and became more active in the process of publishing short stories. The topics covered by the Kuwaiti women

writers have drawn significant amount of public attention and social alertness. The short stories are not only a representation of the concerned issues of the Kuwaiti society at that time, but they are also a call to social awareness about the women's status in society. Among many examples is "Ajniha min Rih" [Wings of a Breeze] by Muná al-Shafi, in which the protagonist sympathizes with a butterfly because she sees in it her own suffering from the desire to love. A dialogue between them is a self-reflection into her own life dreaming of exuberance and open spaces but at the same time she remembered the bruises on her body (Tijani 2009). The butterfly in this context symbolizes liberty and freedom to love. A much more insightful representation of the image of women in society is also mirrored in the "Munira" mentioned previously, a story written by the Kuwaiti/Arabian Gulf short story writer Khālid al-Faraj. From a feminist perspective, the protagonist's actions – suicidal death – is engendered by the patriarchal culture. According to al-ʿAjmi, "Munīra" "reflects the call of the new generation [of Kuwaiti intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s] for social reform", and it is meant to criticize delusory theories and practices that were dominant in pre-oil Kuwaiti society (Tijani, 2009). Badriya Musāʿid's "Amīna", published in the early 1950s, is set against the omnipresence of the male-controlled society in the pre-oil Kuwaiti years. This story – though female authored – characterizes Amīna as a woman who deliberates and acts in accordance to the patriarchal culture. Like "Munīra", "Amīna" illustrates that marriage is the one and only objective of the conservative Arab woman.

Whereas the likes of "Amīna" among Kuwaiti women's short stories are either imitative of the dominant narrative discourse, seemingly apolitical from the viewpoint of feminism, Hidāyā al-Sālim's "Kharīfbilā maṭa" (1972), ʿĀliya Shuʿayb's "Imraʾa tatakawwan" [A Woman in the Making] (1991), and Laylā Ṣāliḥ's "Laylat al-iqtirāʿ" [The Election Night] (1986) denote the growth of another tendency in the Kuwaiti female fictional tradition from the 1970s onwards.

These stories illustrate one of the different stages of Arab feminist writing in general. The two stories—Shuʿayb's "Imraʾa tatakawwan" and Ṣāliḥ's "Laylat al-iqtirāʿ"—represent a preliminary phase of feminist consciousness in the second half of the twentieth century which, according to Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (2004), is the awareness by women that as women they are systematically placed in a disadvantaged position.

"Imraʾa tatakawwan" by ʿĀliya Shuʿayb is set in a pre-oil Kuwaiti environment, in which an unidentified young heroine reflects on the unfair treatment she usually receives from her parents against their privileged attitude toward Abdullah, her brother. The author expresses the awareness by women of their gender inequality in society. Similar awareness is found as well in Laylā Ṣāliḥ's "Laylat al-iqtirāʿ". The story describes Kuwaiti women's political mindfulness and national awareness in the second half of the twentieth century. The author mirrors the thought of an unnamed heroine who continuously disagrees with the political segregation of women in Kuwait. She also illustrates discontent with the indifferent attitude of the Kuwaiti government, the people and the press towards the recognition of women's rights to vote and to become members of parliament. The heroine proves to be a feminist by refusing to go with her husband into exile after losing the elections because she seeks change in women's 'second-class' status. The kind of social and political change that Ṣāliḥ was mentioning in 1980s is now happening in Kuwait.

Thurayyā al-Baqṣamī's[13] stories are also a criticism of women's position in society. In "'Arus al-qamr" [The Moon's Bride] she attacks old traditions and expresses her rage and criticism of society's rules when a girl is forced to marry at a very young age without seeing her

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[13] Thurayyā al-Baqṣamī was born in 1952. She writes short stories and articles and has published four collections: al-Araq al-Aswad [The Black Sweat] in 1977, al-Sidra in 1988, Shumu al-Saradib [Basement Candles] in 1992 and Mudhakkirat Fatumma al Kuwaytiyya al-Saghira (The Memories of the Little Kuwaiti Fattuma) in 1992. Her first story, al-Thawb al-A~far [The Yellow Dress] won her a prize in the cultural fete held by the Ministry of Education in 1969) (Alsanousi, 2002, 199).

future husband before marriage. Al-Baqṣamī continues her criticism of a woman's position in "Al-dumya" [The Doll], where she points out how the old Kuwaiti mentality prohibited relations between a man and a woman, even when they were children. In this story, Maryam is a determined child who insists on having what she wants, even when she is making herself a toy to play with:

> I have been trying to cut this tough thread for an hour without success. Let it go to hell. I have sharp teeth and they can cut this tough thread. Now I will draw the eyes, I will draw them big to attract everyone's attention (Al-Sanousi, 1995, 123).

The woman in al-Baqṣamī's story is powerful and more willful than the existing perceptions will allow, and she defies man's power in her challenge to the though thread. Her teeth can cut through it. Maryam wants to draw big eyes for the doll, to look through them at the extensive world which she will miss as soon as she will be forced to give up playing outside forever. Al-Baqṣamī's fury against the dominated position of women is even clearer when she defines the strong and defiant attitude of Maryam's the minute she refuses the idea of marriage since she is "only nine years" old and it is "nonsense, I will not agree. I will refuse even if I am beaten for it" (Al-Sanousi, 1995, 124-125). Al-Baqṣamī is attacking beliefs and prejudices that are common in old Kuwaiti society. However, many of these principles are still prevalent in today's society. The idea that the woman should stay at home, unaware of what is going on around her, is still strong in men's minds.

Another two stories that embody some of the early Kuwaiti women's fictional texts with elements of feminist overtones are Hayfāʾ Hāshim's "al-Intiqām al-rahīb" (1953) and Laylā al-ʿUthmān's "Min milaff imraʾa" (1979). They both explore the topic of gender and violence as a way of projecting the rejection and domination of women in pre-oil Kuwaiti society. Their corresponding heroines reveal their rage and anger against male authority. Whereas "al-Intiqām al-rahīb" describes male-initiated violence and female counterviolence, "Min milaff imraʾa" depicts female-initiated fatalistic violence. "Al-Intiqām" is the story of Lulua, a teenage girl who was withdrawn vehemently from school by her brothers. Lulua realizes the fact that her isolation and marginalization from society will persist unless she challenges familial orders. Going out on her own choice, and without the company of any of her relatives, represents the protagonist's temporary escape from imprisonment even though it implies a great risk and distress. From a feminist point of view, her escape is regarded as an act of resistance to patriarchal oppression, and for having endured her brother's aggressive authority and persecution for years, now she is rebelling and revolting contrary to male-oriented society.

Laylā al-ʿUthmān[14]'s "Min milaff imraʾa" is one of the very few works of murder fiction not only by the author, but also by Kuwaiti authors in general. It describes the story of an unidentified adolescent girl who is required to get married with a seventy-year-old man. After a period of three years of marriage without any child, the heroine slays her husband while he is asleep. The girl says: "Why don't I get rid of him? Why don't I match my parents' crime, the one

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[14] Laylā al-ʿUthmān is one of the leading Kuwaiti women writers of the contemporary period and also the best well-known and remarkable author from Kuwait, if not the Arabian Gulf region in general. A novelist and a short-story writer, al-ʿUthmān was born in Kuwait in 1945. Some of her writings are considered transgressive, and therefore disqualified in Kuwait. Some of them were published in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. Her stories tackle controversial political and social aspects that successfully reflects a rigid patriarchal society ruled by conservative rules in which women are the oppressed protagonists. Her novel "Waseema Comes Out of the Sea" was selected as one of the best hundred Arab novels in the 20th century. In 2004, Al-Othman launched her literary award "Layla Al-Othman Award for Youth Innovations in Story and Novel". The award goes every two years to creative literary works by Kuwaiti youth.

they forced me to accept at the age of fourteen?" (Al-Sanousi, 1995, 137). The story represents a feminist and revolutionary act of rebellion against the patriarchal order that is imposed on women without their consent. It is furthermore a story of social condemnation that clearly illustrates the rage and disapproval against male-dominated system in Kuwait society.

A radical narrative by the same remarkable Kuwaiti writer is *Wasmiyya takhruj min al-baḥr* [Wasmiyya Emerges from the Sea], her second novel published in 1986. This story is a social realist text that defines class and gender relations in pre-oil Kuwait society. It depicts a secret love story between an upper-class girl named Wasmiyya and a lower-class boy called Abdullah. Wasmiyya is instinctively defiant and expresses her wishful desires and personal freedom by inviting him into her house, appearing unveiled to him and involving deliberately into a secret amorous chat with Abdullah. She is far from being described as a passive female under the subordination of patriarchal culture and escapes from home in order to meet Abdullah on the beach. By being on a date with a boy, Wasmiyya breaks class and societal values and barriers. Furthermore, she acts courageously by jumping into the water in order to avoid a possible encounter with a guard symbolizing the Kuwaiti patriarchal authority and subsequently a horrific fate for both of them. According to Tijani (2009), the novel reproduces and appraises repressive patriarchal traditions and practices. Wasmiyya is unconsciously rebellious and she demonstrates her subjectivity, a way of expressing her wishful desires and personal freedom. With this novel, al-ʿUthmān demonstrates once more that she is a feminist conscious writer trying to put into evidence the subversion of the patriarchal authority within her literary works. Other literary works in which al-ʿUthmān reflects the struggle and fight for a better social condition is in *Imra'a fī inā'* [The Trapped Woman], where a young university graduate is seeking her independence. Equally, the protagonist of the short story "At-timthāl" [Sculpture] is

completely independent and emancipated. Al-ʿUthmān's stories show the intense fury for objecting against male's domination and the fierce challenge of the patriarchal social structure. Her aim is to improve the women's condition in society.

Similarly, Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm's[15] "Mudhakkirāt khādim" [A Servant's Diary] explores the same themes of love, class, and gender in post-oil or contemporary Kuwait. The protagonist of this story, Madam Sāra, is a woman in her thirties belonging to the upper-class society. In the late 1970s, she is depicted as an illuminating and revolutionary woman who refuses to be controlled by the male-dominated society. A conscious feminist character, Madam Sāra subverts the patriarchal culture by accepting her interracial marriage with her domestic servant even though her son will not approve of their marriage since he belongs to an inferior level of society (Tijani, 2009).

A recent novel published in 2019 by Layla AlAmmar portrays Kuwait's traditional gender roles. *The Pact We Made* is a book about marriage, but it is not considered a conventional love story, since it reflects social and cultural expectations, the remaining effects of trauma, and healing and loving yourself again (Shaffi, 2019). The novel is about a woman, named Dhalia, who is struggling to create her own life in a world where women are expected to conform to the old practices of Kuwaiti society. She never feels an independent person. This is codified in the way she lives at home, under her father's roof and guardianship, before marrying and moving to the home and guardianship of her husband. She is never truly under her own guardianship or seen as a full adult (Shaffi, 2019). There is also the notion that a woman is imperfect in some way if she does not marry. "There is a pervasive idea that this is the primary goal in a young

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[15] Tayyiba al- al-Ibrāhīm was born in Kuwait in 1952. She started writing at the age of thirteen in the 1960s; her stories started to show up in the Kuwaiti dailies in the late 1970s. She has published more than ten novels most of them belonging to the science fiction genre. She is also a social and feminist critic writing articles in support of the women's political and human rights.

woman's life, and that she is somehow deficient if she reaches a certain age without marrying" mentioned AlAmmar in an online news (Shaffi, 2019).

Women have always been the focus and concern of these and other many Kuwaiti literary writings due to her importance in Arab society whilst at the same time placed in a subordinate and deprived role in society, where they do not possess the same rights nor freedom as men do. Nonetheless, women may have been denied a voice and a dignified position in society, but their writings attest to the quest for their right to exist as autonomous individuals.

**Conclusion**

The oppression of women in the Middle East and particularly in Kuwait is a reality just as women's world-wide subjugation continues to be a contemporary fact. Yet, the essentializing construction of the passive Arab woman who is unable to resist patriarchy and is trapped within a life of victimization is not necessarily a truth. Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to show that Arab women's writing is a strategy of resistance for women in the Middle East. Writing can be a powerful vehicle for feminist thought, especially when invisibility is needed or sought. Arab women in the Middle East are breaking the image of the voiceless Muslim woman by demonstrating the feminist force that lies within themselves and comes into being through a different number of aspects in order for their rights to be improved. Arab women's writing is central in passing on their experience and vision of the world from one generation to another. Within the words of these authors there is a message of liberation, but not only directed to Arab women, but to all women around the world. Fighting for women's rights has never been an easy task throughout history, especially in this part of the world; however, women relentlessly challenge the patriarchal domination for a change in their status quo in society. Women have

always proved through their excessive work and dedication in different aspects of life that they are the key to a positive change not only in their own communities, but also in a broader spectrum. Until nowadays many of the Kuwaiti women have successfully contributed to country reforms and have used their capacities in their professional fields to further excel in society at large and to be mediators of change.

In the next chapter, I attempt to describe how Nada Faris plays a pivotal role in the contemporary Kuwaiti society, as an agent of change through her literary productions, where gender inequality is a constant concern.

# CHAPTER THREE

# NADA FARIS'S LITERATURE PAVES THEWAY

# TO FEMINIST ACTIVISM

## Introduction

This chapter analyses some of the articles of the Kuwaiti feminist activist writer Nada Faris, who questions and reflects on the contemporary issues of her country. Like all the other writers that have been discussed in the previous chapters, she has decided to take on the literary path and transform her experiences into fictional and non-fictional writings. As examined, writing has surfaced with the beginning of the education, and for women it meant a door opened for liberation. For Nada Faris, writing plays an essential part in her life in creating perceptions about lives as women and voicing out feminist concerns. She undertakes the difficult process of transforming the mentality of people and encourage them to implement positive changes. The first part of this chapter focuses briefly on her professional life as a writer. Afterwards, it follows an analysis of her articles that focus on gender inequality within a conservative socio-political system.

**Introduction to Nada Faris's Life and Works**

Nada Faris, a renowned writer and performance poet, was born in 1986 in Kuwait. She completed her elementary education in an English school, and it was in 2003, when she was 17, that Faris decided to be a professional writer. Soon she realized that for being a writer she lacked the most relevant tools: knowledge and language. Without any further delay, Faris enrolled in the College of Arts where she started wisely crafting her language being part of a ten-year arduous hard-working journey filled with rewards and acknowledgements that places her as one of the most acclaimed contemporary feminist activist Anglowaiti writers of 21$^{st}$ century in Kuwait. After completing her Bachelor's degree in English Literature at Kuwait University, Faris worked full-time as a university administrator and successfully managed to work in a variety of part-time jobs. She worked as a teacher, writer, editor, translator, and website designer for companies such as New Horizon and Expression. Faris was honored as the top student in Kuwait University's Master's Program of Comparative Literature in October 2010. In addition, she graduated from Columbia University with an MFA in Creative Writing, major in poetry and translation.

2013 was a breakthrough year for Faris. On finalizing Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah's artistic writing program, she was designated to represent Kuwait at London's Shubbak Festival. Later that year, she was once again selected to represent Kuwait at the University of Iowa's International Writing Program (IWP). The revered program, also known as the United Nations of Writers, is a ten-week creative residency for internationally reputable and evolving writers, the alumni of which includes Kuwaiti writer Taleb al-Refai. Currently, she is an Honorary Fellow in Writing at Iowa University's International Writing Program (IWP) and an alumna of the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), USA. Faris is also the winner of an Arab Women Award Harper Bazaar Arabia 2018 in the category of Inspirational Woman. Her article

"Every Child Deserves a Home: Zeina Al-Sultan Unveils the Truths Behind Adoption in Kuwait" en.v's Voice of Success program in 2012 evokes once again her unstoppable attitude toward a more thoughtful and compassionate community. She also received a fellowship from the World Peace Initiative's Peace Revolution where she meditated with Buddhist Monks in Turkey, in 2016. In 2015 and 2016 Faris was elected as a member of the board of trustees for Kuwait's Cultural Circle Prize for the Arabic Short Story (AlMultaqa), the Arab world's first international award for short story collections in Arabic. Additionally, she has performed at Busboys and Poets, Washington DC, USA, The Feminist Union, Iowa, USA, The Mosaic Rooms, London, UK, and all over Kuwait. Since the end of 2009 Faris has published articles, poems and short stories in Kuwait *Times* newspaper, bazaar magazine, *Unique Magazine*, *CityPages* magazine, *en.v earth* magazine, *The Norton Anthology of Hint Fiction*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Fanack Chronicle of the Middle East & North Africa*, *The Operating System*, *Sukoon*, *The Indianola Review*, and many more.

In 2013, Faris decided to self-publish *Before Young Adult Fiction*, a book that includes different literary genres, such as short stories, poems and articles that reflected the mentality and lives of the Kuwaiti society. 'Facebook Intellectuals' and 'Stasis is the Mark of the Dead' mentioned below are only two of the many inspiring and activist writings published in this book. These outstanding writings were the foundation in the writing process since they helped to shape her voice. Faris tackles socio-political themes widespread in the state's narrative by interrelating social issues, enquiries, and activist messages into the book.

Nada Faris has won consecutive rewards for her poetry, and occasionally for her journalism. Her award-winning poems comprise 'Facebook Intellectuals' which is a criticism of the contemporary "armchair intellectuals: Gucci-covered individuals" (Faris, 2014b, 11) who

superficially tackle national issues without actually taking up on activism. These kinds of "intellectuals" (11) pretend to "support the cause" (12) of "the Bidūn [who] are getting a beating in Jahra!" (12) by "taking filtered photographs" (12) of their "new hairdo and posting them on Instagram" (12), whereas in reality no type of accomplishment generated their posts, but only "the enumeration of protests" (13) which is why they "lost their influence in the Human Rights Organization" (Faris, 2014b, 13).

Another award-winning poem is 'Stasis is the Mark of the Dead' which is a philosophical poem on identity and activism on social change. The poem effuses encouragement to generate a "New Man" (Faris, 2014b, 43) and to "forget all those stereotypes and clichés, and rethink our identities and aim of our days" (42) because "stasis is the mark of the dead" (44). This function of social change is accompanied by a progressive and stirring tone. The poem starts in a placid tone talking about a fixed nature that one might assume life is about, and the tone progressively continues to rise lively into a vital call for change. The reader is encouraged to change perceptions, attitudes and implement new paradigms because the "time does not flow in a single line. It is relative not linear" (Faris, 2014, 41). The final note of the poem ends in a solid activist way to "choose life and change instead" (Faris, 2014, 44).

In 2013 Faris also published a noteworthy young adult fiction romance titled *Fame in the Adriatic*. This astonishing and captivating young adult novelette is set in an Italian background in the first half of the sixteenth century to camouflage some of the most common practices and mentalities in the contemporary Kuwaiti society. A year later, in 2014, *The Elephant in the Room* was published including a variety of poems and an interview with *Bazaar Magazine*. The book also narrates ingeniously "stories and articles from Anglophone Kuwait" about racism, gender inequalities, gender differences, interracial marriages, religious and political aspects. The

introduction of this book is primarily centered on the effort of the "Anglowaiti" movement with a social aspect character, and the ending too is through an activist article which is "I Write to Get Back at People", in this way highlighting right from the very beginning her social goal and ending with the same tone of an activist writer believing in the power of literature to change people's perspectives.

In 2014 *Artemis and Other Spoken Word Poems* was also published. It consists of spoken word poems and interviews with *Bazaar Magazine*. Most of the poems and articles had been published in prestigious magazines and appreciated for being authentic and reaching to the hearts and minds of the people in ways that can transform their thoughts and actions. "Joy" is a poem awarded 1st Place at Taste of Jamaica's 2nd Slam Poetry Competition in December 2010. It talks about a confusing relationship with a woman named Joy who puts men in hospitals because of her desire for vengeance. "Artemis" is another poem awarded 1st Runner Up at Taste of Jamaica's 4th Slam Poetry Competition in December 2011. It is about a fervent expression of disparaging longing. The narrator conveys the aching, irritation and hurt resulting from a departure. In 2018 "Mischief Diary" is published which is a collection of fifteen hilarious insightful short stories for young adults. It portrays funny tales based on real events tracing back to her memories from childhood until present days. *Artemis and Other Poems* is Faris's first poetry compilation which received national awards, granting her the nickname: "Kuwait's Finest Slam Poet." In 2017 *Fountain of Youth* was published and was a semi-finalist in Vine Leaves 2016 Vignette Collection Award. This book questions what it means to be human after the universal success of neoliberalism and the way we reflect upon this will affect our ideas about progress in the Middle East.

Another outstanding work of Nada Faris is titled *Women of Kuwait*, written in collaboration with Maha Alasaker[16]. This brilliant and unprecedented book depicts in photographs and prose an angle of Kuwaiti female identity for a Western audience. In this 2019 series, Maha Alasaker photographs women of diverse ages and social upbringings inside their most intimate private spaces and tries to give "a voice to those who are often voiceless" (Sabah, 2019, 4). After being contacted by Maha Alasaker to work on this book, Faris started writing the texts that complement the images captured by the photographer. For these texts, Faris interviewed twenty-five Kuwaiti women in order to find out about their lives, inner thoughts and beliefs; however, "many of these women resisted the process … to reveal the very parts of their beings that they reserve for intimate partners or best friends, and sometimes only for themselves" (Faris, 2019, 8-9). Faris states that most women "refused to incriminate family members, friends, neighbors, or even colleagues" (2019, 9) even though they greatly shaped their identities in life. In this book, Faris chose to write all the stories in the second person and in the present tense, in a way to engage the reader into these women's significant events of their life. Together with Alasaker's photographs and Faris's texts, the book offers a glimpse of the female authenticity and vulnerability in a culture dominated by patriarchy where social rules must be followed. Moreover, *Women of Kuwait* encapsulates an array of wonderful and awe-inspiring texts of

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[16] Maha Alasaker is a Kuwaiti professional photographer based in New York where she produces commercial photography to support herself. The fundamental theme of Alasaker's works is "the status of women and the conflicting emotions and feelings that arise from being subjected to a set of rules, both spoken and unspoken, that females are expected to adhere to" stated Sabah (2019,.5) in the Foreword of *Women of Kuwait*. Another unique work of Alasaker is named *Belonging*, where "she addressed the double lives that many women have in Kuwait, a mechanism to avoid scrutiny and to save one's own sanity" (Sabah, 2019, 5). Another remarkable work of Alasaker is titled *Abolish 153*. The aim of her work is "to abolish laws in Kuwait that are violent and discriminatory towards women" (Sabah, 2019, 5). Sabah (2019) confirmed that Alasaker "broke through many boundaries in her creative process by being true to her own's authentic self, and in doing so serves as an inspiration to many women, especially those from conservative backgrounds" (p.5). Alasaker "understands how culture shapes individuals and the extent to which restrictions and constraints put pressure on the expression of one's individuality, especially in a society where women are often judged and criticized for nonconformity" (Sabah, 2019, 5).

Kuwaiti women that not only transfers the reader into another world, but it also advocates individualism and determination to reach for one's goals no matter the circumstances.

Currently, Faris continues to take part in slam poetry competitions and performs at cultural events. Some of her past performances were at the Kuwait Writing Club's open mike featuring Kuwaiti artist Shurooq Amin and the Riyadh Writing Club, the Kuwait International Book Fair, Word of Mouth Kuwait's poetry event, Gust's Poetry Night, The Divan's Debate Tournament, as well as several other local schools, universities and national and international cultural centers.

### "Anglowaiti" Literature

Literature has incited political and social change in societies and continues to do so to this day. It is an embodiment of words based on human tragedies, ideologies, desires and feelings. It cultivates wonders, inspires a generation, and feeds information. As emphasized by Nada Faris, "literature is both powerful and extremely important" (Faris, n.d.-a). "Literature saved my life, and I am not being metaphorical" (Faris, n.d.-a) highlights Faris in an article called 'How and When I Decided to Become a Writer?'. The writer is firmly convinced that literature contributed significantly to her life, and provided her with an influential voice to express her sufferings, as well as it offered answers to some of the questions that haunted her. To write and to be able to express the deepest feelings and thoughts out in the public signified for Faris a mode of escape that only a determined woman with a powerful goal in her mind can do. In the same vein, the academic feminist writer Rita Felski (1989) noted that woman writers express their psychological distress and subjugation through writing. In other words, writing symbolizes a form of escape from an intimidating environment to another place where writers

can break the silence of word and thought to pour out the feelings of misunderstandings, loneliness, alienation, anger, distress, revenge or fear. However, for Kuwaiti society, literature is meaningless and considered "a frivolous occupation" states Faris (n.d.-a). Some believe that literature is simply not important or underestimate its abilities to stand the test of time and give us great knowledge. There is a stigma in society which implies that the one who is more inclined toward science will somehow be more successful in life, and the one who is more passionate about literature and other art forms will be destined to a life of low-paying jobs and unsatisfying careers (Faris, n.d.-a). Therefore, people should be practical and "get a real job" (Faris, n.d.-a) instead of wasting their time on such irrelevant professions. Despite this common belief, at seventeen years old, Nada Faris decided to be a writer and promised herself that she "would never let her parents, friends, or society dictate how she would live" (Faris, n.d.-a). This statement highlights her resistance to norms that are made compulsory on individuals by overlooking the importance of each person's interests and goals in life. Allowing no one to 'dictate' her life even though she comes from a patriarchal society where a male's word weights more than a female's belief, it suggests determination and struggle to "end the subordination of women" (Felski, 1989, 13) by not conforming to a life already imposed by others.

One of the most noteworthy aspects that needs to be stressed about Faris's literature is the fact that she "coined the term Anglowaiti" (Faris, 2014a, 14). She explains that the "Anglowaiti" term was coined in order "to give Anglowaiti writers a sense of belonging to a collective" (Faris, 2013, 24). According to Faris, Kuwaiti writers feel "ostracized, alone, separated from the bulk of Kuwaiti literary life" (Faris, n.d.-g). Many of the Kuwaiti literary works in English are filled with structural and grammatical errors and as a result, readers will rather choose a Western text instead of reading a mediocre Kuwaiti book (Faris, 2013). Therefore, the lack of an audience

leads to the fact that Kuwaiti writers cease to effectively work on their writings which indicates a very low interest in writing literature in English. In spite of the fact that "Anglowaitis may not have a plethora of opportunities to grow as writers in the country" (Faris, n.d.-g), Faris encourages them to not "be disheartened" (Faris, n.d.-g) and that it is "imperative for Anglowaiti writers to discover their writing voice to be able to bring new insights, to create new ways of thinking, and to positively influence social consciousness" (Faris, n.d.-e). Not only does she inculcate motivation within the Kuwaiti writers, but she also persuades people to read, instead of regarding literature as "a waste of time" (Faris, 2014a, 158) or pointless in one's life.

The term "Anglo" derives from the language in which the text is written, and "waiti" is "the suffix from the word Kuwaiti, which relates to the focus of the piece" (Faris, 2013, 21). Faris (2013) explains that "An Anglowaiti is thus any person who writes about Kuwait using English as their language of self-expression" (21). In this way, individuality is promoted, which blends a globally used language with socio-political aspects that concerns the region of Kuwait, a place where the second most used language is English, after Arabic. It should be stressed that as a non-native speaker adopting English as the main language to write poems, prose, novels, and articles is not that easy because every word and every sentence can be a constant confrontation. Despite these difficulties, writing in English for Faris is empowering because every word, every piece of writing and grammar constitute hard work. It denotes a great determination for a non-native speaker who willingly chooses to work outside her mother tongue, and at the same time it defines Faris's literature with a unique and innovative writing style for the contemporary literary scene in Kuwait.

Writers who decide to write in a language that is not their own native language are called exophones or exophonic writers. The word 'exophony' comes from the Greek word éxō,

meaning 'outer, external' and phōnē, meaning 'sound, voice' (Duncker, 2018). Adhering to the

meaning of this word, Faris's preference for English could be interpreted as a way to reach a

wider reception, outside the Arab world. Apart from the fact that writing in English can easily

imply the mere business decision because it can reach an international audience, it can also hold

political connotations. In fact, Faris (2013) mentions that "writing in English is a political

decision" (24). In this sense, Faris's writing is redefined "on the one hand in relation to the

language and the culture and on the other hand in relation to the historical and social situation"

(Garnier, 2013, 2, cited in Mahmoud, 2018, 110). As mentioned in the first chapter, Kuwaiti

people witnessed a gran influx of distinct nationalities which contributed to the progress of the

country. Many of these people are struggling for a better treatment in a state which "continues to

represent the ideology of an outdated figuration of Kuwaiti identity based, in part, on the 1990s

invasion, and, in another, on the closed-minded, racist superiority of nationals" (Faris, 2014a,

13). However, according to Faris, there is still hope for things to be changed, especially toward a

more tolerant society that is ready to accept the diversity and plurality of a foreign population.

Hence, by means of an international language, Faris's purpose through "Anglowaiti" literature is

to:

soften the nation (readers and officials in power) to the plight of "the other". In

other words, not to give voice to the voiceless, but to condition readers to the

heteroglossial nature of the nation so that officials and civilians actively

participate in decreasing institutionalized racism. Creative social workers could

then convey their personal struggles to an Anglowaiti audience already

cultivated to recognize and criticize (objectively) social and economic malpractices. (Faris, 2014c, 76)

The reason why Faris writes in English rather than Arabic language is "not a matter of writing in the colonizer's tongue" (Faris, n.d.-g) nor to show and/or adopt any English characteristics. In fact, she argues that:

I am a Kuwaiti, born and raised in Kuwait. Both my parents are Kuwaitis, their parents and grandparents as well. Yet I am a Kuwaiti who studied in English schools, who has a BA from an English Department, and who is enrolled in the Master's Program of Comparative Literature at Kuwait University, which is taught in English. I am Kuwaiti through and through—I just happen to write in English. (Faris, n.d.-g)

For Faris, writing in English is considered a matter of adjusting to the contemporary culture or "to the changed fabric of Kuwait society" (Faris, 2013, 23), a society constituted by a range of people from various parts of the world. She also reminds the audience that English has always been there "from the boards on the streets to official documents. Now it is even in our computers, phones, TVs, car radios, and on the sides of medicine bottles and milk cartons. We did not import it. We did not imitate it. It was always there" (Faris, 2013, 23-24).

The statement implies that Kuwait is home to an ethnically diverse population in a country that was also under British protectorate for many years. Therefore, "We did not choose to learn English. We were born out of Kuwait's infrastructure", states Faris (2013, 23). Hence,

writing in English is a matter of adopting the second most spoken language in Kuwait. Even though writing in English might have "overtones of stripping away (one's) identification altogether […] Specifically, a Kuwaiti author who more or less choose to write in English, whether in exile/diaspora or in his/her own homeland, is thus perceived as abandoning an Arabic speaking territory and/or claiming to an English speaking one" (Mahmoud, 2018, 113), writing in English does not necessarily mean that she is refusing her own identity. On the contrary, Faris embraces the fact of being a Kuwaiti citizen. Nonetheless, she is using "Western features" (Faris, 2014a, 8) because she "has a story to tell about vast areas in the country that have been hidden from view simply because of the language barrier" (Faris, 2013, 24). Faris conveys the idea that choosing English as a language of expression is not just a random choice, but rather it represents a wider audience coverage for making people knowledgeable about the nation's important issues. Stating that she has something to say to the audience and that something has not been made visible, demonstrates how determined she is to partake in a literary activist movement for a social transformation. Embarking on the production of "Anglowaiti" literature, Faris declined the conventional writing style in Arabic language by producing a unique style of literature in the contemporary Kuwait. Even though for many literary historians, scholars and notable figures Kuwaiti literature in Arabic is the only literature that deserves to «become part of [the Kuwaiti culture's] historical heritage» (Mahmoud, 2018, 115), writing in English contributes to a wider popularization. In contrast to what others might claim that "they [Anglowaiti writers] are doomed to be totally forgotten by the community" (Mahmoud, 2018, 115), the Anglowaiti writer Nada Faris is expanding the frontiers of Kuwaiti literature at large, shaping and describing and/or reflecting about different issues of contemporary Kuwaiti society, making valuable and lasting contributions to Kuwaiti literature and Arabic literature in general. Without writers like Nada

Faris, who deliberately chose English as the language of expression in her writings, Kuwaiti literature would be far less rich, vibrant, diverse and colorful. In addition to this, writing in English, Faris has the potential to make a huge impact on a wider scale, and to a greater extent by bringing into light feminist concerns, because it is widely known that the spread of feminist thought can give women the ideas and confidence to make positive changes within their lives and communities. Profoundly influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's theory of social transformation in contemporary twentieth century, Faris aspires to a social change through "Anglowaiti" movement. The change is necessary to advance and progress because life is not fixed and nothing can evolve from stability and human inactivity. For this reason, Faris is well-aware of the fact that literature is read by:

> teenagers and socialites in coffee shops and malls. Thus, my challenge was two-fold: First, to speak their language, that is to grip them, to make them want to turn to my articles rather than to flip to the next advert. Then to give them something new, something to make them think, or question, or a feeling that would resonate with them even after their coffee has gone cold. (Faris, n.d.-g)

"Anglowaiti" literature is perceived as a possibility for the human actors to bring about a transformation in society that starts with raising consciousness about:

> palpable struggles that we-Kuwaitis, that is, not imagined variations of 'the Arab' experience on a daily basis, things like cross-cultural marriages,

reconciling our national and regional identities, the growth of both apathy and

violence, repressed sexualities, and, as artists, what our work should look like,

to whom we address it, and from whom to seek patronage, to name a few.

(Faris, 2014a, 12-13).

In fact, Faris's motto is "I write to get back at people" (Faris, 2014b, 95) which denotes that she is a firm believer that literature can persuade people for a positive change in society.

**Consciousness Raising for Social Change Central to Faris's Art**

Art is produced for different purposes, thus has distinct functions. For Nada Faris literature represents not only a mirror of society as in Plato's concept of imitation, but it is also a driving force that can contribute to a social transformation in Kuwaiti society. Throughout Nada Faris's writings it is made evident the main goal of a social change in the contemporary Kuwaiti society by raising awareness about many injustices, oppression, inequalities, and in so doing promoting the pursuit of a positive social change through a feminist expression in the field of arts. In other words, lack of women's basic rights, gender oppression and many other cultural and social gender differences are a constant theme throughout Faris's literary texts which constitute a condition of concern within the feminist field, whose main preoccupation is "to end sexism and sexist domination and oppression, a struggle that include efforts to end gender discrimination and create equality" (hooks, 2000, 115). Despite the fact that women in Kuwait are considered much more emancipated than their Gulf peers (Allam, 2013), there are still basic rights that have been denied to them on the basis of sex in the twenty-first century. Tétreault

(2001) maintained that "in addition to legal limitations on women's political rights, other laws and administrative policies discriminate against Kuwaiti women, chiefly by directing state benefits disproportionately to male citizens" (204) favouring the continuation of a patriarchal system where women's basic rights are overlooked. In this regard, hooks (2000) emphasized that before women could change patriarchy we had to change ourselves and raise our consciousness. Understanding and exposing the way male domination and sexism was expressed, it created awareness in women of the ways they were victimized, exploited and oppressed (hooks, 2000). Consciousness raising transformed the lives of many women during the 1970s. Hogeland (1998) stated that consciousness raising novels in some cases depicted the protagonist's process of consciousness raising and in some others the novel "was designed to transact consciousness raising with its readers" not in any programmatic way, but "by personalizing and novelizing feminist social criticism" (ix). Hogeland (1998) further explained that even though consciousness raising novels were a specific and historically short-lived fictional form, consciousness raising was fundamental in "shaping feminist critical understandings of the relationship between reading and social change" (x). Additionally, "Historians of feminism's second wave agree that consciousness raising was central to Women's Liberation" (Hogeland, 1998, 24). Besides being crucial to feminist efforts, consciousness raising is, according to Greene (1991a):

> a re-membering, a bringing to mind of repressed parts of the self and experience
> […] that enables us to understand the processes that make us what we are and so
> to change what we are […] on the basis of which we may possibly be able to
> construct alternatives for the future. (300-301)

Reading Faris's fictional and non-fictional texts, the aim for a social change is noticeable because the goal is to unravel static perceptions of gender roles, and what is considered age and race appropriate (Faris, 2014). Faris believes that literature can transform people's minds and attitudes in order to "reshape the world by using justice and fairness" (n.d. -f) and "to make the world a better place" (n.d.-f). Having the vision of making the world a better place by starting to change the traditional opinions of gender roles, it constitutes a considerable step forward for literary activism in Kuwait using art as a vehicle to raise awareness about women's status quo. In the same vein, "Greene and Felski explicitly relate contemporary women's fiction to movements for social change" (Rose, 1992). Gayle Greene's "Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition" is grounded on the premise that reading and writing have played a "key role" (1991b, 9) in the women's movement. In fact, "reading and writing are in themselves subversive acts. What they subvert is the notion that things have to be the way they are" (Vonnegut, 2008, 6).

Faris's ideas coincide with other feminist activist writers who are mainly in opposition to the reform with the adoption of predefined roles for men and women in the private and public spheres. Feminists insist on the rejection of the role of women as mothers and wives as their solitary duty roles. Writers advocating this thought believe that all enjoyment and growth belong to men and all backward to women. According to feminist thought, women are free to define or live in any format of family structures, including nuclear family and marriage. Feminists believe in using legal and political opportunities to change the situation, provide equal economic opportunities, change in family and school. These thoughts influence contemporary writers who use literature as a way to spread progressive beliefs and goals since "Muslim societies, like many others, harbor illusions about immutable gender differences" (Moghadam, 1993, 5). Nada Faris is among writers who urges to disseminate and dislodge the immutable gender differences long

instilled in the Kuwaiti society because "There is a very strong contention that women are different beings – different often meaning inferior in legal status and rights – which strengthens social barriers to women's achievement" (Moghadam, 1993, 5). Women are defined as the 'other' or they are ignored, rendered invisible and silent, if they do not fit the patriarchal scheme because specific cultural values are tied to male interests: such as the opposition between rational (male) and emotional (female), nature (female) and civilization (male) – which position woman as the defining opposite or 'Other' of man. Outside the dominant definitions of male-dominated culture, women exist only as insane, inarticulate or irrelevant. The repression of a patriarchal society creates silences, things that cannot be said and these silences are disrupted by the avant-garde feminine practice of writing (Madsen, 2000). Writing helps each woman's individual survival and success in the world, by increasing her ability to function in her chosen endeavors.

As a writer, Faris appeals to feminist activism for "the betterment of society" (Faris, n.d.-h) like many other feminist writers (discussed in the second chapter) who endeavored to go against the norms of the culture, and to conceive alternatives forms of society – all of which are fundamental according to the feminist activist scholar Charlotte Bunch (1979). Through writing, Faris attempts to change the perceptions of predefined gender roles (Faris, 2014) since it is also known that the role of women was not entirely accepted to take control and in consequence, discouraged to "think analytically […] to question the way things are, or to consider how things could be different. Such thinking involves an active, not a passive, relationship to the world. It requires confidence that […] you can make a difference (Bunch, 1979, 7). Faris's pursuit for a change and making a difference in society through writing is "because [she] as well feels the need to produce art for something instead of merely creating it as something" (Faris, 2014d). Art has the capacity to contribute to a change of mentality, and in Dewey's ([1934] 1980) words, "art

breaks through gulf, walls, and barriers that other forms of communication cannot penetrate" (105, 244).

In other words, art helps people see new worlds that they did not know existed as they are introduced to new experiences through art. In experiencing a work of art, people are potentially challenged to rethink their beliefs and assumptions about themselves and their lives as they encounter new horizons (Mattern, 1999). Writing as an art form has a great power on people's lives because readers witness situations that can change ideology and lives, and Faris makes sure to "expose my adult readers to all sorts of styles, subjects and stories. I force them to question their own mental compartments and evaluative systems. Then I engage them with questions, issues, and scandals", says Faris (n.d.-f).

Nada Faris also exposes the writings in different "social networking devices that allow a person to transcend borders and divisions, to reach audiences that would otherwise be invisible or with whom it would have been difficult to communicate" (Faris, n.d.-f). Dewey ([1934]1980) argued that art is the "most effective mode of communication that exists" (286), "the most universal and freest form of communication" (270) and "communication in its pure and undefiled form" (244). These arguments imply that art is a form of communication through which people are aware about each other's differentiations and resemblances, break through some of the boundaries to understanding and consciousness, and develop some of the commonalities that define a developed community. Art represents the direct vehicle of a writer's message that will never fail to reach the audience's hearts and minds as it has occurred to a Kuwaiti female reader after reading one of Faris's texts. I quote at length Faris's statement:

A few months ago, on Instagram, I was contacted by a Kuwaiti woman, who informed me that the review I wrote had had a significant impact on her life. It made her question the state of education in Kuwait and the future of her children. She then took the initiative to pull out her children from school and embark on homeschooling. (Faris, n.d.-f)

This confirms Mark Vonnegut's (2008) statement "the world is a slightly different place just because they read a […] book" (6) in which the author raised awareness about important issues in society. Cosgrove (2008) argued that "the world is a different place after someone reads the books because of her/his concrete actions/reactions (whether conscious or not) that take place after reading the book" (237). After the audience reads a certain book, the common-sense version of a human being is stimulated, and people become more logical, thoughtful and empathetic in the real world. Theorists like Suzanne Keen (2006, 1997 cited in Cosgrove 2008, 236) are skeptical of the idea that the feeling responses that novels trigger are necessarily ethical. Others like Martha Nussbaum (1997, 1995, 1990 cited in Cosgrove 2008, 236) argued that novel-reading has the potential to make us better, more empathetic citizens with one another. It is also true that reading might not have the same effect on every reader, but as Joanne Frye[17] (1986, 191 cited in Hogeland 1998) explained, women learn "from female characters new ways to interpret her own and other women's experience, she helps to reshape the culture's understanding of women and participates in the feminist change of human experience" (x). Faris holds the same view, saying that "We need to see art as it is – a sociological phenomenon. And as such it can genuinely change the world" (Faris, n.d.-f). This statement echoes again the idea that writing

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[17] For more on Joanne S. Frye, see *Living Stories, Telling Lives: Women and the Novel in Contemporary Experience* (1986).

fiction can raise consciousness and can help to change readers by what they have read. Through literature, Faris aspires to educate the world and according to her, serious writers:

> do not simply write propaganda to serve the status quo or make commercial goods to grow a writing brand – we create art to elevate social consciousness, to dislodge dogma, and to challenge the status quo, even if we end up making a living out of our calling. (Faris, n.d.-c).

Faris strongly believes that art is one of the most powerful tools for raising social awareness because it can shape the most potent force that humankind has composed by sentiments and consciousness. Her writings are regarded as a great literary work since it masterfully works as integrally activist and forward-looking to change women's status in society.

### *The Importance of Literature*

In the article "How and When I Decided to Become a Writer" Faris mentions several reasons to explain the importance of literature in society. One of the reasons is that "literature allows us to live more than once" states Faris (n.d.-a). She points out that literature broadens our perspectives and encourages us to think differently, unconventionally, or it makes us see more than just what the front door shows. In other words, literature helps us realize the wide world outside that is surrounding us. With this, we begin to learn, ask questions, and build our intuitions and instincts, and we expand our minds.

"Literature transforms us" (Faris, n.d. -a) is another reason on why literature is considered relevant in our society. What Faris is trying to say 'by transforming us' is that literature holds the ability to incite change in thought, and this change can be translated into action, which can be internal or external. Literature is a catalyst for the course of transformation, and it has the power to change the way people think and interact with each other. According to Faris (2014a), it is wrong to think that "writers are escapists who do not understand reality or that they spend all day holding a mirror beside the world," (158) instead "good writers don't reflect reality. They change it" (Faris, 2014a, 158).

Faris maintains that we are accustomed to thinking of literature as mimetic, as a representation of reality such as it exists, while literature is in fact, according to her, a disruptive force, breaking up our fictions about the world we live and showing us new possibilities for the future. Literature, as she explains, has the effect to transform minds and hearts of the people, and it's not just a "record of historical or political events […] and a reflection of the reactions of a particular society" (Craig, 1975). Moreover, literary writings can transform people's minds and hearts. In "Lessons from Literary History: Texts that Changed the World", an article published in *The Elephant in the Room: Stories and Articles from Anglophone Kuwait*, Faris explains that many historical events would have not triumphed without the help of literature. Therefore, according to Faris (2014a), "writers create phenomenal pieces that inspire the public to view the world in a different manner, and it is these texts that showcase literature's hidden potential" (155). In spite of the fact that literature is considered as "commercial or niche" (Faris, 2014a, 156), "literature is potent – so powerful in fact that it has repeatedly changed the shape of the world" (Faris, 2014a, 156). Faris also highlights the fact that "literature enhances our biological organs" (n.d.-a) which implies an evolution of the human organism. Having evolved a large and

complex brain, human beings have the ability to think, imagine, create and learn from experiences. The human beings have used this ability to create technologies and literary and artistic works on a vast scale and to make a progress into a scientific understanding of ourselves as humans and the world. She (n.d.-a) continues to highlight the importance of literature saying that "it affects our social evolution." Literature provides unique insights into the course of human evolution that governs the progress of society, civilization and culture. It provides a better depth of infiltration than either historical narrative or biography because it can depict the emotional state and social perception of the characters, and the times with far greater profundity and realism. Thus, it can be an influential element to objective analysis of external institutions and events (Harish, 2012).

Faris (n.d.-a) also points out that "literature acts as a living record of the past and a wake-up call to the present" which is to say that present literature is aware of past literature. In other words, present literature builds on and interacts with past literature. Eliot (1975) highlighted this viewpoint when he asserted that there exists "an ideal order" (39) amid literary texts that adjusts the relationships between the old and new ones. Elliot also contended that "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (39). Since literature is a long-lasting product of the past, the present literature aims at finding its own voice, to be original and innovative. It is important for feminist activist recalling the past and reassembling to the present and the future, and/or to evoke the traditions as part of our human existence. For Greene (1991b), traditions should be viewed as a making and unmaking process, "wherein fiction performs complex negotiations with the works of the past, negotiations which are both appropriations and subversions" (7). In addition of recalling the past, Faris (n.d.-a) thinks that literature is not just a "museum where you see fossils from a distance behind a glass screen",

instead is a "living record" which "cautions us against making the same mistakes again" states Faris (n.d.-a). By means of evoking the past, Faris alludes to a second-wave feminist activist perspective by raising consciousness about the importance of literature on how people are "transformed" (Faris, n.d.-f) upon reading. This function is foregrounded in feminist fiction that is most explicitly concerned with change. In Greene's (1991a) words, "The feminist fiction that flourished in the late sixties and early seventies came out of a liberation movement, the so-called second wave feminism in this century, and focused on women's efforts to liberate themselves from the structures of the past [..] to express the 'newness' of now" (292).

"Finally, literature helps us deal with darkness," (Faris, n.d.-a) which in Faris's opinion "no other field of study" (n.d.-a) helps us deal with the sufferings and "come out on the other end as stronger, happier, and healthier individuals". The fact of writing represents a mode of persistence, an expressive and rational aperture to an inaudible conscience. This has other significances too. Writing has the supremacy to give women control over their personal lives. It proffers them possibilities of agency and autonomy. Women from the recent past have begun to write the 'actual', 'real' and not the 'ideal' aspect of their existence. Their writings achieve, to use Gayle Green's (1991b) words, "counterhegemonic interventions" (7) that are socially effective, and Faris is laying down the foundation for women's agency to take control over their own lives.

### Writing in "Response To" or "Against Certain Events": "Circumscribed Criticism"

Faris maintains that "writing is more than style or grammar," writing takes place in "response to or against certain events" (Faris, n.d.-b), thus, "a self-generating discourse cannot be judged in abstraction from existing social conditions" (Felski, 1989, 121) but must be

understood in relation to the needs and expectations generated by the contemporary events in society. In close reference to this, it is worth mentioning "Circumscribed Criticism", one of Faris's short stories, in which the protagonist fights for the women's rights. The story is written in the third person singular and set in Kuwait in the twenty-first century. This revolutionary and feminist story is written in 'response to or against certain events' within a society where criticism is not well tolerated. The protagonist is a Kuwaiti woman whose name is Ameena Abdulrazzag. She graduated from the College of Social Sciences at Kuwait University with a perfect 4.0 GPA and was named an intelligent robin by the country's administration. Nonetheless, as soon as she joined the Kuwaiti Women's Cultural and Social Society, she was no longer mentioned and praised, but called as "The Female Messiah" (35) by her fans or "The Female Anti-Christ" by her opponents (Faris, 2014a). The narrator describes Ameena as being one of the "craftiest feminist Kuwait has ever known" (Faris, 2014a, 43) who struggled fervently until her last breath to "Give women their rights – right now!" since "Half a democracy is not a democracy" (Faris, 2014a, 36). Ameena wrote vehemently about women's rights encouraging women to fight for their cause. An article signed by Ameena Abdulrazzag, "Anything He Can Do I Can Do Better" provoked a lot of criticism, but at the same time many women asked for their governmental positions (Faris, 2014a, 36). Furthermore, it led to the Blue Revolution of March 08, 2005 where thousands of Kuwaiti women dressed in blue, held signs, and protested in front of the Parliament (Faris, 2014a). Nevertheless, the patriarchal authorities suppress public feminist movements and Ameena's articles triggered the government's opposition in jailing her right after her article "We Were All Formed Female First" (Faris, 2014a, 37) was published in her newspaper *Sayidat Al Mustaqbal*. After her costly liberation, she promised to honor the country in her literary writings and for this she will "reject" (40) her "favorite pen, which is now lying in [her] drawers" (40)

since she made a promise and intends "to maintain no matter the consequences" (40). However, the publication of an article by one of her critics, caused her imprisonment again on the premise that she was a traitor to the country due to her feminist writings. The narrator tells us that she is imprisoned on "the 24th of July 2009 and passed away when she heard the news of the first anti-governmental demonstration where a hundred thousand Kuwaitis took the streets on the 21st of October, 2012, protesting against governmental corruption" (Faris, 2014, 42).

This story can be interpreted as a reflection of the fact that writing in response to or against certain events in certain parts of the world triggers negative consequences. Feminism may be removed from sight, but it is not necessarily extinguished, and voices of Arab women and men accelerate progressive transformations in society. The fact of being a woman who breaks the silence and decides to go against the norms and dedicate herself to writing is "precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (Juncker, 1988). Additionally, it has often been argued by different academics and writers that writing is a political act. In male-dominated societies when a woman decides to take up the pen and to express her own ideas on the paper is considered to be an act of subversion. Women writers interpret the world they inhabit and imagine an alternative space from a woman's perspective. This type of alternative art "marched into the sacred spaces of literature, making for a revolution that drew its strength from that other force for progressive social change – feminism" (Joseph, 2003).

Faris's writing is created with the purpose of contributing to a positive change in society by raising social awareness and "empowering people to create their own visions and personal strategies" (Faris, n.d.-f). Writing "responds consistently and materially to the stark reality it

aims so violently to eradicate" (Faris, n.d.-b), and Faris's aim is to change the mentality of Kuwaiti society, "to establish a serious mindset that recognizes Kuwait as a sovereign, democratic Arab state that appreciates diversity, advocates hard work (not *wasta*[18]) and offers a safe haven for anyone (Kuwait and non-Kuwaiti) to work and live with respect" (Faris, 2014a, 6). This statement is indicative of the fact that Faris embarks on literary activism and shows that feminism is not only about gender, but about racial equality, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, spirituality, class and many other markers of who we are. Echols (1989) claimed that the goal of feminist thought is to reorder society and this also promotes equal rights in many aspects of life from a social, political, personal and professional perspective. Faris's feminist art explores what it means to not only be a woman, but to be a woman from a certain time and place. It explores the question of identity, the lives and concerns of every Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti where she offers an imperative for change or makes an audacious or unapologetic political statement in the best interests of women. Her feminist writing art allows for hope and the possibility of an improved society.

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[18] "*Wasta* is a versatile notion with no immediate parallel in the English language […] *Wasta* translate into 'intermediary' or 'intermediary means.' *Wasta* is a way to get there […] they can take care of the problem […] the term really evolved new meanings – now you can say, 'oh, his dad is a real *wasta*,' meaning he can get stuff done for you. So, it refers to a person. But you can also think of it as a process: '*wasta* does its worth.' You're not talking about a specific person anymore. Or 'with *wasta* you can do anything.' 'You better get *wasta'* is a very common clause in speech. If you have *wasta*, you can get it done in a day. It means you can get it done if you have a way – an intermediary way, a way to get in, or someone inside the system" (Gardner, 2010, 154-155) to help you with whatever you need, even getting a driving license. Gardner (2010) further explains that "People even talk about Vitamin W – that's *wasta* […] My informants described many scenarios that might potentially require *wasta*: securing placement at the University […] obtaining the appropriate papers for importing labor, or securing public housing or government loans, for example. Similarly, for both men and women seeking jobs in the public sector, familial, sectarian, and tribal connections" (155-156). "This social capital is commonly used to achieve certain objectives which may be political, financial, social among other areas of life. It is sometimes negatively associated with corruption and nepotism" (Aseri, 2016, xiv). "The connections between *wasta* and the public sector are particularly intricate […] In this system, citizens have more power than noncitizens, and Sunnis have more power than Shi'ites" (Gardner, 2010, 155-156).

**A Persuasive Article for Gender Equality**

Right from the very beginning of the article "Is Gender Equality an Oxymoron?" published in 2016 in *Economic & Political Weekly Journal*, Faris poses an activist feminist question using a rhetorical device which creates a paradox on whether there is any gender equality in the twenty-first-century Kuwaiti society. The irony, masterfully created, incites people to think carefully and reflect on the different forms of discrimination[19] against women in spite of the equality[20] ensured to them by the law. Alike, the goal of feminism as a political movement is to make women and men more equal legally, socially, and culturally. It is relevant to note that gender inequality can take many different forms, depending on the economic structure and social organization of a certain society and on the culture of any certain group within that social order. However, whenever we speak of gender equality, it is usually women who are disadvantaged relative to similarly situated men. In terms of labor wages, women often receive lower pay for the same or comparable work, and they are commonly blocked in their chances for advancement, especially to higher positions. According to Lorber (2001), when

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[19] "Kuwaiti law and practice discriminate against women in violation of the ICCPR. In particular, provisions in the Personal Status Law discriminate against women in relation to inheritance rights, the weight given to their testimony in judicial proceedings, and their rights in contracting marriage, during marriage, and at its dissolution. In addition, provisions of the Penal Code reduce or eliminate punishments for violent crimes committed by men against women, and criminalize abortion even when it is necessary to save a woman's life, and other laws and practices prohibit women from engaging in public affairs and public service. Further, other laws and practices discriminate against women in relation to passing nationality to their spouses and children, and effectively prevent women in some cases from living legally as a family with husbands and adult children who are not recognized as Kuwaiti nationals".: https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/kuwait/kuwait-05.htm [Accessed 24 September 2019].

[20] "Under article 2 (1) and article 3, it is also bound to ensure equality before the law, without discrimination. Article 26 of the Covenant states: "All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." In its Concluding Observations, the Human Rights Committee declared that "Kuwait must grant women effective equality in law and practice and ensure their right to non-discrimination"; "polygamy should be prohibited by law"; and Kuwait "should take all the necessary steps to ensure to women the right to vote and to be elected on equal footing with men," and ensure that women fully enjoy their right to equal access to public service". https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/kuwait/kuwait-05.htm [Accessed 24 September 2019].

women professionals are matched with men of comparable productiveness, men still get greater recognition for their work and move up career ladders faster. Nonetheless, gender inequality can take many different forms, but on a general basis, gender inequality means that work mostly done by women is paid lesser than the work mostly done by men (Lorber, 2001). In this case, Faris's discussion of the term 'equality' does not necessarily mean similarity or to be equal to men in every single way, quoting at length:

> It doesn't mean that because women give birth and thus need maternity leave, then men should be granted exactly the same handout. Rather, it means that women should not be discriminated against just because they are mothers, or have the potential of becoming mothers. The right to work, to education, to healthcare, and so on, ought to be granted to everyone in spite of gender— not the right to a specific job, a school, or a hospital. (Faris, 2016, 133)

What Faris argues is that women face different forms of discrimination, and one of them is that women have been denied the right to apply for certain job positions simply because they are females, and/or "due to the perceived lack of fit responsible for many types of biased judgments about women in work settings" (Heilman, 2001, 660). This idea is also backed up by Lorber (2001) when the critic argued that because of gender bias and the way in which it influences evaluation in work settings, being competent provides no assurance that a woman will advance to the same organizational levels as an equivalently performing man. Stereotyped beliefs about the attributes of men and women are pervasive and widely shared. Moreover, these stereotyped beliefs have proved to be very resistant to change (Heilman, 2001). Men and women are thought to differ both in terms of achievement-oriented traits, often labeled as "agentic," and in terms of

social- and service-oriented traits, often labeled as "communal" (Bakan, 1966, cited in Heilman 2001, 658). Thus, men are characterized as aggressive, independent, and decisive, whereas women are characterized as helpful, sympathetic, and concerned about others. Not only are the conceptions of women and men different, but they also often are oppositional, with members of one sex seen as lacking what is thought to be most prevalent in members of the other sex (Heilman, 2001). There is evidence that traditional stereotypes of women and men predominate not only in work-settings as recounted above, but as well in non-work settings (Heilman, 2001).

Faris's (2016) explanation for this gender difference is that "Identity and belief systems for the majority rest upon defining genders as fundamentally unequal. […] The distinction carries with it a semantic hierarchy" (133). Following up on the idea of hierarchy, theorist Acker (1990) stated that the early radical feminist critique of sexism criticized hierarchy as male-created and male-dominated structures of control that oppress women. Furthermore, Al-Mughni (1993) agrees on the same idea of the hierarchical ethical order, emphasizing the fact that Muslim women, veiled and obedient, are everywhere subordinate to men and are limited to roles dictated by their biological constitution. "Because human sexes are different, then one of them has to be better, stronger, faster, etc, than the other" (Faris, 2016, 133). It is in this view that Faris (2016) disagrees with the patriarchal hierarchy, arguing that "humans have resorted to numerous explanations" (133) to justify the gender hierarchy, hence the oppression of women to a male-dominated society resulting in gender discrimination.

Religion, tradition and culture are often used to justify women's subordination in society. Faris refutes the three explanations that justify that hierarchy. The first one is the "religion argument" (2016, 133), and "in all the world's major religions, religious texts have been interpreted to reinforce the power of men in society" (*Culture, Religion and Gender*, 2002).

According to Faris "discrepancies exist not just between men and women, but within these two human categories as well, […] however, religions tend to offer basic rights and resources to all its adherents" (2016, 133). Regarding this statement, scholars have demonstrated that the Qu'ran contains principles of gender equality and wider issues of social justice, thus laying grounds for challenging patriarchal traditions (Kynsilehto, 2008). Faris (2016) goes on to accentuate the fact that "religions tend to illustrate that gender norms themselves are mutable, changing with context, and shifting according to the necessity of the time" (133). Moghadam (1993) affirms that "By examining changes over time and variations within society and by comparing Muslim and non-Muslim gender patterns, one recognizes that the status of women in Muslim majority societies is neither uniform nor unchanging nor unique", thus "Islam is interpreted differently over time and space" (7). Faris (2016) agrees with this view and writes that "regardless of mercuriality, religions offer basic access to rights and resources that transcend gender differences" (133). Furthermore, she relies on the same idea on which scholars have demonstrated how it is not the texts themselves but rather their interpretations that have allowed for patriarchal traditions to persist (Kynsilehto, 2008).

Another argument that Faris (2016) questions and that traditionally justifies the gender hierarchy is "the 'nature' argument" (133). She holds the view that "nature is actually gender-blinded. It does not deny differences. It does not gloss over them or pretend that they are merely a figment fabrication of bigot' racists imagination. Rather, it simply discounts their relevance when it comes to accessing its own resources" (Faris, 2016, 133). It is clear that she opposes the pervasive gender discrimination installed in patriarchal societies due to the argument that gender inequality is due to the distinction in nature between men and women. According to Faris (2016), "gender equality is thus absolutely a natural phenomenon" (133) just "like religion itself" (133),

that does not make any differences nor preferences in base of their gender. Like many other scholars who conclude that gender is a socially constructed component that reflects a society's views regarding appropriate roles for men and women and is only instigated by traditional belief, cultural norms and customary practices, Faris (2016) concurs with the idea that gender equality "becomes tainted with social philosophies that justify inequity for various reasons, mostly for dominance disguised as security, and these philosophies are then maintained through conditioning, a phenomenon that is present in the animal kingdom as well as ours" (133). What Faris tries to convey is that gender inequality is not only a socially constructed argument but also a natural one that has been conditioned by a male-dominated system with the main reason for subordination and governance over a possible matriarchal society. Faris (2016) goes on to argue that "It could be helpful then to make a distinction between 'natural law' and 'animal law'. One does not deny the existence of difference, but the other uses difference as a platform from which to legislate worthiness" (133-134). She maintains the idea that differences between sexes exist because of the 'natural law' that is used to create norms and rules for the dominated part. From the carefully chosen words, Faris diligently knows how to incite people's minds with these provocative statements in a male-dominated society in which the feminine gender is expected to lower the voice and behave accordingly to social rules. Through the comparison amid the 'natural' and 'animal law' worlds Faris defends that there is practically no difference between these two kingdoms, except for the fact that "the other" (134) establishes an order that creates a difference between "worthiness" (134) and "unworthiness", thus, creating a gender difference that mostly favours a male-dominated society.

The third argument that justifies the gender hierarchy in Faris's terms is "The 'It Didn't Happen Yet, So It Must Be Inapplicable'". According to her statement, if gender equality is "a

contestable topic, it will never manifest in the real world" (2016, 134), and there is a very small chance for gender equality to flourish, giving green light to the pervasiveness of gender discrimination and a red light to the empowerment of women in Kuwait. According to Faris (2016), the reason why this is happening is because "they reduce the concept to idealism, to abstraction, and dismiss attempts to transform the goal into an accomplishment" (134). By reducing the concept to idealism, "it can be thought of as corresponding to the conventional sense of ideal, as in perfectionism or utopianism" (Vincent, 2013, 237). According to Lane (2018) "idealism has frequently been thought to be opposed to realism" (60). Considering that idealism applies to the state of mind and is not reduced to a real condition, the idea of gender inequality it would also become impossible to dismantle and "inapplicable" (Faris, 2016, 134) within a traditional society. Nevertheless, Nada Faris (2016) states that:

> narrative of human progress is replete with drastic dismantlement of perceived reality. Slavery is perhaps the most obvious example. One minute it was impossible to dismember, and the next moment it was banned on a global scale. Of course, this is an exaggeration. Thousands of years and manifold wars and battles have been spent in debunking human apathy when it came to slavery. But once it was outlawed, a new reality triumphed. In addition to slavery, cannibalism and sorcery were perceived unshakeable once upon a time, and so was the idea that the human body is composed of four humours and that travelling to the edge of the flat earth meant risking falling off. (134)

From this paragraph, it's noticeable that Faris maintains a hopeful and positive attitude toward a change for gender equality, that even the most unthinkable events of human history changed their course of life. In the same way gender equality will triumph over the old and conservative traditions that keep it stable. Additionally, Faris reminds readers about these historical events that took place over the years through struggle and wars and is trying to prove that the women's agency for gender equality is not an unattainable reality if only people choose to discard the same old ideas that things can stay the same for "hundreds and thousands of years" (Faris, 2016, 134).

Faris believes in the power of transformation, similarly as the Heraclitean doctrine that everything flows, nothing stays still (Mount, 2010), and that things will not pervade the same way as they are now. Everything is in a state of becoming and flux, and that nothing has any firm existence (Mount, 2010). Hence, nothing is stable and everything changes, and change brings with itself a transformation of a society that most of the time favours development and progress in every aspect of life. Nevertheless, the problem is that "we refuse to pick alternatives to the habits and ideas we render 'real'" states Faris (2016). People choose to remain faithful to the old traditional ideas thinking that there's no other way for them to be changed, and the life cycles continues to take place "in a cosmically regulated pattern of recapitulation without change - without progress" (Tétreault & al-Mughni, 1995a, 65). Tradition is the term that Tétreault and al-Mughni (1995a) indicated as to the "the term that we use to refer to the remnants of the dynastic realm in the modern world. When we speak of 'tradition' and 'traditional life', we speak implicitly of timelessness and subjection as well" (65). In Faris's (2016) article, the reality that people envisioned is essentially the tradition that people "render real." Marry Ann Tétreault and al-Mughni (1995a) continued saying that "Hidden beneath the gloss of 'tradition' are the

assumptions of the dynastic realm: the interconnected concepts of legitimate subjection and an inherent absence of progress or development" (65). The traditional unchanging system pattern automatically affects the progress and stagnates the empowerment of women in a subjective society because "persons whose position in life are determined by qualities independent of their individuality" (Tétreault & al-Mughni, 1995a, 65).

With this in mind, the core issue of Faris's (2016) article is the fact that gender inequality persists because of "a result of tribal-centric philosophies" (134) that people choose to believe as plausible explanations for a gender hierarchy. According to her (2016), "Gender is not the biological and physical characteristics of humans, but rather the ways in which society expects and disciplines its own people to behave" (133). What Faris tries to highlight is the fact that women behave and perform in accordance with the society's expectations about her femininity, which leads us to the most feministic statement that: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product […] which is described as feminine (De Beauvoir, 1949, 330). De Beauvoir (1949) argued that men set the standards and values, and women are the Other who lack the qualities the dominants exhibit. Men are the actors, women the reactors. Men thus are the first sex, women always the second sex. Men's dominance and women's subordination is not a biological phenomenon, De Beauvoir maintained, but a social construction that denies its universal overdetermination. The same idea is maintained by other feminists that highlight the fact that gender inequality is a direct result of a social construction and intensely entrenched in the structure of societies. Lorber (1997) sustained the idea that "Gender inequality is built into the organization of marriage and families, work and the economy, politics, religions, the arts and other cultural productions, and

the very language we speak" (8), and for "Making women and men equal, therefore, necessitates social and not individual solutions" (Lorber, 1997, 8).

An important idea that Faris (2016) points out is the fact that "gender is not a mental abstract social construct, but rather a material one" (133), and while it is determined by society's expectations and conditioning, "it is often rooted within genetic, biological, mental and emotional characteristics" (Faris, 2016, 133). In this context, Faris theorizes gender as an individual production. In a similar line, the feminist theorist Nancy Chodorow (1995) stated that "gender is not entirely culturally, linguistically, or politically constructed. Rather, there are individual psychological processes in addition to, and in a different register from, culture, language, and power relations that construct gender for individual." Other feminist theorist like Risman (2004) situates "gender as embedded not only in individuals but throughout social life" (431) Furthermore, Lorber (1994) maintained that gender is an institution that is entrenched in all the social processes of everyday life and social organizations.

Faris's article "Is Gender Equality an Oxymoron?" calls into question "whether our inherent differences justify exploitation, subordination or exclusion from basic rights and resources" (Faris, 2016, 133). In other words, she arguably questions whether the discrimination toward women is a justifiable and reasonable motif that is instilled in society for the simple reason of being born females. According to al-Mughni and Tétreault (1995a), "their most natural and essential role is that of mother. The family is their natural domain, where they are maintained and protected by their husbands" (72) and due to their "biological constitution" (Ibid) women covered and obedient are subordinate to men and restricted to their roles (Al-Mughni, 1993). Taking into consideration that feminism is a fighting creed that must be continually, and universally, critical of oppression and injustice (Mookherjee, 2009), Faris engages in using

words like 'exploitation', 'subordination' or 'exclusion' to emphasize a strong discrepancy to any kind of injustice toward women taking a feminist activist stance fighting for a gender equality in Kuwaiti society.

Faris's article draws attention to the issue that "gender-based inequity persists as a result of social conditioning" (Faris, 2016, 133). Raising feminist concerns in this article, Nada Faris tries to persuade people to take action and engage in creating a social change in order to change the status quo of gender inequality because in the end "gender differences rest upon our shoulders" (Faris, 2016, 133). Faris writes that gender relations, like the common law and racial practices, are regarded, as natural or pre-political but are actually socially constructed, alterable, and unjust (Sunstein, 1988). Similarly, Chodorow agrees with the fact that many of the middleclass restructurings in the areas of education, health, working environments, family lawmaking, and so forth, were not believable in pre-capitalist societies. Also, not long-ago women's control over their bodies were forbidden topics for activist, academics and the public, but it has been a major accomplishment for feminist to place these subjects at the center of public debates (Choudhury, 2015). Faris brings into light the long-instilled gender inequalities and makes use of art for raising awareness and addressing a serious and thought-provoking question to the reader on whether "we collectively choose to subscribe to deterministic principles that creatively rob one another of dignity, happiness and basic access to rights and resources? Or do we intend to hold society accountable for the inequality present today in the name of gender differences?" (Faris, 2016, 134).

The tone employed in the last two questions can be described as sarcastic since the intention is to clearly eradicate any kind of inequality, and for this it is necessary the assistance and support of the society. Also, the use of the term "oxymoron" gives strength and power to the

feminist movement that Faris creates through literature, trying to catch people's attention by raising awareness through her inspiring twenty-first century activist writing. The article is identified as well as an imperative call to society not only to reflect on gender inequalities but also to start taking action because at the end of the day, a matter of choice rests on our hands, and it depends on the society whether its goal is to keep everything immutable or involve into a positive social transformation. This gender article can have an influential impact on the reader since it can change perspectives on gender differences and eventually drive people into a social change by dissipating the traditional views of gender stereotypes.

## Conclusion

Nada Faris's writings can be categorized within the literature of feminist activism that challenges gender norms. For Faris, writing becomes a space to reflect the current state of society and its problems as well as to induce people to envision a new possible world in which those issues and conditions are defied and transformed. Hence, she regards literature as a central movement for a social change in the contemporary Kuwaiti society, one where discriminatory gender norms can be questioned and challenged. Her art aims at changing reality because she recognizes an urgent need to address the issues arising from a fragmented and discriminatory society that still holds dear conservative and traditional views. Faris is ardently driven to transform society through her feminist activist literature and to make it more egalitarian. The primary focus of her literature is to lead to a positive change in the Kuwaiti society, one where gender equality prevails, and alternative ways of thinking help to promote freedom and individuality.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# PATRIARCHAL DOMINANCE AND FEMALE RESPONSE

## Introduction

In this chapter, I attempt to analyze some of the most common themes that appear throughout Nada Faris's two short stories. In both stories, characters try to create their life under a patriarchal dominance that will be analyzed in relation with their contemporary Kuwaiti society. For this reason, it is relevant to highlight that "the Middle Eastern Muslim family has long been described as a patriarchal unit, and it has been noted that Muslim family laws have served to reinforce patriarchal gender relations and women's subordinate position within the family" (Moghadam, 2004b, 137). In this way, patriarchy fosters a clear hierarchy, in which power is conducted by male leaders of households placing men in a superior position to women and children. In a patriarchal society women stay relegated to their domestic functions and are "subject to distinct forms of control and subordination" (Moghadam, 2004b, 141). In addition to this, feminists identify two dimensions of patriarchy — public and private. Private rights are women's rights in marriage, divorce, mobility, and inheritance (i.e., the Shari'a regime), whereas public rights are reserved to public spheres such as education and politics (Sadiqi, 2008). Kandiyoti (1988), who conceptualized gender relations as a "patriarchal bargain," calls attention to women's status as the outcome of negotiation. The "patriarchal bargain" restrains women, while at the same time offers space in which women improve tactics and negotiate areas of independence. Kandiyoti (1988) argued that patriarchal bargain varies within societies and across

classes and ethnicities. Wealthy women enjoy areas of autonomy that poor women do not. Women from privileged regions or ethnicities might be more empowered than males from less privileged areas. Finally, because it is a bargain, it can relate to specific aspects or dimensions of life, such as the public or private space.

My analysis begins with two alluring short stories "Raising Jenna" and "30 Years Marriage", both included in *Before Young Adult Fiction* (2013). One of the significant features of these two narratives is that they introduce female characters who represent the revolutionary post-oil and modern Kuwaiti female. Their respective female characters demonstrate female's fury and rebellion against a male-dominated society where women's status is considered inferior to that of a man. Whereas "Raising Jenna" depicts male violence and female revenge, "30 Years Marriage" portrays the submissiveness and silence of a woman who gradually transforms herself toward the end of the story. Additionally, these two stories share an open ending, one that is left to the reader's imagination and expectation. The narratives are written in an ironic way to awaken the reader's concealed inner intentions of subordinating women to men in the familial, legal, economic, social, cultural and artistic realms. Both short stories explore the theme of 'gender and violence' as a way of reflecting the objectification and oppression of women that is still going on in the contemporary Kuwaiti society. To be a feminist activist is thus to become aware of this oppression and, having realized that it is embedded in the cultural belief system of society, to work to obliterate it to improve women's role in society.

**"Raising Jenna"**

"Raising Jenna" is a short story included in *Before Young Adult Fiction* (2013) and republished again in 2014 *The Elephant in the Room: Stories and Articles from Anglophone Kuwait*. It enlists the reader's imagination by disrupting chronology throughout its development. Past and present actions alternate, to create a better understanding of the characters and their actions. Toward the end of the story these past and present actions are interwoven, yet the author leaves the ending open and free to our imagination to what might occur afterwards. The open ending story and the refusal of linearity are characteristics that have been attributed to feminism metafiction being considered qualities associated with women's writing and female boundary fluidity. "Raising Jenna" is one of the several short stories of Nada Faris that includes elements of feminist overtones. I consider this short story a revolutionary text, being a contemporary groundbreaking fictional attempt to represent Kuwaiti women's angry revolt against patriarchal authority. Most of the stories that are published between 2010 and 2019 by Kuwaiti writers do not reflect the status of Kuwaiti women nor introduce characteristics of feminist activism, hence "Raising Jenna" is one of the several short stories of Nada Faris that can be said to be a reversal of the dominant literary tradition of portraying the Muslim female stereotype representing the relegation to the dominant patriarchal system rooted in the society.

"Raising Jenna" revolves around a dissolved and short-lived marriage that resulted with the birth of Jenna who grew up for thirteen years with her Kuwaiti father named Abdullah AlKhadran. Emily, her mother, decides to return to England soon after she gives birth to Jenna. Emily leaves her Kuwaiti family, her husband and her daughter thinking that she would come back for her daughter in the future. At the end of the story, the narrator implies that Emily will

return for her after thirteen years. The protagonist of the story is Abdullah AlKhadran because he is present not only in the past events, but also in the present days of the story. He is described as a "millionaire" (43) whereas Emily's class is not mentioned. The past events correspond to the beginning of Abdullah and Emily's relationship when they were classmates at university. Among these events, there is also a depiction of Noor's young life and ideology. Noor is the key character of the story, whose ideas reflect a social change in society by going against the predetermined gender roles and norms of a woman in a strictly conservative society. The present events of the story describe Abdullah's life taking care of Jenna, who is thirteen years old. Noor is described much older and a dramatic event affects her life and her husband.

## Male Authority, Female Response

Feminist analysis stresses the way in which patriarchal gender norms outline men's dominance, and how this power helps to create gender structures that legitimate men's use of authority against women. This aspect is also exhibited in "Raising Jenna" where the main protagonist, Abdullah is depicted in an authoritative position to his wife and daughter. The story starts in England when Abdullah and Emily were just colleagues at university. The beginning of their relationship could not be considered as the most loving one because there was a constant rejection toward Emily. This rejection lasted for around "three years" (29), but Emily kept insisting on being with him. The story opens when Emily is standing at Abdullah's door, crying to be left inside his house. After being left outside on the street crying all night at his door, the next day Abdullah goes straightforward to her parents to ask for her hand and offers a dowry[21]

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[21] In Islamic culture before the formal betrothal of a couple can take place, the two families discuss about the financial contribution that is paid to the bride. The size of the mahr – the dowry – is an indicator of the family's social status and the value that they place upon the bride-to-be (Monger, 2004).

even though her parents do not belong to the same Kuwaiti culture. His intentions are truthful and he decides to marry her. Also, he wants "to fix Emily" (35) because "She humiliated herself last night" (36). Although Emily's mother considers that "There's nothing wrong with my daughter" (35), for Abdullah's patriarchal culture, it is shameful for a woman to insinuate any kind of sexual behavior (Adibi, 2006), this being connected to Emily's insistence of entering his house. Therefore, Abdullah considers that marrying Emily would save her from any further dishonorable behavior. Abdullah, portrayed as being very confident on himself, states in front of Emily's parents that "she'll agree [to marry him]. She spent the night crying at my doorstep because I wouldn't let her in. I had to step over her body to come here" (35).

Right from the very beginning, Abdullah demonstrates and enforces his control and power over her by not allowing her in. However, dating as currently practiced in much of the world does not exist in Islamic culture. There is no live-in or acknowledged physical relationship whatsoever before marriage (Joseph, 2006). Rather, in Islam premarital relationship of any kind between members of the opposite sex are forbidden. After Emily's long-desired wish to be asked for marriage by Abdullah, the author also mentions that her parents refused to come to her wedding in Kuwait, especially because Abdullah's meeting with them did not end in very good terms. One of the reasons is that Emily's parents did not welcome the concept of the "generous dowry" (34) and her mother replies "I don't know," […] "You seem like a nice young man, but I don't quite feel comfortable selling you my daughter. Even for this generous price" (34-35). As it is obvious there is a clash of cultural beliefs about the dowry. In relation to this, Ghanim (2009) highlighted that "the dowry, *mahr*, an inherent element of every Muslim marriage plays an important role as both deterrent and compensator by providing women with a bargaining position to negotiate the terms of marriages, if not divorces" (8). Thus, one of the main

instruments of oppressing women and ensuring their inequality and inferiority in marriage is perceived as a source of power for women. Once again, this claimed sense of power that women derive from dowry makes more sense within patriarchal societies where inequality between men and women is the norm. In the same vein, it has also been argued that the family provides protection from the state aggression and is not an institution for the oppression of women.

As previously mentioned, Emily runs away right after giving birth to her only child, and this escape is a response to Abdullah's devaluation of her self-identity. From what we perceive, this escape was not within Emily's plan until Noor, who is her sister-in law, was commenting about leaving Kuwait. From that moment onwards Emily felt like this would be the only way to leave the country and abandon her husband, but the problem would be her new born baby. Faris evokes Emily's thoughts and emotional state of this escape making a contrast between the enthusiasm of leaving and the harshness of staying pointing out to "the exit sign" (65), which symbolizes Emily's escape: "When Emily opened them [the eyes] again she saw past Noor where the exit sign on the ceiling flickered, first bright with green light, and then dim with gray darkness" (65). Symbolically, the color "green" of the exit sign transmits the message of hope and a new life far away, whereas "darkness" conveys the idea that everything is black and very difficult to continue living in Kuwait. Emily's last words in the story are "Noor, take me with you." "I don't want to stay here either. Please, take me with you" (66). Her pleading accentuates her ultimate decision. She repeats the same words "take me with you" (66) to emphasize the fact that she is not wronged about her thoughts and wishes. Thus, she needs to repeat again in order to express her desperate need of leaving stressing it with "Please", as if she were feeling suffocated and could not bear her existence into that environment anymore.

Metaphorically, the same feeling is illustrated again by the third person omniscient narrator in a way to acknowledge her pain and intolerable reality with AlKhadran family: "Noor's hesitation [the fact of refusing to take Emily with her] felt like a rope tangling around Emily's neck, tightening more thoroughly every time Noor shook her head in fright" (66). Emily's desire to escape from Abdullah and his family and eventually succeeding in her endeavor to leave Kuwait right after giving birth to her daughter, represents defiance, disobedience and the refusal to confine herself to any patriarchal system even though it meant to leave her baby daughter behind. Apparently, some of the reasons why she decides to leave are due to a feeling of inferiority, lack of support, and denial of basic rights. Before signing the marriage contract, Emily expected to have a wedding in England together with her family and friends since they could not fly to Kuwait; however, her fiancé imposed his authority and in a very confident and unquestionable manner he mentions that there's

"No wedding in England," Abdulla said as his phone began to ring. "That's final."

"But what about my family? What about my friends? They can't fly to Kuwait!"

Her fiancé shook his head. Before Emily could argue, Abdulla answered his phone. (38-39)

From this dialogue, it is noticeable that Emily's wish has no significance for Abdullah. Her plans to celebrate with her family and best friends vanish in a couple of seconds. Her arguments for celebrating the wedding in England are considered needless and irrelevant in comparison to his business matters. Seen from a traditional Kuwaiti perspective, one could argue that a woman should support her husband's goals. Nevertheless, the lack of empathy and indifference toward

Emily contributes even more to enhance male authority. In addition to the negation of the celebration, Abdullah informs Emily of his decision to fly back to Kuwait. This resolve does not appear to be consulted or even talked about with the person who is going to be his wife, who has the right to an opinion in this matter whatever the outcome is. Emily's reaction is similar to that of an oppressed woman who does not have the courage to argue against her husband's decision to leave England, but it seems that she is concerned about her future career. Abdullah's words are worth quoting below and also Emily's feelings and thoughts told by the omniscient narrator:

"We'll leave Oxford, honey, and fly to Kuwait. My father's launching new branches. He needs me to help him manage them." Emily shook her head. She really wanted to say no, but the word was wedged between her stomach and gut and refused to travel upwards. She ran her tongue over her bloodied lip and asked about her career instead. "This is your career […] You will be a wife." (39-40)

This dialogue conveys the power of a man over a woman in a society where "social beliefs seem […] to control the social development of women through unequal expectations, thus placing the woman in an inferior position" (Al-Suwaileh, 2015). Al-Suwaileh, (2015) explains that the inferiority of women in the traditional Arab family is the result of customs and values that still impact the majority in spite of reforms and social transformation. Similarly, Crystal (1992) coincides with the same idea asserting that women are placed in an inferior position according to Kuwaiti social values and customs. Hence, Kuwaiti society delegated certain roles for both sexes and those roles have placed women and men to two distinct realms. It is

maintained that marriage and family living are fundamental to social reproduction and are "a sublime manifestation of the Divine Will and Purpose" (Mutahhari, 1982, 7, 31, 58 cited in Moghadam 2004b, 138). A man and a woman enter into a relationship of marriage and each performing roles are designated by nature and biology. "A woman fulfills her functions by being a wife and mother, while a man is to be the undisputed authority, the breadwinner, and the active member in public life" (Choueiri 1990, 127-8, cited in Moghadam 2004b, 139). Therefore, Emily is expected to be a wife and take care of the children, whereas Abdullah will be managing the family's business. Moghadam (2004b) referred to this as the patriarchal gender contract. Similarly, Kandiyoti (1988) argued that "Women strategize within a set of concrete constraints" which she identifies "as patriarchal bargains" (274) within a "male dominance system […] characteristic of the Muslim Middle East" (274) region. It is important to mention that Islam privileges patrilineal bonds and enjoins men to take responsibility for the support of their wives and children. In the Arab-Islamic family, the wife's main obligations are to maintain a home, care for her children, and obey her husband. He is entitled to exercise his marital authority by restraining his wife's movements and preventing her from showing herself in public.

Abdullah is the dominant figure and the authority who takes decisions including ones that concern his fiancé's future, obviously ignoring her wishes. This denotes the male dominant supremacy, and that they are "the spiritual leaders and decision-makers in the family" (Klatch 1988, 675-76 cited in Moghadam 2004b, 138). To express this viewpoint that her career is to be a wife, it is noticeable that there are no sublime words employed, instead it is a direct statement "This is your career […] You will be a wife" (40). The selection of these words can be closely associated with an order that must be obeyed instead of an opinion or recommendation that she should consider. Hence, she cannot accomplish her aim of having a career as she is told that her

career will be "a wife" (40). In regard to this matter, Al-Suwaileh (2015) emphasized that the religio-cultural system of Islam that operates in Kuwait assigns a subordinate status to women within the household […] As a form of sex-role ideology, the four religious systems (Malki, Hanbali, Hanafi and Shaf'i) culturally mandate that a woman's primary allegiance ought to be the family and that men be providers of economic as well as social status. Hence, housework and child-care remain women's most important responsibilities. However, for most Kuwaiti women, a combination of family and career is possible only insofar as it does not interfere with one's role as a mother and wife (Al-Suwaileh, 2015). Abdullah's denial of Emily's wish of having a career marks the beginning of a rejection towards him. In a very skillful manner, the author starts to point out to Emily's refutation and a strong negative attitude to the socio-cultural scene as soon as she touches the Kuwaiti soil. When they arrived at the Kuwait Airport, Emily silently exclaimed "Wait! Take me with you! I made a […] mistake!" (42) alluding to the fact that she truly regrets traveling to Kuwait after witnessing an airport scene and the extreme high temperature. After her arrival into the Kuwaiti family, Emily shows a slight feeling of detachment and even lack of integration into the patriarchal lifestyle.

Abbdullah is characterized as a respectful and traditional person who holds on to his cultural values, but at the same time he appears as an authoritative man. The fact of being dominant and authoritative is not precisely an element that Emily appreciates. On the contrary, his attitude contributed to a distant relationship, one where happiness started to vanish. Also, Emily is described as feeling lonelier every day at home, detached, and misunderstood by his family, especially his mother. As a response to all this, Emily's way out translates into escape and fleeing back to England, the place she missed so much. From a feminist perspective, Emily refused to abide by any of the patriarchal codes of the family and leaves everything behind

including her daughter. Emily's actions correspond to a woman who in Walby's (1990) terms cannot accept being treated inferiorly in a "patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit" (20).

## Gender-Based Violence and Offspring's Rebellion

Gender-based violence is one of the most extensive violations of human rights. The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence resulting in physical, sexual, or psychological harm to women. This may include verbal threats, coercion, economic abuse, or arbitrary deprivation of freedom in both the private and public spheres (Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2011). Thus, male violence against women has different forms; it can be physical, sexual, or emotional, and may be produced by a husband, a partner, a family member, colleague or another individual. Male violence against women and girls in the MENA region, as in the rest of the world, has dramatic effects for families and communities, as it not only causes harm to women, but also blocks productivity, diminishes human capital and weakens economic growth (Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2011). "Violence is a weapon for subordinating and oppressing women. As long as the present system of domination is maintained and juridical and social inequality continues, both men and States will feel legitimated to pursue violence against women" (Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2011, 2). While bell hooks (1984) agrees that male violence against women in the family is an expression of male domination, she believes that violence is inseparably linked to all acts of violence in this society that happen between the powerful and the powerless, the dominant and the dominated.

To analyze male violence against women in this story, we have to focus on Abdullah Al-Khadran. He is portrayed not only as a conservative and cold person, but also as a violent man who gets enraged rapidly. The story starts depicting him as a "tall, dark, and self-assured" person that keeps Emily at a distance without indulging into a conversation with her. In the first scene, when they meet, the narrator describes Abdullah as an emotionless and totally indifferent young male although Emily wishes for a closer encounter. His only words are "You're drunk," "Go home" (30), after which Emily cries the entire night outside at his door. These terms denote detachment, and to a certain degree it implies aggressiveness since violence is not simply hurting physically, it is also mental violence (Longva, 2018). From another perspective, Abdullah's actions can also denote caring. His intentions are far from being wicked even though she exclaims to him "Do whatever you want with me" (29). Progressively, as the story develops into the present, Abdullah is being depicted as an angry and to a certain degree aggressive person. The first scene in which Abdullah's violent personality can be easily perceived is at his daughter's school, when he starts yelling at the lady secretary of the school's reception:

> When he yells at the […] secretary to retrieve his daughter—his voice resounding against the walls of the reception hall, echoing throughout its length—the tip of his qitra[22] slips then sways over his left shoulder" […] "This is the second time I ask you to retrieve my daughter." His voice is a low rumble, cold and clipped. The vein on his neck pulsates with repressed anger. (31)

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[22] Ghutra: A headdress made of a piece of cotton cloth worn only after being folded in a triangular shape::https://www.e.gov.kw/sites/kgoenglish/Pages/Visitors/AboutKuwait/CultureAndHeritageCustomsAndTraditions.aspx, [Accessed on 14/02/2020].

Faris sets the reader into a state of inquisitiveness and wonder about Abdullah's next action and/or utterance. His "visible impatience" (32) and fury is also noticed by a Kuwaiti woman thinking that "this angry man should not be in the middle of an all-girls school" (33). This thought soon becomes a concern "wondering whether or not this Kuwaiti man would hurt her if she interjected and spoke to the staff herself. Would he dare insult or strike her in the presence of her own husband?" (56) Even though this couple belongs to a secondary role in the story, it highlights the violence against women in Kuwaiti society. This woman's thoughts involve the reader to become a witness to a possible aggression addressed against women in public spaces. The woman's feeling of fear of being hurt even though she's accompanied by her husband, signals the way violence is rooted in the structures, cultures, perceptions, and social values that dominate society (Ghanim, 2009).

Violence against women has been present for so long that it is often seen as a natural or inevitable. Surveys conducted in some countries find that even women have internalized the idea that domestic violence must be their own fault, and that men are entitled to correct their wives or female kin (Arfaoui & Moghadam, 2016). hooks (1984) concurs with the idea that "it is the violence condoned and accepted, even celebrated. Society's acceptance and perpetuation of that violence helps maintain it and makes it difficult to control or eliminate" (120). In the same vein, Nazar and Kouzekanani (2007) conducted a study on attitudes of a sample of 474 college-educated Kuwaiti citizens towards violence against women and their results revealed that 62% males and 38% females agreed that the man has the right to hit the woman, if he deems necessary. Similarly, hooks (1984) argued that "Many of us who were raised in patriarchal homes where male parents maintained domination and control by abusing women and children […] women also believed that a person in authority has the right to use force to maintain

authority" (119). In addition to this, Nazar and Kouzekanani's findings showed a general divergence with actions and/or attitudes that may suggest violence against women. According to Ghanim (2009), violence in the Middle East region is not an uncommon characteristic, it is an impulse that is embedded into the very core of domestic relations making it a carefully familiar and mainly confidential fact of everyday life. Ghanim (2009) explained that this pervasive, intimate style of violence takes many forms: physical, psychological, deliberate, unconscious, covert, and public. The omnipresent narrator gives a detailed characterization of Abdulah's personality talking about the way Jenna knows her father, who is a "hot-tempered man" (54) knowing him "as a violent creature all her life, angry to the point of delirium" (61) turning "over tables and wreck fine china" (54) and mistreating his daughter by striking "her into doors and walls" (54-55). The narrator exhibits his behavior as an aggressive person who didn't show any sign of love, kindness nor warmth toward his daughter. He believed that a distant and aggressive behavior would only educate her in an appropriate way and teach her manners, says Abdullah "I was strict. I know that. But I just wanted to raise her properly" (76). In the same vein, hooks (1984) mentioned that many parents behave "by saying things like 'I'm only doing this because I love you' while they are using physical abuse to control children, parents are not only equating violence with love, they are also offering a notion of love synonymous with passive acceptance, the absence of explanation and discussion" (123).

For a better interpretation of Abdullah's personality, the narrator makes sure to offer an additional description of Abdullah as a child, which is contrasted with the stiffness and aggressiveness of the present-day temperament. The narrator remarks that the one "who changed Abdulla's life forever" (37) is Jarrah Dawood, a childhood friend or a "phantom from a previous life" (36) who just met unexpectedly and undesirably at the school reception area while waiting

for his daughter to come. According to Jarrah's words, which are quoted below, Abdulla's behavior as a child was typical of a person who didn't only:

> loved to don heels and apply his mother's lipstick, oh no; he also spoke like a fairy. Remember Abdulla? Remember your utopia? He was always talking about a place where everyone was happy and independent; where people judged one another based on their contributions to society, rather than how much money they kept in their bank accounts. (50)

Unlike the intimidating man that Abdulla embodies nowadays, in the past he used to put on some of his mother's stuff, which caused negative reactions from his friends, bullying and mistreating him and eventually starting to call him as Om Sa'ad. At the same time, he used to dream as well with a world of his own, a paradise or utopia, which in the writer's terms, Utopia is a place where people would be recognized by their efforts dedicated to the society rather than their bank accounts. In this context, the main point is perhaps to highlight the importance of living in a society free of judgmental thoughts and unfair practices, that is a society filled with unbiased and kind-hearted people and making the world a better place. However, the utopian world represents a closed chapter in Abdullah's life, which was substituted with a cold-hearted person who

> is no longer that little boy who put his trust in others, who gets bullied and badgered. He promised himself after leaving Jarrah and his friends that he would change into a different person, a man respected and feared, a man looked up to rather than ridiculed. (51)

Moghadam (2011) and other sociologist of gender define masculinity as a set of images, values, interests, and activities held important to the successful achievement of male adulthood. Their concern with demonstrating their manliness obliged men to look for manhood characteristics, such as those exhibited by Abdullah Al-Khadran, and that empowers them to act strongly over the woman. Maynard and Winn (cited in Ghanim, 2009) highlighted that "Masculinity is a form of power and, to the extent that it is formulated in opposition to femininity, masculinity enables men to act out this power in the subordination and control of women. In one sense, then, to "become masculine is to become an oppressor" (80). What matters most for Abdullah is the fact that now he is a father, and at the same time the embodiment of a patriarchal structure which positions him in a very serious and responsible place, who cannot afford losing his daughter for this secret, quoting "it is at this moment that Abdulla remembers his purpose at Jenna's school, and the fear of losing his daughter reaches insurmountable proportions" (51). Abdullah wanted to keep his childhood events buried forever and never be mentioned again. The reason is that these events would jeopardize his image as an authoritative and aggressive man, typical characteristics of the social masculinity constructions that embody violence (Ghanim, 2009).

Yet, what he most feared in his life has been revealed exactly in front of his daughter which made the situation even worse says Abdullah "I never wanted you to find out about that period. I was a child. Your age. I wanted to protect you" (68). During that period of his life, he is presented as being a victim of mockery by his friends, but the highly exaggerated and inflated male ego and the patriarchal construction of masculinity, which is also connected with aggressiveness and violence, leave no room for male victims. A male victim is inconceivable or a contradiction in terms in the patriarchal context where men's weakness are to be hidden and

unexpressed (Ghanim, 2009). Therefore, he didn't want his daughter to discover the weakness and powerless of a man that was hidden inside him as a child because these attributes are associated with a woman's way of being. He wanted to keep intact the image and perception of the violence which is attributed to men, whereas weakness and oppression to women, and by raising "her properly" means raising his daughter within "the patriarchal social structures, where woman find themselves inferior to men, as men use their position of power to dominate and control women" and women "are presented as the weak and powerless sex" (Ghanim, 2009, 85).

Another instance where we can see Abdullah's slight anger and conservative personality is in the car with his daughter returning home from school. After Jenna knows about his father's past, in the car she demonstrates a bold attitude and tries to listen to music, perhaps as a way to start going beyond her father's restrictions. However, Abdullah immediately orders her to "cut that out" […] "No music in the car" (67). After having discovered about her father's past juxtaposed with his present-day attitude, Jenna's response is slightly infused with audacity and courage questioning him "Who says that?" […] "is it the conservative dad I've lived with for fourteen years that says this, or the other dude who wears heels and makeup?" (67). Jenna's answer denotes a rebellious attitude by voicing out her thoughts to her aggressive and conservative father. At the same time, she also knows that for being recalcitrant and insubordinate to her patriarchal aggressive father she would be punished. Thus, "she braces herself for the slap. She unclenches her jaw and loosens her facial muscles, aware that a high velocity strike would hurt less and heal faster if she embraced it" (67). Knowing about this form of faster healing after the strike, it already implies the fact that she must have been beaten several times before, as she mentions "Strike me! Go on! Do what you used to do when you were lost for words" (69). Male violence represents a fundamental element of the social masculinity structure

that tends to naturalize male violence, giving it a sense of normality or a common characteristic of a man, to which woman feel abused and inferior to male-power. Nevertheless, women's uprising against patriarchal values consists, among other things, of rejecting verbally what it seems wrong, as in the case of Jenna when she

> decides to let everything out in one burst, to become the fireworks on Liberation
> Day and self-destruct: "I don't know anything about you! I know what you don't
> like; I know that list by heart because every bullet point is imprinted on my body
> in blue and purple markers."(69)

The fact of knowing what he doesn't like, implies constant rules and norms that Jenna has to abide by, otherwise disobedience will trigger her father's aggressive behavior. As a result, Jenna's rebellion reached the outmost of her existence, exclaiming to him that:

> If it is my mother, if she has come to claim me at last, if you are trying to bribe
> me with music and feigned compassion, you should give it a rest. I've made up
> my mind. I'm going with her. (69-70)

This dialogue is of great relevance since it symbolizes Jenna's revolt against her father's orders and violent attitude. As a very young character, Jenna is the epitome of a new generation that is about to bring about a change in society by going against her father's norms or patriarchal gender norms. It is noticeable how she increasingly rejects her father's violent behavior and does not forgive him even though he's trying to be lenient by finally allowing her to listen to music. It is

also interesting to see how Jenna finally decides to go to her mother even though she has little information about her whereabouts, yet she prefers to leave her father perhaps to escape the violent aggressions and as a form to rebel against him and the patriarchal system he symbolizes.

By exposing the theme of male violence against women, the story intensifies and raises consciousness about violence against children and women and the urgency to eradicate it. Women must oppose violence to avoid a culture of violence by developing "viable resistance strategies and solutions" (hooks, 1984, 130). Hooks argued that "Until women and men cease equating violence with love, understand that disagreements and conflicts in the context of intimate relationships can be resolved without violence and reject the idea that men should dominate women, male violence against women will continue" (1984, 125) and many other forms of violence in society. This African American scholar (1984) further defended that it is essential for continued feminist struggle and subversion to end violence against women. The topic of violence in this story shows the new generations that women can avoid violence in their life and improve their place in the family and society, which is what feminists are working for (Alsuwailan, 2006).

**Oppression of Woman**

The narrator portrays a society in which men exercise political and social dominance. The communities are utterly patriarchal --male-centered, male-oriented, and male-controlled. Wright and Rogers declare that "male domination has characterized the gender relations of the society and their successors" ((2010, chpt.15, 1, cited in Aseri, 2016, 72). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a woman's place was in the home as wife and mother, whereas the man's place was in the public sphere. This explanation is repeated throughout the narrative several

times and more precisely when Abdullah comes back and doesn't find his wife at home. The narrator illustrates a scene in which he was alone "drinking tea and watching TV while his wife was God knows where, completely oblivious to his needs" (71). This suggests that he was bothered by the fact that his wife was not at home waiting for him and "care about his whereabouts and physical desire" ( 89). Since Emily established a friendly relationship with her sister-in-law Noor, she "had been neglecting him for seven months. She barely stayed at home" (70). Spending time outside home is not proper of a wife in a patriarchal society, and it is even more inappropriate when she doesn't inform her husband about her location since "God knows where" (71) she is. For these reasons, "Abdullah thought about getting a second wife" (70) and asked his mother "to look for him" (71). Hence, being the upholder of a long-preserved tradition in a patriarchal society, Abdullah has the right to take another wife while still being married to Emily. Therefore, women have unequal marriage rights under Kuwaiti law. Al-Mughni (2010) pointed out to the fact that "A husband is allowed to have more than one wife under both Sunni and Shi'a family law without the permission or even knowledge of his first wife" (231). Al-Mughni (2010) further mentioned that "a wife may not petition for divorce on the grounds that her husband has taken another wife" (231). The narrator notes that Abdullah was planning on how "to break the news to his wife" (71) which leads us to Ghabra's (1997) research conclusion that "a sizable minority of men still marry more than one woman" (369).

In many Muslim states, women are able and sometimes officially persuaded to manipulate regulations and ambiguities to avoid inequitable and unfair conditions in the law. Women can, for example, write clauses into marriage contracts that make taking another wife grounds for divorce and for post-divorce division of marital assets. A growing form of feminist activism at present seeks to inform women about such approaches and accessible loopholes

(Offenhauer, 2005). Furthermore, what is of great importance in a recent married couple in Kuwait is for the wife to have kids as soon as possible. The narrator exposes this topic genuinely and wittily when Emily is visited for the first time by her husband's relatives and acquaintances, quoting "Then they asked her in Arabic whether or not she was pregnant: "Hamaltay? Hamaltay was the second Arabic word she learned" (48). Walther explained that "It was a matter of great importance for a young wife to produce children of her own as rapidly as possible – especially sons so that she could assume the respected position of a mother" (1981, 46, cited in Alsuwailan 2006, 67-68). For this reason, the narrator exposes the fact that she is expected to get pregnant immediately after marriage. They couldn't understand why she didn't get pregnant and for this reason they wanted to "diagnose her: she could be barren […] It became a habit. Every night after her husband returned from work Emily coaxed him to help her answer his nagging family with a resounding: "Yes, I'm pregnant! Now shut […] up!" (48-49). Thus, she is "obliged to fulfil her societal role and show the people around her that she had no medical problems that might limit her ability to bear children" (Al-Suwaileh, 2015, 218).

Moghadam (2004b) remarked that patriarchal society is a pre-capitalist social formation that has historically occurred in varying forms in Europe and Asia in which possessions, house and descent continue through the male lineage. She goes on saying that "in classic patriarchy, the senior man has authority over everyone else in the family, including younger men, and women are subject to distinct forms of control and subordination" (Moghadam, 2004b, 141). The author preferred to refer to this social formation allegorically with an interesting scene in which an old man, "who has been the school's security guard for the past six years" (61) wanted to show Jenna about six newborn rabbits that were kept inside a fenced area. It is interesting to note that as soon as Jenna sees them, she starts enquiring about their mother several times, instead of

being amazed about the little rabbits. She doesn't get any answer about their mother, instead the old man "smiles like an adult about to impart important knowledge to a child, but he merely nods" (62). The tone of the narrator is mysterious since the reader is not really told whether the mother died, or the old man found the babies somewhere or he was actually the author of taking the newborn rabbits to his enclosed area. What it is specified is that "behind his booth […] over some shrubberies where he created a small wooden fence that covers an area of grass" (61) the little rabbits are kept inside this confined area, which makes us understand that it was actually the old man who stole the rabbits and took them to his place.

This can be correlated with Kandiyoti's (1988) women under "classic patriarchy" which "may be found in North Africa, the Muslim Middle East" (278). Kandiyoti (1988) argued that the "key to the reproduction of classic patriarchy lies in the operations of the patrilocally extended household, which is also commonly associated with the reproduction of the peasantry in agrarian society" (278). Motherhood is the central female labor activity. But just as in capitalism what an employee generates is not deemed the property of the worker, "so in a patriarchal context a woman's products – be they children or rugs – are not considered her property, but those of the patriarchal family and especially the male kin" (Moghadam, 2004, 141). The allegorical use of the animal kingdom to refer to the women's inferiority and oppression makes it vibrant and very powerful in the use of the visual graphics to raise awareness about the women's oppression/situation under the control of men.

The narrator exposes another exceptionally important topic within the Arab families which is the theme of virginity. Akgul (2017) highlighted that virginity and honor are other cases in which women are oppressed and controlled by their peers in the context of Middle East. In the Middle East region, virginity is an index of honor, modesty, and a mode of social existence for a

female living in these societies. Virginity is also a sexually prejudiced cultural practice in the Middle East because it is only confined to women while men are free from this social imperative (Ghanim, 2015). An entire cultural and general system has been constructed around the concept of virginity and female chastity (Ghanim, 2015). Al-Suwaileh (2015) affirmed that both men and women in Gulf countries believe that it is men's responsibility to protect and control woman's sexuality. Similarly, Akpinar stated that Arab female sexuality was and is still regarded as being under the control of men and the law, according to a code of honor and shame, describing virginity as "an asset not only for the individual woman but also for her family because it is an 'index' for masculine reputation" (2003, 430 cited in Al-Suwaileh 2015, 183).

This idea is well-reflected when Noor is in England, far away from patriarchal norms. However, Ahmad reassures Abdullah that their sister is safe and "her honor is intact. She's got a chaperon here, always" (79). 'Her honor is intact' illustrates the supreme importance of this vital ingredient in this region. In this context, Ahmad represents the guardian who makes sure to protect her because the loss of her virginity is as painful as the loss of a life, especially for the family members. The Egyptian feminist writer, El Saadawi (as cited in Eltahaway 2015) confirmed that an Arab family does not grieve as much at the loss of a girl's eye as it does if she happens to lose her virginity. In fact, if the girl lost her life, it would be considered less of a catastrophe than if she lost her hymen. Concerning this topic, it is also relevant to mention that in the last years there is an increasing demand for hymen restorative surgeries in the Middle East (Ahmadi, 2016). If indication of her sexual activity comes to light—through pregnancy or if the hymen is found to be torn—the social outcomes can be critical. "She may be socially ostracized and at risk of violence by family members; her child would be legally considered illegitimate and

face lifetime stigmatization, and she might find it difficult to ever marry" (Foster & Wynn, 2016, 4).

In the story, Abdullah implies that virginity is considered of paramount importance and men have the authority and duty to protect their virginity, that is why Ahmad reiterates once again that "I'll take care of her, don't worry" (79). Moghadam (2004b) stated that the "patriarchal belt is characterized by male domination, son preference, restrictive codes of behavior for women and the association of family honor with female virtue (143). There is a high importance placed on the protection of an intact hymen until the wedding night concomitant with strict accusation of premarital sexual relationship (Ghanim, 2015). In many areas, the preoccupation with female virginity leads to honor killings. Honor killing is the name given to a customary practice whereby women and girls are killed by members of their family on suspicion of having had or having aspired to pre- or extra-marital relations because such sexual transgressions presumably violate the integrity and honor of the family (Moghadam, 2004b). In Kuwait, the "Campaign to Abolish Article 153[23]" is a national campaign led by a group of activists concerned with ending all forms of violence against women in the Arabian Gulf and the region (Abolish153.org, n.d.). The campaign focuses on the need to abolish article 153 of the Penal Code because it threatens the family and women's lives and puts them in a position of weakness and gives men the right to kill them on suspicion in return for a weak punishment (Abolish153.org, n.d.). There is a movement in the Gulf and wider Arab world to remove violent legislations against women and starting to focus on empowering women (Al-Shammaa, 2017).

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[23] The article 153 states that "Anyone who surprises his wife in a state of adultery or surprises his daughter or mother or his sister in the presence of a man and kills her immediately or kills him or kills them together is punishable by imprisonment for a period not exceeding three years and a fine or not more than 3000 rupees or one of these two punishments." http://abolish153.org/about/advocacy-and-lobbying/ [Accessed 18 July 2020].

The narrator describes how patriarchy refers both to modes of thinking which tend to promote the subordination of women and to social practices which are oppressive. Like early feminist critics, concerned with exposing traditional stereotypes and providing alternative role models, in the next section we shall analyze how more complex feminist females engage in a scrutiny of the tradition and invent a reflective narrative that challenge the patriarchal social formation.

**Subverting the Patriarchy**

Al-Suwaileh (2015) stressed that females are supposed to be tied to their domestic duties, to perform according to their attributed gender roles that are limited to being good mothers and wives. Alsuwailan (2006) affirmed that Kuwaiti women are facing obstacles which impede their development in building a society that will consider their social implication outside the home to be as relevant as their role inside the home. Alsuwailan (2006) further revealed that women face a view that limits them to a narrow range of professions and constrain their admission to executive places. In addition, subordination to gender norms generates a submissive and passive identity that makes women powerless to make individual determinations involving their own education or future careers. In contrast to this view, in this contemporary story the narrator is presenting a secondary character whose personal features are far beyond the stereotyped passive woman within the domestic realm. Despite of the fact that Noor occupies the story as a secondary character, she is described as true to herself and fearless to disrupt the social codes attributed to women and gender roles of the patriarchal society to accomplish her goals in life. The fact of being a secondary character in the story alludes to the position of women in society, that they are placed in an inferior position according to Kuwaiti social values and customs

(Crystal, 1992). As Foucault (1978, 95-96, cited in Ghanim, 2009, 15) argued, "where there is power there is resistance". Power and resistance are never one-sided or one-dimensional. Power and resistance make and remake gender relations. Hence, Noor is willing to overthrow these societal values and fight for a more gender equality in the Kuwaiti society by raising awareness about its negative consequences.

The narrator draws attention to traditional gender roles and the public/private social division. As a gender patriarchal norm, women are placed in their traditional roles as good mothers and wives, confined to the private domestic space (Alsuwailan, 2006). In the Kuwaiti society women are frequently indoctrinated with messages about the suitable role of a female in the private sphere. Women's endeavors to enlarge their roles in society face continuous suffocation by the conservatives who intend to maintain the gendered division of private/public life (Alsuwailan, 2006).

Nevertheless, Noor is challenging this division trying to break through gender norms and make a change in society by leaving her home and attending cultural events and socialize with people in the public sphere. Going out for studying is a consolidated reason for Noor to be left outside the home, quoting "Noor said what she usually said whenever she slipped out of the house: "I'm studying" (47). Noor AlKhadran is a thirteenth-year old student at the British School of Kuwait, and her siblings are Abdullah and Ahmad, which means that she has grown up and raised in Kuwaiti society which makes her well-aware about the boundaries and norms of a woman in this culture. As the story develops, readers are acquainted with Noor's empowering beliefs that promote individual growth and achievements in life.

One of the aspects that describe Noor as a subversive character is the fact of playing the guitar without anyone knowing about it, except Emily. She quickly realized about Noor's hidden

secret because she was playing late "at night when everyone else had gone to sleep" (47). The fact of playing the guitar without anyone knowing implies prohibition of showing interest toward music, yet Noor ignores her mother's orders and continues doing what she most enjoys in life. In the story there is no direct information whether Noor comes from a very strict and conservative family or from a liberal one. However, the prohibition to dedicate herself to music is closely associated with very conservative groups in Middle East that shape the laws and norms for women, and impose "very strict set of rules, especially in relation to the education of women […] the human body […] music and the plastic arts […] movie theaters are illegal and public music is seldom heard" (Cavendish, 2007, 93). In the same vein, Russel (2013) adds that in the Middle Eastern region "many clergy consider rock music or female vocals sinfully enticing" (72).

Another aspect that can be described as subversive is when Noor reveals defiant thoughts about escaping. Noor cannot understand how a woman can spend the time at home all day long, and she feels pity for Emily who does nothing but staying at home and denying herself the right to enjoy a social and cultural life. That is why Noor considers herself privileged for having a car, considering that some women are not allowed to have their own car, let alone to drive. She is feels lucky for having friends and being able to evade the private space and enjoy the freedom of being outside with her friends:

You must be homesick. Noor said. I don't know how you agreed to live like this. All I ever think about is escaping, but at least I have friends and my own car, so I rarely stay at home. I can't imagine what you must be going through. (17)

Different themes of oppression related to women which are prevalent in society are shown in the story. One of these themes presented in one of the conversations between Noor and Emily is related with the domestic service and the exploitation of the servant woman. As discussed in the first chapter, some of the Kuwaiti writers focused their themes on domestic workers who are verbally, physically and mentally abused by their employers on a constant basis. "Raising Jenna" exposes this topic as well and appeals to human kindness, comprehension and sympathy through Emily's words, as soon as she finds out that Chandra, the Al-Khadrans' domestic servant, is sent outside in the hot summer heat to wait for the order to be delivered[24]. For Emily this appears to be a mistreatment and tells Chandra to not tolerate harsh conducts and to stand up for her rights:

> "But it's so hot outside!" Emily protested. "[…] So Chandra cannot wait outside until the driver arrives! She's a human being." "Please listen, Chandra," Emily told the servant, "you do not have to do anything that you don't want to do. OK? You have rights! There are people you can talk to who will take you home. Do you want to go home?" (58)

Dominated by tolerance and compassion, Noor doesn't oppress or abuse Chandra, the one who raised her since she was a child. On the contrary, Noor shows signs of support and encouragement by allowing her to converse with the "driver next door" (59) while she waits for the order to be delivered. Her brother is also informed of this situation and is doing her a favour by letting her outside and having the opportunity to establish a relationship with the driver, taking into account the rigorous ethical behavior of the society:

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[24] Kuwait is experiencing high temperatures up to 48 degrees Celsius in the summer, with a reading of 54 degrees Celsius in July 2016 north of Kuwait City. Retrieved from:
https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/94235106_Kuwait-NC2-2-KUWAIT%20SNC%20%20final%20v2.pdf

> They're together. Noor said after some time. Chandra and the Punjabi driver from next door. No one knows but me and Ahmad. We give her ludicrous demands to stay outside so she can spend time with him. You know how it is here. (59)

Noor displays sings of affection and care not only toward her sister-in-law, Emily, but as well toward the domestic servant. However, not all domestic servants enjoy the same supportive conditions, a fact that leads to a systematic oppression (topic that will be discussed in chapter 5). According to the narrator, Noor belongs to "the community of misfits who meandered on the fringes of a larger society strict with conventions and moral conducts" (59). Noor feels that she doesn't fit into this type of stringent society and follows her own path toward a society with open-mindedness nuances and one that is free of misjudgment. Through the narrator's voice, particular attention is paid to the description of Noor's lifestyle, a girl that indicates subversion through her mode of behavior and ideology against a conservative society:

> Since their conversation in Emily's bedroom, Noor and Emily had grown closer […]. Noor's friends showed Emily a different side of Kuwait—a Kuwait more tolerant of promiscuity, inebriation, music, parties and deviations of all colors. But most of all, Noor concentrated on the underground networks where artists and writers amassed. They bought season passes to the Kuwait Little Theater, signed up for memberships at Dar-Al-Athar Al-Islamiyya, and became regulars at the lectures hosted by the American University of Kuwait's Center for Gulf Studies. Noor took Emily to bazaars, open-mics, concerts, comedy

shows, Failaka Island, and one-day trips to Bahrain. She even introduced her

sister-in-law to Kuwait's notorious Messila beach culture. (63-64)

Particular attention is paid to the contrast between the society's strict social norms and the subversive and secretive world of these young people whose goal is to improve themselves aesthetically and culturally, and to empower the new generation with knowledge that will help the society to develop. Noor is pointing out at the other side of Kuwaiti society that has little or nothing to do with the private sphere assigned particularly to women.

Furthermore, regarding the artistic networks, it is important to recall the youth movement from 2011 to 2013 which added a new element to Kuwaiti social structure. This story was published in 2013 and possibly reflects the events that occurred during that time, for which it is important to recall them. Ghabra (2017) wrote that art exhibitions, music, theatre, poetry and other cultural activities constituted a way of bringing people of distinctive backgrounds together. This opened the way to uncovering commonalities. Ghabra (2017) sustained that art and theatre in Kuwait frequently lack originality, creativity and free manifestation, and for being monitored and censored, art does not touch the soul. Government-controlled book exhibits tend more to alienate people and decline the will to be open to fresh opinions than to inspire reading. The renaissance in communication, reading groups and private theatre groups provide young people an intellectual channel to evade spirit-crushing state intervention. Additionally, "the youth movement and the civil society movement were among the few forces unifying Kuwait's different religious groups, tribes, urban groups, Bedouin and others" (Ghabra, 2017, 36). They embraced adaptation to transformation, change, and so the possibility of national unification. The movement epitomized an important example of the people's integrative power despite the

suppressive actions of the state. Ghabra (2017) mentioned that "Although unifying values in Kuwait are in decline and racism, most aimed at the tribes, Shias and Bedouin, has hit a high mark, attitudes among the young, who are the majority of the population, seem more positive when involved in a social movement" (37). The state's reaction to the youth and change movements was predictably oppressive, and many demonstrators had dozens of court orders issued against them, some were detained and sentenced, while others had to escape from state repression (Ghabra, 2017). In addition, numerous prominent Kuwaitis who supported them were stripped of their citizenship by the state, and the major opposition TV station (al-Youm TV) was shut down, together with its newspaper, and its owner and his siblings lost their nationality (Ghabra, 2017). The state's actions eventually disintegrated the movement. Nonetheless, this segmentation adds to a deeper segmentation of the social framework of the country added Ghabra (2017). Despite numerous protests and conflicts with police, the youth movement represented an extraordinary occasion to transcend the boundaries of tribe, sect and other self-interests in the grander quest of justice, equal opportunities, non-discrimination and national integration (Ghabra, 2017). The values driving the new generation may not always be well articulated, but they need to be discussed and adopted by the state, maintains Ghabra (2017).

In this context, Noor clearly embodies the transformation and positive change in society that the writer tries to achieve through literature. In the same vein, al-Mughni (2010) confirmed that women now have the unprecedented ability to directly motivate Kuwaiti society. In regard to the revolutionary attitude of Noor, in a conversation with Emily, Noor confesses that she doesn't want to spend the rest of her life in Kuwait and highlights the fact that her dream is to "study music" (66), which means that she really wants to accomplish her goal. Because she cannot reach her aim in Kuwait, her plan is to leave the country. In this case, Noor is the personification

of a girl who sets an example and encourages other girls, especially girls that come from a conservative part of society, to believe in themselves and follow their dreams in life no matter the circumstances.

This is because many Kuwaiti women's decision about their major area of study or their work must be consistent with the wishes of their male guardians, or they may be condemned to stay at home. As El-Sanabary commented, "Students and their parents make decisions on the basis of prevailing perceptions of women's roles and a limited knowledge of educational and career options. The result may be a loss of human talent and resources" (1998, 167, cited in Alsuwailan, 2006, 156). An important and closely related concept is the gender-equality. Gender equality is understood to mean that the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not rely on whether they are born male or female (Moghadam, 2004a). It is also defined as a situation where human beings are free to expand their personal abilities and make choices without the constraints set by strict gender roles; that the various ambitions and needs of women and men are considered, appraised and favoured equally (Moghadam, 2004a).

Analyzed from another perspective, Noor's decision of going abroad and follow her dream can also be contrasted with Emily's situation who gave up to her career in order to be a wife following her husband's advice or, more precisely, his orders. However, Noor is fighting against the socially constructed gender norms and striving for the empowerment of women for making their own life choices. In the same way, women's empowerment refers to women's ability to make strategic life choices where that ability had been formerly refused to them (Moghadam, 2004a). Accordingly, empowerment is central to the processes of maintaining the benefits of women at individual, household, community and broader levels (Moghadam, 2004a).

It involves the action of boosting the status of women through literacy, education, training and raising awareness (Moghadam, 2004).

Another aspect that classifies Noor as a subversive person by going against the patriarchal gender norms is the fact of having a boyfriend and planning to go and study abroad with him, saying to Emily that "My boyfriend was accepted at Cardiff University. I'm going with him. Don't tell anyone" (65). Noor's intentions reflect how traditional gender norms that oppress female's individuality and free choice are challenged and transformed. However, Noor's revolutionary attitude is likely to end up tragically in her life. Noor begins the story as a happy and enthusiastic girl who is presented as a "wild young girl, active, lively, and rebellious" (80), totally in contrast of how a girl should be in society; however, toward the end of the story, she is depicted much older and "shackled, handicapped" (80) for being diagnosed with "MS, multiple sclerosis" (81). The reason of this dramatic episode in her life can be interpreted as a form of correction and discipline for her past behavior. In other words, because she didn't obey or conform to patriarchal social codes, Noor would be classified into the category of bad girls. In patriarchal culture, there are only two personalities a woman can have. She can be either a good girl or a bad girl. Good girls are those who are obedient, shy, honorable, self-sacrificing, and virginal; bad girls are, by contrast, independent, antagonistic, immoral, worldly and have sexual desires. Tyson (2006) develops on these contrasting patterns of women imposed by patriarchy, quoting that "if she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she's a good girl, if she doesn't she's an immoral girl. These two roles […] regard women only in terms of how they relate to the patriarchal order" (89). For this reason, the narrator expresses that Noor was annoyed by the fact that people used to ask about "what happened, like it was her fault, like it was a crime that she had committed or a sin that she had practiced, which eventually led to

this" (80). The narrator refers to the idea that a bad girl is eventually denounced and punished for her rebellious behavior, while a good girl is always rewarded for her submissive behavior and nothing wrong could happen to her. Noor is portrayed as the antithesis of a stereotyped subordinate woman in the Islamic culture. As al-Mughni & Tétreault (2000) think, she is a woman who has "begun to question men's authority in the realm of domestic bliss" (254). Nevertheless, due to the entrenched patriarchal norms in society, the disease attributed to Noor for being a rebellious girl from a very young age, does not only expose this fearful belief that a woman might end up like this as a consequence for her bad behavior, but also exhibits attitudes of rejection and overthrowing this traditional belief. As a very young character, Noor belongs to a group of friends who does not conform to the society's conventions and look for ways of subverting the patriarchal dominance that repress individual growth and free choice. In other words, "The future of youth will help decide the future of Kuwait's acceptance of diversity and/or social integration" (Ghabra, 2017, 40). In addition, Noor encourages and motivates the younger generation, who has little control over their future, to fight for the goals and dreams envisioned no matter the severe circumstances. Furthermore, Noor stands for the empowerment of women in a male-dominated society by challenging gender norms and rejecting social codes of a conservative society.

**"30 Years Marriage"**

"30 Years Marriage" is another outstanding and breathtaking story written by Nada Faris. Simple and lucid in its language, not too much sophisticated in its plot, the story runs through seven pages. It is included in *The Elephant in the Room: Stories and Articles from Anglophone Kuwait* which is the second collection of stories and articles issued in 2014. The story is initiated by the narrator describing the feelings and thoughts of a couple. Even though the time and place are not mentioned, the reader can perceive that is about Kuwait in the twenty first century. Right from the very beginning of the story, the reader is introduced into a miserable life of a middle-aged married couple who has been married for thirty years. Even though "everybody envied their relationship" (98), they don't enjoy anymore their happy married life. However, the narrator does not reveal right away the reason of their distress and possible separation, until almost the end of the story when they start arguing about their past actions and behavior. Apart from being a mysterious and dramatic narrative, it also raises feminist concerns within a patriarchal culture.

**Passive Suffering and Alienation**

Right from the very first line of the story, the narrator stresses about the indifference of Haifa's husband when she most needed his help, and he is leaving "his apartment as if his wife had not been sprawled on the floor covered in milk" (97). To avoid any misunderstandings about his attitude toward his wife, the narrator makes sure to clarify that his unhelpfulness is not due to his unawareness, but his behavior is intentional:

More indifferent than oblivious to the fact that his wife lay amidst a sea of
damaged groceries, Jassem jogged down the stairs two steps at a time—which
meant that he had already stretched his muscles—which meant that he had been
in the living room when his wife collapsed in front of his apartment. (97)

Nevertheless, she is being portrayed as being unable to utter any words, to ask for help or to make any kind of scolding to her husband. This illustration of her 'speechlessness' is a demonstration of women's internalization of patriarchal culture. Tijani (2009) explains that passivity and fearfulness to familial orders are reasonable contemplating the fact that women are vulnerable to the social and cultural injustice, embedded in the Kuwaiti system (52). The text is mostly concentrated on her impotence of saying anything, let alone acting against him and instead: "Haifa held back scorching tears. Motionless, dumb, writhing in pain, she waited for the last echo of her husband's footsteps to fade; only then did she examine her groceries, salvaging everything that wasn't completely ruined" (97).

The author's ability to display scenes of despair and anger without any type of dialogue is perceived through the contrast of her passivity in front of him and the fury that is exposed after he leaves. The powerful words about this scene can easily induce the reader to not only imagine the maddening scene, but also to easily sense her exasperating and reprimand feelings that immerse all her might. The expression of anger frees the woman and moves her out of a victimized position into an empowered one:

Mad with frustration and pent-up anger, she kicked the cornflakes box with all
her might. The box dented, squashing crispy matter within. She then stomped on

it, once, twice, thrice, and kicked it against the wall. Her salty sweat dribbled

down her nose and dropped onto the twisted box below. (97-98)

Lack of knowledge or perhaps courage of not reaching the right decision leads her to this afflicted condition in which only suffering is her only companion instead of her husband of thirty years, quoting that "She didn't know what to do anymore […] Haifa leaned her forehead against the cold wall and inhaled heavily. Hot tears betrayed her will and rolled one by one in streams of anguish and pain" (98). Accepting this tormented silence and passivity doesn't really contribute to the improvement of their relationship nor does it make her feel in any way better. The depiction of Haifa's passive attitude and suffering in silence, adds to what Gilligan and Snider (2018) confirmed that "it's no secret that patriarchy depends on women's complicity. The persistence of patriarchy is premised on women's silence and women's compliance" (*Where Then Do We Stand?*), for which Haifa prefers to heartache in silence and alienate herself into her world filled with sadness and pain. Within this suffering world, she tries to survive day by day by immersing herself in deeper levels of anger and frustration. The fact of abstaining herself in front of him and choosing not to trouble her husband for clarifying the situation, it leads to the fact that women were instructed by their families to be submissive and modest (Alsuwailan, 2006).

Minces described how Arab families were careful to teach their daughters the proper characteristics of womanhood (1982, cited in Alsuwailan 2006, 61). Girls were taught by their mothers to be docile, submissive, discreet, industrious, modest, soft-spoken, and without curiosity about the outside world. Those are the attributes that made the Kuwaiti woman submissive to male power. Kuwaiti women accepted their roles as appropriate and consistent

with Kuwaiti social order because they were taught from a very young age to follow the instructions they received. It is interesting to note the transition of the third person narrating the event to the first person, allowing the reader to get into Haifa's mind and be able to recognize, empathize with her agony, and at the same time to realize her intention to keep her situation as private and isolated as possible, quoting "please let no one talk to me about it, God knows I have cried often enough" (98). It is noteworthy to mention the abundance of scenes describing her immense suffering that occupies almost the entire short story through the eyes of the narrator, who again makes sure to reiterate that "she didn't want to scream. She had screamed enough for the day, and it was still only ten in the morning" (99). The author demonstrates her inciting power over words to create a painful and distressful atmosphere that totally submerges the reader into Haifa's state to not only witness and feel her pain, but to be also aware of this kind of ongoing situations that exist in the contemporary society. A wife's main duty was to keep a consistent marriage avoiding in this way any kind of breakup, not only because of a harmful reputation divorce might bring to them and their families, but also to retain the bonds and good relations among members of the family (Alsuwailan, 2006).

At this stage of the story, Haifa embodies the passive woman who endures and totally accepts her husband's negligence and aloofness. She is even dreaded at the thought of him when "a hot nauseous fear bubbled in the pit of Haifa's throat as she remembered her groceries swimming in a puddle of filth in front of her husband's apartment" (98). Al-Sabah pointed out that the women of Kuwait followed familial rules without questioning their roles or reflecting upon their situation (2001, cited in Alsuwailan, 2006, 71). They inherited their mothers' and grandmothers' traits and perceived them to be the proper ones. Even when she found her wedding picture being cracked, her woe speaks by itself in the form of speechlessness and

containment doing nothing but putting into practice a form of relaxation: "Haifa counted to ten, breathing long and slow to cool her nerves" (102) after "she discovered that her wedding picture had been knocked down" (102).

In spite of all this pain caused by her husband, the narrator also displays signs of love that Haifa has for Jassem, mentioning that "She still loved him" (100). The containment of her despair within herself for such a long time is exposed throughout the story until the end of it, in a way to intensify Haifa's pain and to warn the reader about the women's situation. After this description, one might assume that Haifa is the archetypal of a passive Muslim woman who is being unfairly mistreated, and her only response is to despair alone in silence. Nevertheless, toward the end of the story the narrator is clarifying the reason behind their silence and at the same time there's a turning point in Haifa's attitude, where the suffering seems to have been dissipated and replaced with new notes.

**From Passivity to Change**

Women's response against patriarchal norms can come in different forms and manners, and in this narrative, Haifa is the one who breaks a silence of eight months between her and Jassem, starting by letting her husband know that she prepared him the breakfast. Being the one who broke the silence, it represents "breaking of the deadlock" (Faris, n.d.-h) and being able "to face the balagan" (Faris, n.d.-h) of her reality, which is the state of confusion and disorder from her last few months to her present survival. This means to fight against the pervaded silence between them and against the patriarchal culture, where women are supposed to be the object of endurance and oppressiveness. Haifa starts to embrace the opposite of her passive behavior and gradually embodies the person who is "ready for new transformations" (Faris, 2013), ready to

change and mend the past in order to save her marriage: "Jassem," […] "This is stupid. We've been acting like babies." […] "It's been eight months. I don't even know why you're mad at me" (103). There's been a sudden and positive change in her temperament and thinking. From now on, Haifa is no longer portrayed as a woman who suffers and agonizes, but instead she is perceived as a caring and concerned person who wants to hold on to their love and save their marital relationship by forgetting and fixing the problems between them in order to come to an end to a critically agonizing situation. Thus, Haifa appeals to her husband's senses, saying: "Can't you just let it go? Whatever it is, Jassem, just forget about it. For the sake of our marriage" (103). At the same time, Haifa personifies an activist and rational woman who decides to take a stance forward and fight for what she feels right, which is to stay together no matter the previous circumstances between them. When she is being accused of being irresponsible in the past, her supply for forgiveness indicates repentance and at the same time deep feelings of love that she carries for him, a love that in Haifa's vision knows no borders and no mistreatment for she says "I care enough to say I'm sorry regardless […] I love you despite the way you've been treating me! (103-104). Her love for him is unconditional and is exactly what keeps her alive to fight for their relationship. For this reason, during their long-term marriage, she cared enough to buy the things that he favoured, like "cornflakes (the kind that Jassem preferred)" (97), she also "made pancakes for breakfast—she made three just in case he came out looking for something to nibble on" (101) and this means interest and effort despite her husband's disagreement. Haifa knew nothing except loving and carrying for her husband, while he was in charge of economic and justice affairs. Even though her husband's words hurt her when he is implying that she has been careless to his needs during their thirty years marriage, it is easily noticeable her reaction

and the way she defends herself recognizing her worth stating that "You can't make me feel as if I've done nothing for you. You just can't" (104).

With this in mind, it can be stated that the writer's purpose is to acknowledge the importance of a woman's effort, determination and to also take a stance for herself without giving up or showing any feelings of weakness when it comes to defend herself. During this couple's conversation, it is noticeable the readiness of Haifa to do anything to make her husband forget about the past and start a new beginning where she can have the possibility to rectify her mistakes. Haifa is asking for forgiveness once again, saying "Jassem! OK! I'm sorry! I'll be more attentive to your needs! Just stop yelling!" (105). Her determination and purpose to make things work are clearly displayed with reiterative statements of apologizing and admitting her ignorance related to his wishes "I didn't know what you wanted before, now I know. Please, I'll do anything" (105). On the other hand, the narrator insists on displaying Jassem's implacable and intransigent attitude, a fact which determines even more Haifa to fight for their relation for she says "Honey, come on, do it for us" (105). Haifa is presented to be an example of a woman who doesn't give up easily to her love and marriage. She recognizes to have been suspicious when her husband came home late at night eight months ago under the pretext that he had an accident, she said "Goodness Jassem, I was jealous!" (105) in a way to justify her actions and avoid a possible breakup. Haifa's powerful and persistent attitude is a sign of hope and positivity for a better future that can be traced as well throughout Faris's work.

In many of Faris's fiction and non-fiction texts, readers can easily identify the aim for a social change. In a sense, all narrative is concerned with change says Greene (1991a). "There is something in the impulse to narrative that is related to the impulse to liberation […] in order for there to be an escape from repetition, in order for there to be change or progress" (Greene,

1991a, 291) one must free from the compositions of the past. In the same vein, the feminist fiction that flourished in the late sixties and early seventies came out of a liberation movement which is the so-called second wave feminist and focused on women's liberation from the past. This literary movement aimed "at social change and in viewing the past not as a repository of lost value but as the source of something new" (Greene, 1991a, 292). In a similar way, Haifa is not presented anymore as passively suffering or being afraid to utter any words. On the contrary, she is willing to fight for a change with all her willpower.

The uttermost feature of this short story is represented in an exasperated tone when Haifa outbursts in tears and grabs her husband's arm in extreme pain, crying and begging him to reconsider his decision of divorce, quoting the narrator's description "She pulled him, made him face her, as she hemorrhaged tears and croaked out words with difficulty" (106). Faris's tone in this momentum encompasses all the dreadful and horrendous agony that one can experience. The selection of the terms like "hemorrhaged" or "croaked out" it denotes Faris's writing skills and power over words achieving to create a memorable scene and an emotional piece of literature that lingers with the reader for a long period of time or even forever. Using simple and yet profound words, the author can easily appeal to the reader's sense of imagination and feelings, when Jassim asks Haifa to leave the house by midnight ignoring the fact that she has no place to go. In this moment, the writer presents Haifa in a critical condition, saying "You can't break up with me Jassem. We've been married for thirty years. You just can't do that" (106). The author exposes feelings of extreme outrage accompanied by pain and despair which are easily conveyed to the reader thanks to the author's ability to juggle with the words. Faris knows perfectly well how to sadden or cheer up the reader, and/or to calm and motivate with inspiring words and actions through the characters, just like the transformation of Haifa in the last scene.

**Defending Her Rights**

After thirty years of marriage hearing her husband's order to leave the house by midnight "Haifa's heart raced" (106). Nonetheless, Haifa is no longer the emotional and exasperated person who would tear her heart into pieces, crying and screaming her soul out. In this last scene, the narrator displays Haifa as being logically worried, thinking about "Leave and go where?" (106). Haifa is being transformed into a relaxed and calm woman. She is perceived as being able to think clearly, reasonably and acting as it deems right. Regarding her situation, the narrator is making a reflection:

Didn't he understand that she had dedicated her entire life to him? She looked around her apartment—his apartment. Did he think that just because he paid for everything then it automatically became his? She had lived with him for thirty years. (Faris, 2013, 106)

In this last scene is an empathetic one trying to awaken in the reader feelings of fairness, compassion, and understanding for Haifa's condition. The narrator presents Haifa as a woman who knows how to manage and confront this situation by analyzing it carefully and entitling her as the woman who "had lived with him for thirty years. In fact, she was the one who picked the furniture" (106). Haifa's response to her husband's order is embodied in the transformation of a caring, hard-working and housekeeper woman that she always used to be because "to find fulfillment and achieve identity in this regime, women had to accept [...] male domination and nurturing motherhood" (Leitch, 2010, 262-263). However, the author's focus on feminine concerns like cleaning and cooking draws attention to the pervasive feminine roles that are

assigned to women in patriarchal culture within the private spheres and at the same time elevate these chores as significant literary subject matters. The household chores themes are usually regarded as ordinary and trivial by men. Virginia Woolf (1958) explained that the woman writer might well "find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values – to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important" (81). Thus, the narrator illustrates these feminine values and elevate them to literary subject matters which are worth serious attention quoting at length:

> When Haifa thought of her furniture, she remembered her drapes and the piles of dust they had gathered. She walked towards them, unclipped them, and tossed them into the washing machine. Back in the living room she searched for the coffee stain that soaked into the carpet from Jassem's outburst. She scrubbed it clean and cleared away the shattered ceramic of the broken mug. For lunch she made herself a sandwich and, for her husband, lasagna, which she left in the oven, before heading to his study to empty out his trashcans, wipe his desk and his windows clean, vacuum the floors, tidy the piles of books, and fold his duvet that had fallen from the couch to the ground. (106-107)

The writer exposes the parameters of gender norms dictated by the patriarchy: the primary provider role attributed to men, whereas the household keeper role designated to women. In other words, "patriarchal culture promotes seeing men as independent, autonomous, self-sufficient, and women as dependent of them" (Johnson, 2005). This image is closely associated with "dominant cultural image during the early Cold War era of [...] American woman as a housewife

and mother [...] portraying women's ideal reality as a narrow domestic round of cooking, cleaning, washing", image that was decried by feminist literary critics (Leitch, 2010, 262). Farrell was seeing the woman as economically unproductive dependents "supported for life" by their husband and other men. He described men as "raising money" while women raising children. However, it is ignored the fact that without the woman's help there would have been "no shelter, clothing, pottery, or cooking or other implements nor [...] enough food to live on" (cited in Johnson, 2005, 145). By drawing attention to these household "chores", Faris points out to the significance of these feminine values "As women's domestic labor has been devalued and redefined as nonwork, [...] socially invisible, resulting in images of women as dependent, passive, unproductive, and primarily concerned with child care and "chores" (Johnson, 2005, 145). "The devaluing of women's work is complemented by images of men as hard-working, self-sufficient, autonomous, and even heroic breadwinners who carry on their shoulders the sole burden of family support" (Johnson 2005, 146), as it was the case of Jassem helping his brother-in-law to get out of jail, to take a loan for her father-in-law and helping Haifa through college. Thus, it is not ignored the fact that men do not work hard, "But this doesn't mean that women don't also work hard or that the taking on of this kind of adult responsibility has somehow become the sole province of men" (Johnson, 2005, 146). For this reason, Haifa responds back to her husband "You can't make me feel as if I've done nothing for you. You just can't" (135). The narrator ends this narrative in an optimistic and confident note hoping that Jassem will change in a positive way. Simultaneously, the narrator opted for a very peaceful and inaudible atmosphere that easily tranquilizes and inspires the reader through Haifa's determination to remain in their home despite her husband's order to leave the house by midnight, quoting at length:

When she finished all her chores she made herself a cup of hot chocolate, pulled

out another magazine from the shelf and sat back on her couch in the living room,

admiring her curtains, and hoping that her husband would be in a better mood

when he returned. (107)

Bearing in mind Faris's goal to transform society in a positive note, Haifa not only embodies the social change but also the woman who stands for her rights by staying in the house in spite of her husband's order to leave it by midnight. Haifa is described as the woman who is ready to face any challenges that come her way in order to fight for what she feels right, to break the pervasive feminine roles that narrow a woman's life and "to renew the long struggle for women's emancipation" (Leitch, 2010, 263).

**Lack of Housing Rights**

Throughout this story the use of the possessive pronouns "his" and "her" are to be found in abundance, and this may be explained in close association with the lack of women's housing rights in the region. Right from the very first line of this short story, the narrator makes sure to use "his" (97) apartment in which they are living, with the purpose to show that the house belongs to Haifa's husband, quoting "Jassem Salman left his apartment" (97). In another instance of the narrator's use "in front of his apartment" (97) one might imply that the house is owned by him. Actually, at the end of the story, when Jassem asks Haifa to leave the apartment, he stresses on the fact that he is the owner of the house, and he wants her out of it: "I want you out of my house by midnight Haifa. I don't care how" (106). The use of "my" intensifies that he is the

owner of the house. Also, the use of "my" is only attributed to Jassem, as in "my feelings" (104), "my needs" (104) and "my fault," (105) but not even once to Haifa, perhaps to show and/or critique male superiority and power, or to indicate the fact that women still face discrimination under most GCC regulations for getting land, housing or interest-free construction loans (AlMunajjed, 2012).

On the other hand, there is also the use of her apartment, quoting "she hurried into her apartment" (98), "Haifa cleared up the mess in front of her apartment" (101) and "She looked around her apartment" (106). Because of the use of these two phrases his apartment and her apartment, one might be confused about the owner of the house or might deduce that the apartment belongs to both of them, yet there is no use of 'their apartment' associated with Haifa and Jassem. Logically, there are instances when the use of these possessive pronouns (his/her) are inevitable and need to be employed; however, the use of his apartment has legal connotations in the region.

According to the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004 (2005) inheritance is governed by Islamic law and citizens families[25] (a family must always include a male) are "eligible to receive a plot of land and roughly $238,000 (70,000 KD) interest-free government finance ("housing allowance") through the Credit and Savings Bank to purchase a house" (2063). The Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004 (2005) further explains that the government registers the house in the name of both the husband and the wife, but "in the case of a divorce, a female citizen loses her rights to the house regardless of any payments she may have made on the loan" (2063). At the end of the story, the narrator describes Haifa reflecting on the issue of the apartment, quoting "She looked around her apartment — his

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[25] "A divorced single mother and her minor children or a female citizen married to a foreign national cannot, by law, qualify for the government housing allowance" (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004, 2005, 1983).

apartment" acknowledging that the apartment would belong to him in the case of a divorce. As per the Kuwaiti law, "she may continue to reside in the house if she has custody of any minor children resulting from the marriage, but she must move once the children reach age 18" (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004, 2005, 1983). "Housing[26] is a serious problem for Kuwaiti women, particularly divorced women from low-income groups" (Al-Mughni, 2010, 242). The Kuwaiti Housing Law excludes Kuwaiti women, whether single or married, from taking advantage of the government's low-interest housing-loan policy, which is usually provided to Kuwaiti men who are heads of families (AlMunajjed, 2012; al-Mughni, 2010). Divorced or widowed women from low-income groups suffer the most as they lose their claim to homes purchased initially through this program even if they made previous payments on the loan (AlMunajjed, 2012). Al-Mughni (2010) underlined that Kuwait's housing law also forbids Kuwaiti women from owning government-supplied or subsidized housing that is available to Kuwaiti men by virtue of their positions as heads of families. The only exception to this law is for divorced women with children who can claim a rent allowance if they do not intend to remarry and have no one to support them. However, they are expected to share the government-subsidized housing with their former husbands, who often force them to move out from the house. A Kuwaiti woman married to a non-citizen cannot by law qualify for a government housing loan program (AlMunajjed, 2012).

These are some of the gender inequalities that Kuwaiti women struggle in the twenty-first century. These inequities extend beyond the formal bounds of marriage. This imbalance

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[26] The Kuwaiti government has recently made some serious efforts to provide housing services for Kuwaiti women, especially divorcees, widows, those married to non-Kuwaitis and unmarried women who have lost both parents. An agreement was reached in August 2010 between the Cabinet and Parliament's Women's Affairs Committee to establish a fund of almost $1.8 billion for women's housing. The Public Authority for Housing Welfare issued a new regulation in July 2011 giving eligible women access to a residential loan of $250,000, increasing the demand for condominium apartments throughout the country (AlMunajjed, 2012): https://www.arabnews.com/women-lose-out-affordable-housing [Accessed 20 July 2020].

permeates all gender relations and in doing so, impedes women's progress towards full citizenship stature. Literature is one of the vehicles that makes people aware of these gender discriminations. What is interesting is that the writer does not directly state about this topic, but it is wonderfully embedded in this story which has a deeply profound effect on the reader, because according to Faris:

> It is literature that transforms consciousness by inventing new terminologies and lexicons, builds bridges between isolated and often invisible sectors of society, and creates both physical and virtual communities so that new palettes of being may emerge. (Faris, 2014e)

Literature plays an important part in consciousness raising for a positive change in society. It has a major impact on people's development because it can easily shape people's mentalities, change political systems and expose inequalities and discriminations. Greene (1991b) stated that "If feminism was a "teaching movement," it was also a "reading movement" and a "writing movement," for it was feminist writing—fiction, poetry, nonfiction—that transformed confusion to consciousness, enabling women to understand […] and interpret their "relative deprivation" (50) rooted in inegalitarian social, economic, and political structures. Faris's fictional short-story "30 years marriage" allows the audience to connect and experience emotions and feelings that teach a lesson and, in some way, inspire a change.

**Conclusion**

Both "Raising Jenna" and "30 Years Marriage" epitomize women's struggle in undermining patriarchal supremacy. They both illustrate the family as the core social institution within which women's domination is perpetuated. Women have long felt the power and strength of male domination and responded in different ways against it. In "Raising Jenna" the three females, Emily, Jenna and Noor reflect the feminist rejection against patriarchal hegemony. Emily appears to be in the beginning a submissive woman and obedient wife, allowing her husband to control her life, but gradually, she rejects the patriarchal dominance, ending up leaving the country and her daughter too. It was a tough decision for Emily to abandon her daughter, but it weighted more her unhappiness and confined life in the house. Jenna, just like her mother, in the beginning is described as a good daughter refusing to go against the violence that she goes through. However, as the story develops, she shows rebellious signs, and thinks of leaving her father, who is the symbol of patriarchal social values. Noor is the enthusiastic character who appears passionate about music and about opening up in the contemporary times. She represents the contemporary woman who looks for a transformation in society. In line with feminist thinking, the narrator finds hope in the next generation represented by Noor and Jenna. They belong to the youngest generation who start questioning patriarchal dominance and trying to overthrow it by bringing about more equality between genders in the Kuwaiti society.

In "30 Years Marriage", Haifa who is in her mid-forties, undergoes through a transformation bringing to light female strength and mental power after a tormented period of suffering and silence within her marriage. Disobeying her husband's order of not leaving the house by midnight, it shatters the patriarchal dominance and stands for her rights.

These two short stories expose some of the most prominent and worrying themes related to gender roles and gender discrimination in the Kuwait society. However, as Archer noted, Islamist women's voices can be "powerful agents of change" in the on-going discussion on women's rights matters in the Muslim world (2007, 56, cited in al-Mughni 2010b). This is because these women have the power to redefine women's status within an Islamic context and the power to challenge the dominant interpretations, ultimately altering the traditional perceptions of gender relations. Faris's narratives focus on the women's rights and other related aspects of feminism that contribute to the creation and continued viability of the past political movements. These narratives are paradigms of feminist activism. The female characters support women's political enfranchisement and their social equality. They subvert traditional structures and aim at transforming consciousness and society. As a feminist activist, Nada Faris offers a constructive critique of culture that seeks to "change the rules of the old game" (Green, 1990). The following chapter focuses on the analysis of *Fame in the Adriatic*, a novel that exposes many of the social, cultural and political aspects of an Italian society set in the sixteenth century.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**RACE, CLASS AND GENDER IN *FAME IN THE ADRIATIC***

**Introduction**

*Fame in the Adriatic*, which was serialized in *City Pages* magazine throughout 2013, is a young adult novelette set on the background of the Italian Renaissance. The reason why the story is located in a distant time and different geography is to avoid any type of censorship. The selection of the fictional genre and the historical context is a perfect combination to disguise and mirror social, cultural, and political issues in Kuwaiti society that are occurring in the twenty-first century.

As discussed in the first chapter, Kuwaiti writers are dissatisfied with the social system, and this is reflected in their literary works. This dissatisfaction turns into a major source of inspiration to bring social change. *Fame in the Adriatic* shares the same objectives as the two stories analysed above: to expose the most relevant issues that concern Kuwaiti society, especially those related to women's rights, and to contribute to a positive social transformation by raising awareness about these socio-political issues. Moghadam and Berkovitch (1999) assert that, "while operating within the framework of structural constraints and dominant ideological frameworks, the "modernizing women" of the Middle East constitute themselves political actors with their own voice and distinct forms of actions" (279). Thus, Faris's action materializes through literature. Moghadam and Berkovitch (1999) agree that "writing can be employed as a

political strategy as well" (280). According to Gocek and Balaghi: "Middle Eastern women have turned to writing as a means to participate in society when attempts have been made to mute their public voice" (1994, 12 cited in Moghadam & Berkovitch, 1999, 280). Thus, women writers – and the burgeoning feminist movement – contribute to the process of democratization in the region [...] and Middle East politics cannot be fully understood without recognizing women's contribution to democracy, civil society, and citizenship" (Moghadam & Berkovitch, 1999, 280-281).

*Fame in the Adriatic* is a contemporary feminist Kuwaiti novel in which the struggle against patriarchy and fundamentalism is made clear. It explores gender discrimination, gender inequalities and injustices that are based on race, class, and gender. The use of academic and Latin terms together with simple language characterizes the novel. Faris skillfully manages to deal with these themes in a hilarious and clever form. It is also important to emphasize the fact that alongside a funny tone, a distressed approach is used in scenes where the injustices employed in the domestic labor field are unfold.

The novel is written in the first-person narration, a device that stresses the uniqueness of the protagonist. The character of Maria is the only thing that holds the novel together because every event, scene and feeling is presented through her. The novel does not focus too much on male characters. Thus, Faris took women as the subject of her novel and expressed their literary rebellion against marginalization both as women and writers, yet it is of utmost importance to note the predominance of male power that terminates with female's life. In fact, the title *Fame in the Adriatic* encapsulates the feminist passion for a change and at the same time an unfortunate and famous destiny of the protagonist located in the Adriatic. The protagonist, whose name is Maria Botticelli, is an intelligent girl who acts as a resilient to a life imposed by patriarchy. Even

though she is only sixteen years old, her ambitious vision is to "change the world" (67) and make it a better place for everyone to live in. The novel of about one hundred pages runs throughout the course of a day and a half in Venice.

**Race, Class and Gender in Post-oil Kuwait**

Race, class, and gender are among the main themes of *Fame in the Adriatic*. The Venetian society depicted in the novel is experiencing a process of modernization throughout the sixteenth century. This process of modernization is related to Kuwait and since "the 1970s several new factors intensified the process of change. The increase of labor migration, women's participation in salaried work, state ideology and politics, international input such as United Nations studies and recommendations, and Western feminist demands" (Haddad, 1998, 7). An important aspect to highlight is that in pre-oil Kuwait, "the class dichotomy was between the upper- and lower-class strata of Kuwaiti society. The post-oil era, starting from the 1950s has been complicated by racial factors, and the class is "characterized more by the citizen-immigrant dichotomy than by any clear-cut class difference among the Kuwaitis" (Tijani, 2009, 85-86). The upper class in contemporary Kuwait includes the ruling family, wealthy Kuwaiti merchant families and, perhaps, Kuwaiti politicians as well as wealthy immigrant entrepreneurs. The middle class includes Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti civil and public servants; and the lower class consists of low-waged immigrant workers (mainly from South Asia) and the Bidūns (Tijani, 2009). Class is here understood in the Marxist sense as determined by ownership or control of the means of production; social classes also have differential access to political power and the state. Class location shapes cultural practices, patterns of consumption, lifestyle, reproduction, and even worldview. As Ralph Miliband put it, class divisions "find expression in terms of

power, income, wealth, responsibility, 'life chances,' style and quality of life, and everything else that makes up the texture of existence" (cited in Moghadam, 1993, 16). Class shapes women's roles in the sphere of production, and it shapes women's choices and behavior in reproduction. Rita Mae Brown (cited in hooks 2000, 39) stated that class is much more than Marx's definition of relationship to the means of production. Class involves your behavior, your basic assumptions, how you are taught to behave, what you expect from yourself and from others, your concept of future, how you understand problems and solve them, how you think, feel, act" (39).

In the following two subsections I attempt to analyze *Fame in the Adriatic* in which the post-oil period of social, cultural and political changes in Kuwait are clearly mirrored and concepts of class, race and gender are made apparent.

### *Domestic Labor and the Case of an Ethiopian Girl*

Ethiopian women migrate through illegal and legal trajectories to different Middle East countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in search of work and better living conditions (Woldemichael, 2013). In line to this research, Fernandez (2010) indicated that in 2008-2009, most women migrants are employed in the service sector (primarily as domestic workers) and many of them are from Asia (the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka), and a growing number of domestic workers are from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan and Egypt (Sabban, 2002) reflecting a shift to cheaper sources of labor. It is worth recalling that demand for migrant workers in the Gulf states is due to economic development of oil countries that create a high request of labor from other countries in a variety of fields including domestic work (Woldemichael, 2013).

According to Fernandez (2010), the Gulf Countries allowed the import of migrant labor for the undesirable work that nationals did not want to do. Such demand pulls workers towards a development which in most cases resulted in a slavery like mistreatment especially for domestic workers (Woldemichael, 2013). The image of exploited and enslaved domestic workers is sarcastically exposed throughout the novel. This is observed from Maria's remarks to her birthday gift that happens to be a seven-year-old girl originally from Ethiopia, who is obliged to serve Maria Botticelli in her home duties. In contrast, Maria does not show any feelings of gratitude about the peculiar gift. On the contrary, her remarks show displeasure with the gift. Her tone is rather witty and makes it a thought-provoking beginning for the novel, inferring her disagreement about the slave market issue that is usually preferred by wealthy people:

> Who gives an old friend a seven-year-old slave? Sometimes I think nobles have so much money they get sick of it, so instead of offering ducats or perhaps some vegetables, they give away their possessions. Here, take the chair I've been sitting on for years. You'll enjoy the imprint my backside has left upon it. (2-3)

The comparison of the 'slave' with the term 'possession(s)' reflects the fact that slaves have no control over their own life and without their consent can be sold or given away to other families, just like the case of the young Ethiopian girl being owned "by a something Ziani" (3). According to ILO (2011) there are evidences which demonstrate that Ethiopian girls as young as 13 years old are traded, and it's becoming a practice the trafficking of girls before the age of 18. From a radical feminist perspective, the rationale for this is that society is a system characterized by subjugation between race, class, gender categories, and religious aspects. In line with the

feminists, the essential structure of domination is gender and the system of patriarchy. Men's authority over women, the economic denial and lack of prospects for education and employment made women highly relegated in the social structure and lack capability in decision making in their everyday life, family matters and social engagement. The socially constructed gender inequality and role assignment are rooted in the male-female power relationship where men are dominant over women in various aspects so that women are assigned to a degraded and low position jobs of which domestic work is one. As it is quoted in Ehrenreich (2003), radical feminists argued that housework defines a human relationship and, when unequally divided among the social groups, strengthens established inequalities. In addition to this societal discrimination of women, the crime human trafficking functions in a highly gender-targeted way making women more defenseless to various kinds of abuses and exploitations (Woldemichael, 2013).

In order to overcome this problem in society, the protagonist of the novel raises feminist thoughts underlying the importance of education in a woman's life and at the same time she supports in hooks's terms "a revolutionary vision of social change [...] to aid reforms that will improve the lives of women irrespective of class" (hooks, 2000, 42). By displaying Elana as a slave girl, the novel's aim is to "assist other women in their efforts to better themselves economically and build a better future for them, despite the contrast they hold" (hooks, 2000, 42). Having (a) domestic worker(s) is highly stressed by Faris throughout the entire novel which represents a concerned issue in Kuwaiti society and is extended throughout the Gulf region. The protagonist complains about the fact of not being offered a financial support or something edible rather than being "brought the tyke to the family" (Ibid) because according to Maria "the Ethiopian child forgets that she's a slave" (Ibid). Thus, the girl's services don't really contribute

to ease Maria's tasks. That is why, Maria would have felt more relieved from her work if she had "a full-grown slave [...] someone to do the grocery shopping for [her], someone to accompany [her] in public to lessen the need for adult supervision" (Ibid).

According to Human Rights Watch (2010), having a domestic worker to perform time-consuming errands has reduced the amount of household labor demanded from Kuwaiti women, who otherwise bear primary responsibility for these tasks. Over the past few decades, Kuwaiti women have joined the workforce, pursued higher education, and mostly involved in more vigorous lives outside the home. Thus, the assistance of a domestic helper diminishes considerably a woman's household errands, whereas she can focus on more intellectual tasks that would benefit her even greater rather than household chores that traditionally have been assigned to women. Nonetheless, all academic writings from Arab Gulf standpoints see foreign female domestic servants in the United Arab Emirates and the other Gulf states as a problem, and no published study defines domestic workers as a requirement for the area's changing lifestyle, writes Sabban (2002, 12).

The novel also points out to the fact that domestic labor cannot be afforded by anyone. Maria identifies Caterina as a person who belongs to the middle or lower-class level, and therefore, who "does not have any slaves" (21) because she and her brothers "have not been able to afford one" (55). Moghadam (1993) argued that even in 2002 the observation made in 1971 by Constantina Safilios-Rothschild is still true, that women from wealthy families could afford the help of cheap domestic labor, although middle-class women in most of the large Middle Eastern states are less probable to be able to afford domestic assistance in these post-oil-boom days and more likely to rely on a mother or mother-in-law. Fernandez (2010) observed that foreign domestic workers are a status symbol of this life of luxury, and are methodical in a racialized

hierarchy, with Filipina women at the top signaling the highest status and commanding the highest salaries, followed by Indonesian and Sri Lankan women, and African women at the lowest.

The novel exhibits instances of racism to awaken feminism thoughts that there is something wrong with society's treatment of women of color and struggles to eliminate traces of injustices. As in "Feminism is for Everybody" hooks (2000) stated that "all over this nation individual feminists with class power who support a revolutionary vision of social change share resources and use their power to aid reforms that will improve the lives of women irrespective of class" (42), Maria reflects on the racism issue and asks herself slightly emotional "Why are people born black? Couldn't they just grow into their skin color? This way, no young person would ever be sold into slavery" (71). In the following dialogue as well, we witness the idea that skin color has a direct influence on a woman's life and the fact of being identified as a woman of color, she is automatically placed in a subordinate position by the class power:

> You have no soul [...] It is better not to leave the house from now on. Who
>
> knows what they'll do to you if they see you, because even though you have not
>
> been raised as a slave in our house, you're black. (72)

As a result of the tortures inflicted on the male slave by their neighbors, Maria knows that Elana would be in trouble due to her skin color (71). The color and identity of this girl is subject to marginalization and exploitation. According to Crenshaw (1993), racial stereotyping plays a vital role in 'othering' women of diverse nationalities and race which would result in discriminating them by precise shades of skin color. Ehrenreich (2003) agrees with Crenshaw's thinking that:

One thing you can say with certainty about the population of household workers is that they are disproportionately women of color: lower kinds of people for lower kind of work (Woldemichael, 2013). The fact of not having a soul, which is a reiterative characteristic of the slaves in the novel, could symbolize the fact that "migrant domestic workers are not formally recognized as employees in the State of Kuwait" (Budhwar & Mellahi, 2016, 278). The same research concludes that employers in Kuwait consider migrant domestic workers as a member of the family for which they work, thus Kuwaiti labor laws do not protect them. Consequently, Budhwar and Mellahi (2016) support the idea that "the working conditions of domestic workers depend immeasurably on the way their employers treat them" (278). This aspect is well reflected throughout the novel and the young Elana is treated as another member of the family. In contrast to her condition, there is the situation of a male slave whose owners inflict upon him unbearable punishments that eventually encourage him to escape from the constant harsh conditions that he is forced to endure. The characteristic of not "having a soul" and/or not being recognized by law, leaves girls and women without protection and vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

However, it is also important to note that many times the migrant workers will falsely accuse their employers of the non-payment of their wages or bad working conditions (Budhwar & Mellahi, 2016). Budhwar and Mellahi (2016) attribute this reason to the fact that the domestic workers feel homesick and wish to return to their country or feel that they are not satisfied with the employment relationship they have. The same research found out that in order to break their contract and return to their country, they must escape and seek refuge in their embassies to avoid being put in the awkward situation of employers asking them to pay back the money that they have spent on hiring them. "Once found, the runaway employee could face deportation" (Budhwar & Mellahi, 2016).

Toward the end of the novel, Maria is witness to her neighbor male slave's escape and for "standing aside as the wild mare escaped" (98), Maria would "dodge the punishments" because "slave laws are very strict all over Europe" (98). Not only Maria would face a severe sentence but also "Elana would be executed on the spot for the same offence" (98). In a humorous tone, Maria thinks that "Her life, after all, was valueless" (98) in a way to ironically justify the slave's execution. From a legal perspective, "authorized action is taken against any individual that shelters or employs migrant workers without a Kafala" (Budhwar & Mellahi, 2016, 278). International human rights bodies have maintained the fact that the 'Kafala' sponsorship system is the main contributor to many of the issues migrant domestic workers encounter in Middle Eastern countries, and regard it as a modern-day slavery that prompts bounded labor (Budhwar & Mellahi, 2016). The fact of being a female domestic worker of colour is a highly disadvantaged and vulnerable position to suffer from oppression and mistreatment. With the illustration of these cases, the writer acknowledges the importance of class, race and gender, and proves that art and feminism activism can work together to bring changes for the eradication of injustices and mistreatment of the less advantaged women on the social class structure. In line with de Beauvoir's feminist thought, Faris is well aware of the fact that language is a chosen instrument which does not undervalue the power of change in society:

> Feminists are not useless and silly hysterics. They have studied and thought, and they want to make changes that will benefit all of society. Throughout the world, women are still being sold, beaten, raped and killed, so this is a struggle that must be in the minds of all women and be the basis of all female behavior. We can no longer tolerate antifeminist behavior, from other women or from men. (Bair, 1986, 162).

*Disgrace Upon a Woman's Marriage with a Non-National*

It is worth recalling from previous sections that oil exportation in 1946 triggered huge infrastructure expansion in the name of modernization, urging a significant work importation across all skill levels to meet the employment demands of the new metropolitan (Alissa, 2009, 85). This immense flood of foreign labor altered the composition of cities throughout the Gulf region from a mostly Arab Muslim community to one that is nationally, ethnically, and religiously diverse. Nada Faris portrays this historical period: "The fishing village has now awakened, and the streets, which were quiet a few hours ago, are now teeming with activity. There are too many nationalities, races, and faces" (5). She continues articulating this period with a nostalgic memory because of the huge distinction implemented between nationals and non-nationals saying that: "This multiculturalism has been the pride and joy of Corfu, but more and more of us are now conforming to the image of our nobility: Catholic, Venetian" (5). In this case, the writer clearly refers to the contemporary privileged status of the nationals which is that of being a Muslim Kuwaiti.

Ghabra (2017) argued that "in the past, coexistence happened easily and simply between all categories of people. We used to respect and love one another, no matter the group. Suddenly, in the 1980s this welcoming world ended" (33). Longva stated that in the early years of oil development, "nationality was not yet an issue, and although Kuwait adopted its first Nationality Law in 1948, people, on the whole, were still using the age-old custom of classifying self and others according to their birth-places and not according to their formal subjection to a state" (Longva, 1997, 43). This seems to indicate that "Kuwait's strategy toward its non-nationals has not always been based on exclusion" (Longva, 1997, 43). However, from the mid-1970s onwards, with the enormous increase in Kuwait's oil revenue and influx in labor coming not only

from adjacent Middle Eastern countries, but also from South and Southeast Asia (Alissa, 2009), it gradually became clear that the purpose of the Kuwaiti migration policy was to maintain the transient character of labor immigration in order to ensure that the migrants did not settle down permanently. It is common to hear that what gave citizenship its crucial significance in Kuwait today were the social privileges and material benefits it implied. Kuwaiti nationals did enjoy welfare and social benefits that were extensive by any standards (Longva, 1997, 44).

The novel exposes the negative results if a woman chooses to marry with a non-national or stateless person. Feelings of attraction and love toward a non-national young man are introduced in order to mirror this issue in society. Throughout the narrative, advices and recommendations from Maria's friends are made abundant to make her aware of the miserable consequences if she decides to marry a non-national:

> he's not even a citizen. Let's assume you end up together." Caterina cries out in protest but he silences her. "No Kitty, let's assume they do. Let's say you, me, the boys," he points at her brothers [Caterina's brothers], "and even Aunt Sophia [Maria's mother] herself bless this union, you think the republic will? What'll happen to your children? They'd be more enslaved than the Jews. Maria, forget about him and look to your future. You owe your mother this much at least. (58)

This dialogue is of great significance, since it is indicative of the fact that a Kuwaiti woman is faced with numerous obstacles, which vary depending on whether she is marrying someone from the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council), from another Arab state, a non-Arab, or a stateless person (commonly referred to as Bedun — bidūn) (Alsharekh, 2018). There is, however, a persistent

thread that runs through all of these women's experiences. They are all unable to pass on their citizenship to their children, and their children do not benefit from many of the state-funded welfare privileges that other citizens enjoy, particularly in terms of scholarships, work opportunities and full health benefits (Alsharekh, 2018). Ghabra stated that when a woman marries a non-Kuwaiti, he is not naturalized as a citizen, regardless of how long they remain married, nor are the children from the marriage. In addition to this, "she cannot pass on her citizenship to her children unless the non-Kuwaiti husband dies, or they divorce" (Ghabra, 2017, 32). Al-Mughni and Tétreault (2000) stated that children and non-Kuwaiti spouses of Kuwaiti women are defined and treated as expatriates: they have no right to continue in the country unless they receive residence permits from the state, and they must qualify for these permits on the same basis as other foreigners pursuing Kuwaiti residence. Al-Mughni and Tétreault (2000) further indicated that "children of Kuwaiti women and non-Kuwaiti men are deprived of entrance to government schools although the children of Kuwaiti men and non-Kuwaiti women are entitled, as are the children of two Kuwaiti parents, to join these schools" (245). Not only do the children of Kuwaiti mothers not have the right to ownership or inheritance of property owned by their mothers in Kuwait, a situation that led to mothers fearing death for economic reasons according to Dr Fāṭma al-Ḥūwayl, but they do not get the same health coverage as the children of Kuwaiti men (they are excluded from dental braces and some medicines) nor are they eligible for enrollment in state‑funded scholarships for university study abroad (Alsharekh, 2018). Furthermore, Alsharekh (2018) mentioned that these children of Kuwaiti mothers are also treated as foreigners in terms of salaries in the private sector and government jobs and are therefore paid less than Kuwaitis. Additionally to this, in the Arab Gulf States Institute of Washington website, Leanah Al Awadhi, a social activist, speaks up about this issue when informing about the

injustices and limitation of rights and benefits of children from Kuwaiti mothers and foreign or bidūn (stateless) fathers. In this news, Al Awadhi argued that these children are not recognized as Kuwaiti citizens unless their mother and father officially get divorced, and if they do so, can only obtain Kuwaiti nationality 15 years afterward. Conversely, Kuwaiti men can offer their citizenship to their foreign wives and children (Al-Mughni & Tétreault, 2000) after five years of marriage, and it is at the Minister of Interior's discretion to speed up the process. This naturalized wife gets to retain the Kuwaiti citizenship even after divorce and re-marriage to a non-Kuwaiti, and if her Kuwaiti husband dies, or their marriage ends with divorce prior to her obtaining citizenship, she could still request and be entitled through a male son (Alsharekh, 2018). This makes the questions of citizenship tied to gender in a fundamental and unequivocal manner; for a Kuwaiti man the citizenship is mutable and whole, but for a Kuwaiti woman it is a completely different story. By having different criteria governing the granting of citizenship to spouses and children in each of these cases, the principle of equal rights and opportunities for Kuwaiti women and their right freely to choose a spouse are being challenged. Al-Mughni and Tétreault (2000) highlighted that in 1993 approximately 7,970 Kuwaiti women were married to non-Kuwaiti men and as a result of state policies, by 1995 almost one-third of these women had emigrated to Western countries in search of better lives for their children. In addition to this, many women renounced at their nationalities as a way to protest and fight against this discrimination and had their names published in the official gazette. These women were denounced by the Islamist writer al-Shibani as 'traitors' and 'anti-Islam' without any reference to the severe discrimination they faced along with their families (Al-Mughni and Tétreault, 2000).

This issue is a worrying and distressing order in society, and the female protagonist in Faris's novel reflects sentimentally on her victimized situation and acknowledges the fact that even if she escapes with Giuseppe, her life would be miserable from all perspectives:

I could run away with Giuseppe and live like a pirate, but I would be shunned from normal life. I would lose everything and everyone I know: my family, my friends. Should it happen, I wouldn't even be able to count on even Caterina's friendship. (34)

With this reflection, Maria tries to mirror the perseverance of the preexisting system of classic patriarchy that exercises a tight control over women's matrimonial decisions. The reasons for this are rooted deep within the power relations between men and women and, more so, in the socio‑political structures that still determine that "tribe" and family relations are superior to individual choice or freedom, especially for women (Alsharekh, 2018). As Haya al-Mughni (1993) put it, "the concept of *sharaf* (loosely translated as honor) was essential for the merchant people. It kept them together and helped them to maintain their privilege. More important, it kept women 'in their place" (56). To choose a mate, to fall in love and make a choice that may not coincide with the family's, that may not serve to further their interest and cement their status, was/is traditionally considered dishonorable for both men and women. This independent agency in tightly knit communities, where marriage is a group decision, is considered similar to selfishness by some, and in nomadic communities could lead to the expulsion of the guilty party and the refusal of the tribe to acknowledge them or provide them with physical or material protection. Essentially, this meant that both the non-Kuwaiti wife and husband were regarded as

being a non‑normative and an inferior choice to that of marrying a Kuwaiti, but in terms of legal discrimination it is only the Kuwaiti woman who receives discriminatory treatment. Both Islamic and Arab constructs of "family" and belonging are based on patrilineal descent with a strong preference for marriage within family lines. In Kuwait, the phrase "diḥīna fī mukabātnā" (our oil [stays] in our pan) refers to the ideal of marriage between first cousins so that the family's wealth does not get divided or end up in the hands of outsiders. Therefore, women are expected to marry within the family or if no suitable matches occur, someone from a similar or better background, which is what the female protagonist is advised to do to "ascend her condition" (26) on the social ladder. On the other hand, a non‑national seen through this frame is of a minor social background than a national, even if they are relatives from nearby Arab or Muslim nations (Alsharekh, 2018). Al-Mughni and Tétreault (2000) observed that despite "individual and collective efforts by Kuwaiti women to obtain some rights for their non-Kuwaiti spouses and children, the government has remained unaffected to their demands" (246).

Equally deaf to their requests has been the all-male National Assembly, content to keep untouched existing social laws that relegate women and deny them of their citizenship rights (Al-Mughni and Tétreault, 2000). On the other hand, testimonies of women on the UN refugee agency website, regard this practice as "disheartening and dehumanizing" and "if [their children] don't have the ID card, if they don't have the nationality, they will face difficulties when dealing with authorities" (UNHCR, 2013) says a married Kuwaiti woman with three stateless children. Given that there are more than 19,000 Kuwaiti women married to non‑nationals (of known nationalities) with over 56,0001 children according to the 2016 statistics, this is a problem that involves a significant proportion of Kuwaiti households (Alsharekh, 2018). With an average of 6.502 new marriage certificates issued annually to Kuwaiti women marrying non-Kuwaitis, these

numbers grow year by year (Alsharekh, 2018) and women continue to be placed in precarious positions due to their gender. While there have been many promises and announcements that the children of Kuwaiti mothers will be granted priority following Kuwaiti citizens at the Public Service Authority, the necessary mechanisms for signing these young men and women into the system have not been successful yet according to an article in *AlRai Newspaper* (Alsharekh, 2018). Gender discrimination in nationality laws propagates women's unequal position in society and the family, sending a message to girls that they are not equal citizens because of their gender. Gender inequality exposes women to heightened risks of abuse and exploitation. It also endangers family life. Some women are forced to divorce to try to pass nationality to their children, some are forced into marriages to try to acquire nationality, and others never marry in order to avoid statelessness for future generations.

The exposure of gender inequality in Faris's novel clearly denotes a concern toward Kuwaiti women, and many others deprived of their basic human rights. This concern is translated into the form of writing which combined with activism are considered effective tools and major weapons that can help to promote a social change. Activism is an "effective agent of social change than electoral politics" (Humm, 1989), and the novel's major preoccupation is to "change the world" (67) in terms of gender discrimination.

**Gendered Cultural Norms**

Gendered cultural norms are to be found in every society around the world, and they are produced through social institutions such as families, schools, workplaces, laboratories, universities, or boardrooms and wider cultural products such as textbooks, literature, film, and video games. According to Lorber (1994), "the building blocks of genders are socially

constructed statuses" (17). In other words, gender is an all pervasive social institution that establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family and politics, and is also an entity in and of itself (Lorber, 1994). In *Fame in the Adriatic* the writer chose to exhibit an array of gendered cultural norms that have a tremendous impact on women's decisions, behavior, preferences, the way they dress, and the knowledge that is appropriate for them. Thus, a woman's decision will always depend upon gendered norms creating nearly the impossible of having her own choices.

The reputation of a woman, early marriage to avoid spinsterhood, or choosing to occupy with beauty instead of science are some of the most common themes in the novel, themes that are widely held in society and constitute idealized views about women. In the same vein, al-Mughni (1993) argued that women in Kuwait have become a target of the Islamic fundamentalist movement, and therefore their situation has become increasingly difficult, despite their visible and largely independent role. Leaders of the movement tend to be critical of the appearance of women in public and the co-mingling of the sexes in education, sports, performing art, and travel. The fundamentalists hope to weaken the liberal forces of society, thus jeopardizing the civic gains made by women in the 1960s and 1970s (Al-Mughni, 1993). Despite of the fact that Kuwaiti women have come a long way and is one of the most liberal countries within the Gulf states, it is still largely driven by tribal customs and tradition. Women's roles are argued to remain to the domain of the household as opposed to public affairs. The Kuwaiti society is characterized as a male-oriented and patriarchal in nature where power and authority resides in the hands of men, the few and the elite. Overall, behind the façade of modernity, tribal traditions

remain the dominant cultural framework of Arab society and politics (Olimat, 2009) and this is so genuinely described throughout the novel.

### The Importance of a Woman's Social Conduct

The novel describes a society where a woman is fundamentally defined by her behavior. In other words, "family honor and good reputation, or the negative consequence of shame, rest most heavily upon the conduct of women" (Moghadam, 1993, 4). In addition, there is a code of modesty that rests on the dignity and reputation of the woman, with restrictions on interactions between men and women and anchored in family laws based on Shar'ia law (UNDP, 2003, 2005; World Bank, 2003a, b). "This is supported by the dominant cultural practice of 'qiwama' (protection), which requires that men must 'protect' a woman's honor and sexuality" (Metcalfe, 2008, 90).

Maria is aware of this fact thinking that "if anyone catches" (7) her being "a little playful" (7) and too close to Giuseppe in public, her "reputation would be ruined" (7). In relation to this idea, Wheeler (2004) stated that a woman's reputation is something to be thoroughly protected and intermingling too liberally and publicly with the opposite sex is a sure way to tarnish one's social standing as a decent woman. Men are not subject to the same norms. If they talk with women, it is the woman who are at risk, not the men because "men possess greater authority in nearly all aspects of society" (Torstrick, & Faier, 2009, 113). The reputation of Maria has been seriously affected by her interest in science, which is considered "male knowledge" (14), lack of womanhood, "inability to cook, weave, sew, clean, or nurture kids" (76). Because of her ruined status, she had "fourteen rejections in twelve months – make that

fifteen with Uncle Zian's" (76). That is why she is well-known for not following the society's gendered cultural norms, and this is symbolically illustrated with a "mud stain [that] won't come out" (3) from her dress. The stain is the symbolical representation of her degraded position in society, and alike the stain which doesn't vanish, Maria's behavior and mindset won't change either. Even though Giuseppe recommends Maria to "go home and clean [her] dress with proper Venetian soap and boiling water like any normal girl" (5), Maria insists on going to a well at the end of the village; however, soon she realizes that it was pointless because she ended up being all soaked restraining her attendance to the Sunday service. In a funny note, Giuseppe reminds her that she is "a damn dolt who is totally oblivious to social norms" (6) and now children "will file behind [them] and sing songs about [her] stain" (8). However, children "don't file behind them and they don't sing songs about her stain" (8) anymore, which puts forward the suggestion of people's lack of interest for girls whose name has been degraded in society. The author's aim is to show that a woman's "reputation is of critical importance ... and thus abiding by social customs is one way to achieve personal goals, yet show one's cultural awareness and fluency" (Torstrick & Faier, 2009, 117).

Faris insists on showing that a woman's image must be impeccable especially when attending the Sunday service. The main reason for this is that her mother found her a suitor who was present at the service. For this reason, her best friend Caterina, who embodies the traditional beliefs of society, "wants something black to show [Maria's suitor] that [she] is a pious, unaware of the proposal" (21) and at the same time to "make [her] appear as though she is ready to be plucked and devoured" (21). The writer's use of adjectives like 'pious,' 'unaware,' set the determined values for women, and 'plucked,' 'devoured' entail that a woman's femininity is of great importance. For feminism is therefore necessary to dismantle these predicaments. The

novel conveys the message that, because of the gendered standards rooted in society, a woman must constantly show her spiritual side and project an attractive look to avoid any kind of rejection, especially from men. In Brownmiller's words, "Disqualification was marked on the forehead of a woman whose femininity was lost" (1984, prologue). This is also shown by the secondary character Caterina, who believes that a woman cannot get married if she does not show her feminine side and does not follow the "society with its own rules and moral decorum" (17). The following quotation at length addressed by Caterina to Maria helps to understand not only the standards applied to a woman, but also the emphasis that is put into persuading Maria to be more aware of her behavior:

> Maria. You are ugly. You are poor. You are sixteen. Your mother and I have kept this from you, but I swear that during the past year, you have been rejected fourteen times! By men who never laid their eyes upon you! The mere mention of the name, Maria Botticelli, drives men to reject you. Why? Because of these things you do. You are too unaware of society. You play, oh Maria, you play like you were never a woman, never under pressure to be wanted. But. You. Are. A Woman. And because of these things, you have been rejected fourteen times in twelve months. (25)

From this dialogue, it is evident that a woman's social conduct plays an important role in society and "If women are perceived as not behaving well or dressing properly, they may even be subject to verbal abuse and/or physical violence from both family members and strangers" (Hudson, Ballif-Spanvill, Caprioli, & Emmett, 2012, 64). Therefore, Maria is "required to

exercise extreme modesty in dress code, and social behavior", as explained by Olimat (2009, 201-202) about Kuwaiti women. According to Maria's mother, they live "in a world in which a female's reputation is everything! I don't get to choose the rules, child. They are what they are" (95). Her mother implies the fact that a woman must behave according to patriarchal social codes and gender norms that have been set by the community. In Lorber's (1994) terms, "People go along with the impositions of gender norms because the weight of morality as well as immediate social pressure enforces them (23). Lorber further continued that "human beings produce gender in the ways they learned were appropriate for their gender status or resisting or rebelling against these norms" (32) as it is the case of Maria. Due to an inferior status, women do not have control over their own life, which leads to the repression of their own individualism, freedom of action and self-realization. Tétreault (2001) stated that in this "patriarchal, pyramidally hierarchical and extended institution" (207), where a woman's place is at the bottom of it, her individualism is doubly repressed. She also mentions the fact that "Unlike a boy who can grow up to be *rabb al-'usra* (lord of the family) in his own home, a girl has little to look forward to in terms of future authority over herself, much less over others" (208). Additionally, Ghabra (2017) argued that "increased religiosity of the state has hindered its development in regard to women and resulted in a decline in civil values; women today recognize that they have been made vulnerable and forced into lives controlled by others" (33). Kandiyoti (1991) attributed the emphasis on the control of women to economic and political dependence that restricts their autonomy quite severely in almost every other sphere. Acker (2006) supported the idea that progress for women is directly associated with economic growth as contrasted to democratically inspired social and civil advancement. Furthermore, Tétreault (2001) asserted that "in spite of the illusion of timelessness, we know that in real life societies are not static", but rather, "emerge as changing

alignments of social groups, segments, and classes, without either fixed boundaries or stable internal constitutions" (208). Today such pressures are aggravated by the pressures of modernization. This point is also reflected by Faris, describing Maria's enthrallment toward the modern period:

> this is the modern age now. The age of innovation! The age of groundbreaking discoveries! [...] Life can never be the same again after all these inventions. It can only move forward now. It can only be different, modern [...] and yet, all I ever hear in Benitses is how a lady should behave, whom to marry, and when to deliver" as if they "are living in the past. (17)

Accentuating the fact that modernization is an imminent and welcoming process, Faris manifests negative feelings toward the "traditional norms that govern the female condition in the Middle East that appear curiously monolithic and timeless" (Longva, 1993, 443). Longva observed that "Arabian women are not part of the societies in which they live, and that, by virtue of some unique principle, their condition remains unaffected by the vectors of change that have turned upside down all the other areas of life around them" (443). Moghadam and Berkovitch (1999) argued that "associating women with the private sphere and the maternal role can hinder women's access to the public sphere in general and to political action in particular" (284). Naseem (2020) indicated that Muslim women are in a constant battle against preconceived notions about their lives and identities, whether it's within their own communities, or in the world at large. Naseem (2020) further acknowledged that these stereotypes have been established by people who want to control their lives and the community. Therefore, many Muslim women

are fighting back with words by contributing with stories that offer a more honest or more complex perspective (Naseem, 2020). "Words do indeed have the power to lift up and to crush [...] and literature in Arab society continue to have at their disposal a formidable mode of expression in order to uplift, persuade, criticize, and entertain" (Allen, 2000, 50-51). Writing constitutes a major weapon for social change. Many women writers have moved towards the noble profession of activism through art. The word activism is synonymous with protest or dissent and more deliberately it is an intentional action to bring social change by raising awareness about women's issues. Throughout history, women vindicated their aspiration through writing, and art has changed their way of life.

Faris advocates activism as part of her writing for she believes that writing has a social purpose and can bring a positive change in society. In this case, as Malhorta et al., (2002 cited in Metcalfe 2008, 97) stated, Faris belongs to the category of women that is involved as an agent of change rather than just being a recipient of it. Through Faris's writing, new ways of thinking are widened which generates awareness to transform traditional norms and stereotype images into the ones who think in a novel and enriched way.

*The Spinster Problem*

"Spinsterhood is increasingly viewed as a major social concern across the GCC countries" (Thomas, 2012). This is so because, age at first marriage is rising, and the number and percentage of single women also are rising (Tétreault, 2001). The data released by UN in 2015 shows that in at least half of Arab countries, an increasing number of women are marrying later with a considerable number not marrying at all by the age of 40. Countries which have

significant delays in marriage among women and high level of 'spinsterhood' include Kuwait, Bahrain, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria. Across the Arab world, early marriage is no longer the standard and the average age at marriage for both men and women is usually increasing (Traboulsi, 2019). While marriage in Western nations, where women enjoy comparably higher levels of equality and independence, is less today a condition for starting a family or a measure of a woman's achievement, the situation is the opposite in the Arab world. Reaching a certain age without being married has become a social issue for Muslim women because they start being stigmatized due to cultural norms of society that require women to marry as young as possible or before having a certain age. "This is because the prescribed role of women in Islamic theology and law is often argued to be a major determinant of women's status. Women are perceived as wives and mothers [...] Whereas economic provision is the responsibility of men, women must marry and reproduce to earn status" (Moghadam, 1993, 3-4).

The shift away from early marriage has met with an angry response from religious activists and not only do Kuwaiti women marry at higher ages, but some do not marry at all stated Tétreault (2001). She further mentioned that the rise in the number of unmarried women has provoked allegations of a "spinster crisis" from Islamists and wide-ranging critique of the trend toward privatization of attitudes toward women's behavior. There are different reasons for a girl not to marry. She might spend a great deal of time involved with her education or career and lose track of her age until she reaches the moment when she is called a spinster. Or maybe, she had her own reasons for refusing the men who asked for her hand, preferring to wait for a better offer (Al-Qabaa, 2006). Another reason is due to the changes taking place in society. Al Qabaa (2006) further stated that in earlier times, a girl married her cousin or a relative but that is no longer the case. Young men propose to women from outside their families and sometimes

even from outside the country. Tétreault and al-Mughni (2000) mentioned that many women have avoided marriage due to their success in male-dominated job. They hold managerial positions in the private and public sectors, and some have set up their own businesses. Such involvement has given rise to assertive, independent-minded women who challenge the social and cultural norms of the society. The same idea is echoed in online news, arguing that Arab women do not only take charge of their destinies by delaying marriage or remaining single, but they are also fighting back against the system obsessed with labelling them as spinsters (Traboulsi, 2019).

In *Fame in the Adriatic* Faris does not overlook this relevant topic that concerns many women on today's society, and on whom social pressure has a tremendously negative impact. The novel exhibits this topic eloquently on many occasions not only to mirror the society's concerns but also to yearn for transforming the mentalities of conservative people that hold to oppressive social standards. The female protagonist of *Fame in the Adriatic* is often called a spinster because she reached a stage in her life that should be celebrated with marriage according to the community's norm. The mother has been trying to persuade Maria to get married, and for a whole year they have "played a game of cat and mouse, chasing, escaping, twirling over one another, and dancing around the subject of marriage" (7). "A woman may refuse to marry altogether and remain single, but the social burden placed on aging single women is so high that most women prefer an unhappy marriage to the stigma associated with being a spinster" (Al-Mughni, 2010, 232). The protagonist reminds us that a woman's single status "was decidedly unnatural and required immediate rectification" (7) because "marriage today still retains this traditional form. And, first of all, it is imposed far more imperiously on the young girl [...] There are still many social strata where she is offered no other perspective; for peasants, an unmarried

woman is a pariah", noted Simone de Beauvoir (1949, 507). Not only the mother, but also Caterina, same age as Maria, is engulfed by the society's norms and urges Maria to marry the suitor without having any complaints about him because of her poor, ugly and spinster condition. Al-Qabaa (2006) wrote that the word 'spinster' is not associated with any particular age though wealth, beauty and social status may save some girls from being described as spinsters even if they are well past what is considered the normal age for marriage. Nowadays, many men and much of society make it their business to bully single women into involuntary marriage – and then childbearing – at any cost, as if it is preordained that this is their purpose in life (Traboulsi, 2019). In fact, Caterina is described as concerned and putting in all her efforts to help Maria projecting an attractive image for not being rejected again. "It is to give you a boost. To help you draw everyone's attention when you enter. To show your suitor that you are not some ugly spinster we're trying to dispose of" (30) says Caterina when offering Maria, a small bottle of perfume. Caterina shows an extreme urge for Maria to get married that she "wasted whatever was left in the bottle on" Maria's entrance only to eclipse her suitor and get married as soon as possible saying to her "Oh good. 'Cause I can't wait to see you married. Let's convince your suitor to have it on the same day as my wedding, can we?" (27) By making plans to have the wedding on the same day, it clearly shows that she overlooks the importance of previously knowing a person before accepting a marriage offer. The most relevant aspect is for Maria to walk out from the spinsterhood context of her life because "society [...] calls [her] a spinster" (45).

Being called a spinster in Kuwait is not what a woman likes to be regarded upon since it carries along derogatory notions that may hurt a woman's feelings. Spinster is an ugly word. It upsets many people and so they avoid using it to refer to any woman, no matter what the

circumstances. Some women even agree to marry, regardless of the man's abilities or character, simply to escape being called a spinster (Al-Qabaa, 2006). It is also interesting to note that in order to solve the problem of spinsterhood, a candidate for the UAE Federal National Council for Shajrah has pledged to promote polygamy to "eliminate spinsterhood" as a part of her election campaign. She also blamed families in the rise of "spinsterhood", saying some women have been betrayed by their families who did not approve of them becoming second, third and fourth wife during the "earlier years of their lives" (*The New Arab*, 2019).

Al-Sarraf (2019) stated that there is a societal injustice and bias against women, especially the unmarried women. He identified two issues that concern large segments of Kuwaiti society. The first concerns the right of a mother toward her minor children in hospitals. There are strict instructions that forbid a woman to sign papers regarding an operation on any minor. The law insists only a male member of the family can do this because he knows better the interest of the minor rather than a mother. A second issue that Al-Sarraf (2019) pointed out is related to gynecological diseases. The process requires the presentation of a marriage certificate and if the patient is divorced or a widow should prove it, but if they are spinsters they have to resort to private hospitals as the government hospitals refuse to treat them or conduct laboratory tests on them, perhaps because of her 'behavior'. Al Sarraf (2019) further specified that a male patient is not asked to bring a marriage contract if infected with a sexual disease. The emphasis of the novel on the spinsterhood problem suggests the gender discrimination that is constantly placed on women. Furthermore, the novel conveys the idea that marriage is an important norm in society, and it is especially enforced on women in order to avoid any misjudgments or negative outcomes. The rationale for this is that marriage in the Arab societies is the only socially and religiously approved context for sexuality and parenting. Also, marriage is not a simple

agreement between the couple but rather, it is an agreement "marriage" between the families of the couple (El-Saadani, 2020).

Describing Maria as a spinster denotes almost a terrible life for her that is continuously frowned upon due to established gendered norms in society. Through the character of the heroine of this novel, Faris demonstrates women's capability to defy the social order and female resistance to patriarchal authority.

**Challenging Gender Traditions**

Many of the older traditions persist to be impediments to the evolution of women in Kuwait. The advancement of women has not altered the viewpoint of large sections of society about women's independence and their emerging roles. For example, a sizable minority of men still marry more than one woman. There is also legal discrimination in divorce, and in the application to women of other laws and judicial determinations. In the more conservative sectors of society, the practice lingers widespread of the family imposing marriage on their 16-year-old daughter, or forcing female members of their family to wear a veil or a *niqab* (clothing covering the body from head to toe). Many families also intervene in the educational choices of women by allowing them, for instance, to specialize only in education in order to become teachers in segregated women's schools (Ghabra, 1997). Gender, work and social relations are governed by a traditional patriarchal structure in ME states which limit women's opportunities (Al-Lamki, 2000; Walby, 1990; World Bank, 2003a). Metcalfe (2008) stated that "Women's most important role, according to the society, is as a homemaker and mother, while the man's responsibility is to support and protect the wife and the family" (90). The man is considered the head of the family unit even in cases where the woman contributes substantially to the family's income. As a result,

women enjoy limited, if any, acknowledgment, for their contribution to the family, and are often seen as legally, economically and socially dependent on men (World Bank, 2003b, 9).

*Fame in the Adriatic* genuinely explores some of these gender traditions, which I attempt to analyze in the following subsections. Challenging gender traditions is a way to make a call about "women's sense of themselves as women – as members of a group socially, politically, and economically positioned differently from the group of men" (Hogeland, 1998). As Simone de Beauvoir (1949) rightly put it, women needed to refuse the "otherness" that kept them trapped in immanence. As victims of the "sex/gender system," in Gayle Rubin's phrase, women needed nothing less than a total social transformation to attain equality, and words are crucial weapons for feminism (DeBeauvoir, 1949) to transform society.

### Swears Too Much, Goes Too Far and Aspires a Lot

Women are supposed to be 'less than' not 'too much'. Women are meant to be quiet, modest, humble, polite, nice, well behaved, aware of the red lines imposed on them. They are supposed to tread softly and within their limits (Eltahawy, 2015). Muslim women are especially vulnerable to misogyny and are expected to live within the demands of community which is synonymous with men and too often those self-appointed male leaders are the ones who determine what is 'too far' (Eltahawy, 2015). Patriarchy enables and protects men at the same time as it socializes women to internalize the principles of patriarchy and to accept them as culture and as community.

As soon as a woman breaks any society's patriarchal norms, she is no longer a befitted one, and Maria knows this very well saying that "Society doesn't love me" (45). The author depicts a girl who is developing into a woman that breaks the boundaries of gender norms. In

Arab societies, a woman is supposed to be attentive to the conservative beliefs of the community. However, the name Maria Botticelli is well-known for being a girl "oblivious to social norms" (7), yet she is fully aware of her thoughts and actions saying that "I don't care about my reputation" (100). When in awkward circumstances, Maria's language abounds consciously with curses; she damns and swears internally and publicly "like a man at port who lost both his evening dinner and fishing rod at once" (6), and "yelling in the open streets like an Armenian grocer" (7). The use of the analogies helps to framework Maria's conduct making it a noticeable portrayal as the one who doesn't conform with social rules. Through her words she rejects imposed patterns of thought, and they breach walls of silencing (Badran & Cooke, 2004). Ironically, Maria tries to convince herself and the others that she is "not liberal" (60) but the fact of having a close encounter with Giuseppe and getting to feel that "his warm lips taste like salt" (10) is actually the opposite of a traditional girl. In fact, after this pleasant meeting she acknowledges that she "might be a little bit liberal after all" (10) and at the same time trying to show a conservative side of her, but it "is only on the outside, and inside I am wondering if I should take Giuseppe's offer and run away at first light" (27). Maria seems to be trapped into feelings of conflict between the society's demands and her true personality.

Nonetheless, inclinations toward a liberal life predominates throughout the novel and constitute her thoughts and behavior. One of the "liberal" thoughts that she considers is escaping with Giuseppe Nini, who is "a mule, a nationless, a heathen" (4) and who would only bring dishonor for her and her family. Furthermore, she "even roll around the possibility of becoming Mrs. Maria Nini just to see how it makes me feel, and you know what, it feels a whole lot better than what I'm feeling now" (27). The reason is that Giusseppe does not judge her nor denies her the desire of getting a university degree. On the contrary, he is the one who ordered Maria's

favourite book called *Dialogue on Adam and Eve* by Isotta Nogarola (10). The reason why Maria likes this writer is due to Nogarola's achievements in the Italian Renaissance. Isotta Nogarola (1418-66) remained one of the first women to carve out a place for herself in the male-dominated republic of letters and served as a crucial role model for generations of aspiring female artists and writers. Therefore, Nogarola is the ideal figure for Maria to follow in life.

In a society where the community's norms are to follow in life, Maria represents the strong young female who embraces the idea of choosing her own destiny and rejecting everything what is imposed on her. One of her main interests is reading books and this is illustrated right from the very beginning of the novel, reading Galen's book about "That the Best Physician is also a Philosopher" in honor of her father's death" (14). For this reason, people regard Maria as "anathema" (26) or "an anomaly for simply coveting knowledge" (61) because "when she does something wrong we blame it on her education saying that education corrupted her morals" (Badran & Cooke, 2004, xl). In other words, the subject of "literacy for women of any class was inflammatory and remained anathema to entrenched male patriarchy which has linked female immorality with literacy [...] they could absorb subversive ideas and engage in dangerous communication which would lead to unseemly behavior" (Badran & Cook, 2004, xl). Maria's interest is clearly contrasted with Caterina's world, who is always into beauty and fashion. As Simone de Beauvoir (1949) accurately put it "the feminine world is sometimes contrasted with the masculine universe [...] they are integrated into the group governed by males, where they occupy a subordinate position" (724). In this case, Maria's world would integrate into the masculine universe, whereas Caterina's world into the feminine one, being both of them governed by patriarchy. In addition to this, Caterina informs and advises Maria that "Beauty is made now, from paints and clothes, if you only just leave your ugly science and concentrate on

kosmetike, you will see another modern discovery that you've overlooked" (26). Highlighting the assumption how the way women look is more important than what they do, what they think, or even whether they think at all [...] women are victims of a patriarchal, commercialized, oppressive beauty culture (Freeman, 1975). As a result of Caterina's recognition that "the universe as a whole is masculine; it is men who have shaped it and ruled it and who still dominate; as for her, she does not consider herself responsible for it; [...] she grasps herself as passive opposite to these human-faced gods who set goals and standards" (de Beauvoir, 1949, 725). Therefore, Caterina considers that it is much better to "let men busy themselves with the ugly" (27) instead of dealing with concepts like "printing or the center of the universe" (27) that belong to men's field interests. Caterina belongs to the category of women that in Beauvoir's (1949) terms accepts "without argument the truths and laws that other man gave them. Woman's lot is obedience and respect. She has no grasp, even in thought, on this reality that involves her" (725).

In contrast to Caterina, Maria has "been raised differently than other girls", and she aspires to a higher education and to change the world, but her ambition is overshadowed by the society. In the same vein, in spite of the fact that education for Kuwaiti woman is an official right and they are highly encouraged to have a degree, Ghabra (2017) stated that school curricula are weak in spreading awareness about the many roles women play today internationally and the potentials for Kuwaiti women if they were allowed the chances. According to the curricula, a woman's role remains that of mother, and her place is at home. She is rarely presented as a doctor, writer or leader in society. While many women do not have a problem with motherhood per se, they would like to see some balance in the way they are characterized. In addition, sport and other physical activities, essential to health and well wellbeing, are usually nonexistent from

girl's schooling. In addition to this, Moghadam (1993) pointed out that in the dominion of "education and employment, not only is it believed that women do not have the same interests as men and will therefore avoid men's activities, but also care is exercised to make sure they cannot prepare for roles considered inappropriate" (5). Creating this discrepancy between Maria and Caterina, from a feminist perspective, one could notice the writer's aim to change the attitude of considering women from the social and psychological point of view as the symbol of sex whose main interest should be beauty and fashion. Going too far and beyond her cultural manufactured female boundaries is denoting a feminist activist side of Maria, who is challenging the gender norms of her community. The role of Maria in subverting the gender norms is not an accidental one, but fundamental in changing perceptions and mentalities of the people and especially of the new generation.

### *"No" To an Arranged Marriage*

Even though many rights have been affirmed to Muslim women, social customs continue to dominate the society. Such customs include arranged marriages in which the consent of the woman involved is not sought (Haddad, 1998). According to OECD (2010) women cannot freely choose their husbands; they must obtain prior approval from their families or guardians. A 2004 United Nations report estimated that 5% of Kuwaiti girls between 15 and 19 years of age were married, divorced, or widowed. The report also includes that both Sunny and Shia family laws permit polygamy. Sharia law generally allows Muslim men to take as many as four wives as long as they can prove their ability to financially support the additional wife.

*Fame in the Adriatic* mirrors the theme of arranged marriages that has been recurrent throughout the years, and it continues to be an effervescent topic in Arabic literature. There are

writers who take on this topic to mirror this controversial issue, as has been discussed in the second chapter, but there are also writers who not only reflect on this issue, but as Faris (2003) argues that "elicit the kind of change that benefits" community at large because much still needs to be done across Kuwaiti society (Al-Sabah, 2013). The negative tone of the writer towards marriage is felt from the beginning of the novel. The below interior monologue of the protagonist explains her wish of avoiding an arranged marriage, and at the same time alludes to a mother's power over her daughter, quoting: "My mother will throw a fit if she realizes my age. I close my eyes and make a wish—please don't let Mother realize—and then I blow gently on the flower" (2).

The matriarchal authority in this novel is no less than a faithful shadow of the long-established and prevalent patriarchal power. As Gonzalez (2013) rightly put it "women notoriously perpetuate the status quo of patriarchal norms just as much as men, even if it hurts them in the short term" (136). Maria's mother governs the family and embodies the dictatorial and widowed matriarch with a strong, obstinate and fierce temperament. Her orders are observed as rules that must strictly be followed by Maria otherwise she will be severely punished with "the cane that will do a whole lot more than kiss [her] skin" (44). Due to Maria's advanced age, the mother is impatient about giving her daughter into marriage to an old senator. Women in this region experience what Deniz Kandiyoti (2000: xiv) called a "double jeopardy." They are not only subject to the widespread restrictions on civic and political participation affecting both sexes but are further denied autonomy by discriminatory "personal status laws." Under variants of these laws, it is not women but their male guardians (in their absence would be their mothers) who have the authority to decide matters such as whom they may marry or whether they may work or travel (Kandiyoti, 2000). However, Maria Botticelli is not the conformist girl to obey the

patriarchal norms. On the contrary, she is portrayed as an intelligent girl that reflects on herself and her future, admitting as well that she hates "conventions and rules and decorum. And most of all marriage" (17). In comparison with Caterina, who seems thrilled to marry a noble man, marriage for Maria is an unwelcomed aspect in her life. This is due to the fact that she is focused more on education rather than an arranged marriage with "a man that I never met? All because I turned sixteen last night. So much for my dandelion. So much for my freedom" (15). Maria appreciates the possibility and/or the freedom of a woman to make her own choices in life. She disagrees with society's gendered norms and the way "these people will force a man upon me like I am naked without, like they have nothing else to do" (15). The protagonist feels enraged about women's lack of power including that of marriage that generates gender inequalities in society.

Additionally, society demands for a woman to conform to the traditional gender norms, and "today the tendency is to look at a woman's education as a fulfillment of her Islamic duty" (Haddad, 1998, 7). In fact, "many Islamist fundamentalists in the world, both male and female, do not want Muslim women to have any choice of their own, but to get married to whomever their father or mother decide to marry their daughters to" (Fox, 2010, 497). In this case, the mother is the one who arranges a meeting between both of them, and when they meet, she assures him that "even though Leonardo taught her to read and write, I made certain that she blossomed into womanhood. She will be everything you desire in a wife. That is a guarantee" (43). Maria feels offended when her mother praises her thinking that "It is about how my mother is selling me the way an Armenian grocer sells his fruits! Take this apple! It is a delicious apple! You will never eat another fruit for the rest of your life!" (43). The mother's praise reveals the fact that gender roles are deeply differentiated within the Gulf states; men and women are

conceptualized as fundamentally distinct, but with potentially equal capacities. In general, even with the influence of modernization, there are trends toward conservatism [...] and men and women are expected to behave within their associated gender norms (Torstrick & Faier, 2009). Nonetheless, Faris dismantles "patriarchally produced female archetypes and replaces them with their own prototypes: women who have their own aspirations, desires, needs" (Badran & Cooke, 2004, xxx). In this case, Maria is depicted as a brave girl who stands up for her ideals by refusing the arranged marriage and quote "No" [...] "I'm sorry, who is this man who has been present during my birth and who expects me as a wife?" (43). Even though she is considered a spinster, ugly and poor she still denies the suitor's offer of marriage, thinking that

> I don't care at all that he is a politician in the Grand Council, one of the most prestigious positions in the republic; I wouldn't have cared less if he was Apollo himself addressing me from Mount Olympus! And this isn't just about the weight or the age for that matter, although both of them fill my tiny body with a humongous dread. (43)

Progressively, the writer describes Maria as furious about the arranged marriage thinking that "Why must I marry the senator? Is it because he is rich, and I am poor? Or is it because he gave my father a seven-year-old slave five years ago and is now expecting to collect his due?" (43). The fact that she reflects upon the arranged marriage denotes not only defiant and liberal thoughts, but also her critical and rational thinking upon this issue. "Developing private thoughts is her first rebellion, her first emancipation. She seems to get accustomed to equate freedom with thinking" (Badran & Cooke, 2004, 13-14). After she carefully reflected on the situation, Maria courageously defends herself and denies the marriage without any repentance:

I won't run away like a little girl. I straighten my back and look him dead in the eyes and say, "Sir, if you knew my father, then you know that I have been raised differently than other girls; however, my gender is not an imperfection. It is a blessing for Maria Botticelli intends on becoming the first Italian woman to receive a university degree and she cannot sully that dream with marriage. (43)

"Being raised differently than other girls" (43) means that she was "introduced to male knowledge" (14) by her father who also "encouraged her to pursue her dream" (14) and get a university degree. This dialogue is indicative of the protagonist's ambition to fight against "gender inequality and for a dissolution of the patriarchal gender roles that, even today, continue to short-circuit efforts to achieve complete equality between women and men" (Tyson, 2006, 116). Even though she knows that her passion for science reduces her chances of getting married, Maria struggles to accomplish her dream of studying. Therefore, Faris presents a determined and strong-minded character that is willing to overcome any obstacles that impede her dream even if it has to humiliate her mother in front of everyone, saying that "Although a part of me feels guilty for embarrassing her, the feeling is really so small and so insignificant" (44). One could argue that Maria is a selfish character who only cares for herself and her future career ignoring her mother's wishes. In other words that she breaks the "basic unit of society or basic unit of production which is the family" (Tétreault, 2001, 207).

In addition to this, there are authors who appear to agree that "Having women work with men as a response to the call for modernity is a serious danger and is contrary to the Sharia law, which demands that women stay at home and confine themselves to housework" (Haddad, 1998,

9). Haddad (1998) further stated that "Conservative Muslim authors consider woman's work outside the home to be contrary to her basic nature and against the role for which she is biologically determined" (7). Maria blames society "Because it is society itself that prohibits me from achieving it in the first place!" (44). The female protagonist makes obvious her rebellion against "conservative and traditional attitudes toward females that continue to dominate society despite some signs of progress" (Alibeli, 2015, 123). Ghabra (2017) agreed that among younger women, one finds increasingly strong feelings about being oppressed in a society that still rejects the concept of gender equality. Torstrick and Faier (2009) echoes that society's outward face reflects processes of modernization, yet on the other hand, society is still deeply rooted in traditions, especially those pertaining to family, gender, and marriage. Nonetheless, they argue that gender is in flux and, with each generation, is changing. Consequently, in one family, you might find a woman working as a teacher and balancing the demands of motherhood, while in another household, the women might not work. Hence, new ideas of gender are emerging that take into account societal change, but may also reflect entrenched gendered roles and expectations.

Maria Boticcelli's ideology aims at destroying patriarchy's gender expectations in the most profound sense, and asks for equal treatment considering the woman as an individual and a human being, with her own desires and dreams. In other words, "Not every woman wants the same thing, however, and forcing it upon them is not the best thing for women or for children" (Fox, 2010, 497). Finally, Faris avoided presenting a weak and conformist character that is commonly presented in Arabic literature. Faris's vision is to eliminate injustices and inequalities in society based on gender, race and class, and the world needs strong and determined characters

like Maria, who denies "the valorization of self-denial to further the happiness and well-being of superordinate family members" (Tétreault, 2001, 207).

One of the distinctive features of the novel represents the personality and ideology of Faris's female protagonist who makes it a profoundly inspiring character who can change the lives of many young women in Kuwait and in the world. Maria Boticcelli represents the symbol of the twenty-first century for every woman in order to succeed and follow her own dreams. The writer molded an outstanding character which not only gives life to the novel, but also hope and a good example for the modern-day Kuwaiti woman.

### *Fame in the Adriatic*: A 'Feminine', 'Feminist' or Female Text?

Invoking Elaine Showalter's categorization of the phases of the female literary tradition, *Fame in the Adriatic* falls within the category of the 'feminist' and 'female' narrative discourse. In her *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing*, which discusses the development of the female literary tradition from 1840 to 1960, Showalter identified three major phases most literary subcultures commonly go through. In the case of women's writing, she labels those stages, in successive order, as the Feminine, Feminist, and Female (13).

The first – the Feminine — "is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the [male] dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles" (13). The second, the Feminist, marked "a phase of protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy" (13). The

women artist's role began to be redefined in terms of responsibility to fellow women sufferers. The Female phase, "is a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity" (13). She suggested that the Female phase has entered a new stage of self-awareness around 1960, with the advent of women's movement. The concept of the phase of self-discovery is rather useful in understanding the general mood of contemporary women's writing. Showalter has illustrated how these historical stages can help to understand the complex interrelationship between women writers and their response to societal changes. She has clarified and illustrated that the three phases are not rigid categories and may overlap each other. There may be feminist elements in feminine writers as well as the other way round and one may even find all three phases, in the total career of a particular writer.

In line with Showalter's definition of the 'feminine' phase above, there is no internalization of the male perspective and its faithful reproduction of a male writer. However, one could challenge this assessment that *Fame in the Adriatic*, like other fictional texts by Arabian Gulf writers, faithfully reflects the social roles and adopts the masculine discourse of a submissive, docile female represented in some of the secondary characters. The form, especially the narrative strategy, of the novel is apparently conventionally imitative. However, the language of the text, the actions, and thoughts of the main female character prevail throughout the text because she is the one who constantly demonstrates resistance and protest against the post-oil Kuwaiti social order. A feminist reading of this novel would regard Faris as a feminist activist Kuwaiti woman writer in whose texts the female protagonist does not accept being placed at the bottom of the hierarchical social order. The writer does not follow the androcentric narrative discourse. On the contrary, the dominant narrative voice in this novel is that of the female protagonist. She rejects any stereotypical male whose women have to conform to his system of

values and ideas and embracing the patriarchal order as an ultimate decision. In this novel, the writer is trying to raise the long repressed female voice in literature and in society as well. From a feminist perspective, the content of the novel clearly frameworks a feminist protagonist that challenges many of the restrictions on women's individuality, condemned the mission of self-sacrifice and constructed a model of female oppression. In this phase, Maria clearly refutes a male centered worldview, undermines the ideological forces, and breaks with her own traditional image. Moreover, one could also identify elements of a female phase due to her planning of "running away [with Giuseppe], starting an adventure, a journey, like Paracelsus himself I too shall wander Europe as an itinerant physician, disputing traditional theories, wielding new ones" (74). In line with Showalter's Female phase, Maria is in search for her own identity, of her own experience and feelings, inhibitions, and undercurrents and as a female observer in search for her dream. Her dream is to "change the world" (67) and "establishing a name and a reputation for [herself]" (74). Additionally, Elaine Showalter recommended Female phase writing as the genuine and original in the strictest sense for the woman writer to reveal her feelings, thoughts, and inhibitions. In the same line with Maria's plan to establish a name for herself, Ghabra (2017) highlighted as well that "now, it is normal for young woman to look for opportunities to move to places where they can live independently, experience equality and have some control over their destiny" (32). In addition to this, "developing a sense of self-worth and a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life are skills that need to be fostered" emphasized Metcalfe (2008). Nevertheless, rebelling against the patriarchy goes against the subordination and repression inherent in the feminine ideal. The fact of attempting to "change the world" (67) posed a threat to the society, and Maria's aspirations for a full, independent life are undermined and punished at the end of the novel. After her failed running away, Maria is

accused by Luciano Pelegrinos and charged with "hanging, effective immediately" (101) for an alleged "aggression upon a member of aristocracy" (*Ibid*) and for conspiring with her "girl slave to free the Pelegrinos' possession [...] who escaped Corfu on a ship at dawn" (*Ibid*). In her effort to find a space of her own and "challenge the established practices, that is, to contest the power relations of patriarchy is likely to be met with resistance and opposition" (Singh, 1997, 2). Hence, at the end of the novel, a deadly dramatization of the wrong womanhood was employed since the age-old practices were being weakened. However, as Moghadam and Berkovitch (1999) "hope that in the coming century we will witness the formation of a critical mass of feminist challengers to realize its progressive potential and transformative power" (287).

## Conclusion

*Fame in the Adriatic* voices the hope and anxieties surrounding some of the most important social, cultural, and political movements in Kuwait, as well as encapsulates the paradoxical blend of progressive and conservative ideologies that drove them. Faris does not only mirror oppressive realities, but her contemporary novel challenges gender inequalities and discriminatory practices in society. Moghadam and Berkovitch (1999) concluded that the ways in which women challenge the forms of institutional and personal power in their societies have far-reaching cultural and political implication, and they have the potential to strengthen democratization and weaken conservative and patriarchal forces. They defend the fact that the women's movement is the principal motive force for change in the Middle East region. Faris's novel falls under the category of Arab feminist activist literature whose main protagonist questions social conventions that systematically oppress women. As Badran & Cooke (2004) stated: "The text shows that feminism activism comes not only from conscious, organized,

collective actions" (xxxii) but may occur as well in narratives, where feminism is combined with activism and personal expression. *Fame in the Adriatic* represents a feminist call for the Muslim women to make a change in society because it's only in the women's hands for their position to be transformed and get improved from social, cultural, economic and political perspectives. Moghadam (1993) emphasized that these 'modernizing women', Middle Eastern women, especially secular feminists and Muslim feminists using the languages of socialism, liberalism, feminism, and an emancipatory Islam are playing a revolutionary role in the region for gender equality, civil society, citizenship and democratization. Undoubtedly, Faris's novel join forces in this gender justice of Kuwaiti feminists microcosm that fight the resilience of patriarchy and advocating for changing gender roles in the family as well as in the larger society (Gonzalez 2013; al-Mughni 1993; Rizzo 2005; Al-Sabah 2013). Finally, *Fame in the Adriatic* represents as an exceptional work of art that transmits powerful and profound emotions which can easily reach the hearts and transform the minds of the reader, making it an imperishable novel for the Kuwaiti literary history.

## CONCLUSION AND RESULTS

Literature has always been one of the vehicles to help promote change in society. In the same vein, Allen (2000) points out to the importance of literature in the Arab world, stating that from the beginnings of the Arabic tradition, literature has been an immensely influential force in society, which means that words could be weapons that might start a war. As discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two, literature represented for many writers a reflection of society, depicting its good and its ills, with the view to making the society realize its mistakes and make amends. Many of the writers tried to change people's mentality and fight traditional beliefs for a more progressed and developed society. In addition, many of the Arab Muslim female literary productions denoted rage, criticism and rejection toward a male-dominated society. Literature provided the opportunity for many pre-oil Kuwaiti female writers to reflect the crucial issues of women's lives and register grievances against a patriarchal control. Kuwaiti women authors appealed to writing as a way to support, promote feminism and raise consciousness about dominant hegemonies and reasserting agency, a means of voicing out their oppressed condition. In Lerner's words "this coming into-consciousness […] becomes the dialectical force moving them into action to change their condition and to enter a new relationship to male-dominated society" (Lerner, 1986, 5). It has been noted that Kuwaiti women's condition has been improved significantly, and many Arab Muslim feminist writers contributed immensely to civil society through their literary works.

The contemporary Kuwaiti writer Nada Faris relies on literature as a catalyst for social change by raising awareness in her narratives about many of the issues and struggles of Kuwaiti women in the twenty-first century. Moreover, her global approach to writing through the minting

of Anglowaiti literature expands and builds upon the experience of the Kuwaiti literary production with an eye to "bring new insights, to create new ways of thinking, and to positively influence social consciousness" (Faris, n.d.-e). Throughout the analyzed texts, I have precisely attempted to show that Faris's heroines subvert, resist and do not conform to patriarchal gender roles, struggling for their rights and freedom in a male-dominated society. Through their respective strategies they challenge and undermine the societal norms and expectations that constitute the patriarchal order. These heroines attempt to reclaim their agency and resist the oppression. For some of these female protagonists, favourable outcomes are not a part of their destinies. Some of them end in dramatic ways. Nonetheless, this is also a strategy to highlight even more not only the value placed on the women's agency, but also the power of a patriarchal society with absolute control to keep women in their place.

Through the lens of these fictional texts, readers can see that many gender issues and practices are still a subject of concern within the Kuwaiti society. It is important to recall the fact that Kuwaiti women's status quo has improved significantly and they are one of the most emancipated women within the Gulf states. Kuwaiti women recent entrance into the political and judiciary terrain indicates feminist progress. Nonetheless, there are still many walls to destroy and obstacles to overcome, and this is in the hands of women.

"Women are at the center of transformation and discourse about change in the Middle East" wrote Valentine Moghadam  (1993, 250). Whether they are socialist-feminist, writers, modernists or Islamists, "Arab women have the potential to alter the political, social and cultural landscapes of the Arab world" (Abudi, 2011, 306). The connection between women, the family and social change is not only intimate but crucial. As long as mothering is predominantly a female activity, mothers and daughters are key players in any challenge to patriarchal ideologies,

structures, and institutions. Without bonding, empowerment, and solidarity between mothers and daughters, between women themselves, the dismantling of the male hegemonic institutions cannot be reached. In Adrienne Rich's (1986) words, "Until a strong line of love, confirmation, and example stretches from mother to daughter, from woman to woman across the generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness" (246). The literary contribution of Nada Faris in this transformative process is invaluable as her input can enrich women's lives in a more positive and healthier way.

It is important to highlight that being a feminist writer favouring equality and a social change is a challenging task in a conservative and patriarchal dominant society. In this regard, one might go against and disagree with the equality of men and women. Many women regard equality as unnecessary and ignore the importance of women's contribution that can add to the evolvement of society. Adding gender inequality to the conformity of deep-rooted norms and social constraints of a patriarchal society leads to the absence of any perceptions of evolution in society. No real progress is made if women's condition is suppressed, conditioned and/or ruled by external forces. When girls and women are empowered, humanity is empowered. Gender equality helps to promote progress in society from a social, economic, political and even psychological assessment.

Nada Faris went all the way and dared to be different from all the other contemporary writers of her period, who overlooked the importance of gender equality in the Kuwaiti society. In an informal meeting that we had back in January 2020, Faris stressed the fact that she is against teams, whether they are male and female, or children and parents. She does not think that one of the parts is much better or more superior than the other. It is not about promoting or favouring female superiority and/or dominance over the male side. In other words, it is not about

hating men and/or discriminating against them or any other group or individuals. She believes in the social, political and economic equality of everyone regardless of their gender, class, and race. She maintains that everyone has their opinions and reasons for acting in one way or another, and in order to avoid any arguments these teams should come to an agreement for the sake of both sides.

Faris's words are echoed in Beauvoir's belief that each party should offer full recognition of the other's subjectivity and a common agreement should be made not to try to enslave the other. If we all work together to reach a common consensus, then stability and harmony can be installed for a more just world; a world where everyone has equal rights, opportunities and can reach their full potential.

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