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Gender and the writing of Yemeni women writers

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Publication date:
2005

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Al-Mutawakel, A. M. A. (2005). *Gender and the writing of Yemeni women writers*. Dutch University Press.

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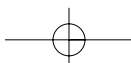
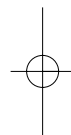
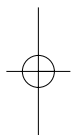
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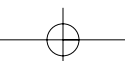
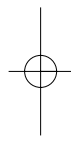
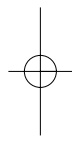
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Gender and the Writing of Yemeni Women Writers





Gender and the Writing of Yemeni Women Writers

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit van Tilburg
op gezag van rector magnificus, prof.dr. F.A. van der Duyn Schouten,
in het openbaar te verdedigen ten overstaan van
een door het college voor promoties aangewezen commissie
in de aula van de Universiteit op woensdag 26 januari 2005 om 14.15 uur

door

ANTELAK MOHAMMED ABDULMALEK AL-MUTAWAKEL

geboren op 1 december 1960 te Sana'a, Yemen

PROMOTORES:
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Cover design: PuntSpatie, Amsterdam
DTP: Offsetdrukkerij Haveka bv, Alblasterdam

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1015 TM Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Telefoon: + 31 (0) 20 625 54 29
Fax: + 31 (0) 20 620 30 95
E-mail: info@dup.nl
www.dup.nl

*Dutch University Press in association
with Purdue University Press, West Lafayette,
Ind. U.S.A & Rozenberg Publishers,
The Netherlands*

ISBN 90 3619 122 x
NUR 740

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I would like to thank Prof. dr. Tineke M. Willemsen and Prof. dr. Maaïke Meijer, my supervisors, without whose guidance, help and encouragement I would not have succeeded in completing this dissertation.

This study would not have been possible without the support of many people who have helped me at various stages of my dissertation. I feel that they have the right to share part of my success. I thank the Yemeni women writers for providing me with all data and information about themselves and their writings and allowing me to attend their gatherings. I thank the poet and novelist Nabilah al-Zubair for her time, for her frankness in narrating her life story, and for her acceptance of its publication in my book. I owe special thanks to my tutors Dr. Hatem al-Saker, Prof. Harsharan Singh Ahluwalia and Manorama Trikha.

Special thanks to Dr. Raufah Hassan – the Chairperson of the Empirical Research and Women's Studies Center – for her support, encouragement and her great belief in women's power and rights. I also thank Prof. D. Thakur – the Chairperson of the English Department – who has been of a great support through my study for the MA or the PhD.

I owe thanks to my father who provided me with references, information and advice throughout my work and to my friends Rawiya al-Kumaim, Kathleene Hindle and Afke Bordat for proof-reading my drafts and to Ingrid Beerens for providing me with recent references throughout my research. Many thanks to the friendly support of Prof. Margot Badran and Ms. Amany Roy.

I must thank my friends who made my visits to Holland cheerful: Sabria, Alkeline, Robert, Marloes, Annelies, Martina, Mr. and Mrs. Meerburg, and Mr. and Mrs. Brouwer.

This study was made possible by the grants from the Netherlands Embassy in Sana'a and the cooperation of Nuffic and Tilburg University whom I should thank. I appreciate the kindness and helpfulness of people in charge: Ms. Joke Buringa, Nuha `Aqlan, Ms. Irma van Dueren, Mr. John Pracht, drs. Robbie Servais, Mariette Rozen and many others.

At the end I'm greatly indebted to my two families: my Dutch family Miss and Mrs. Beerens and my Yemeni family: my husband, my parents, my children, my sisters and my brother.

DECEMBER 2004

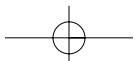
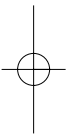
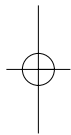
ANTELAK MOHAMMED ABDULMALEK AL-MUTAWAKEL

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Preface

Perusing books on the literary history and literary criticism of Yemeni literature, one is struck by the near silence of these books on Yemeni women's writings. This is despite the fact that the names of several women writers occur in the general Arab and Yemeni history and that there are also some anthologies of famous Yemeni women, including writers. Yemeni social history has not always been in favour of women, who had to face backward social ideologies that have led to the restriction of women to limited socially constructed roles and responsibilities, and to narrow definitions of relations between men and women. With the hypothesis that the compilers of literary history books have probably ignored women writers, I directed my study to answer the question, are there Yemeni women writers? And if there are, as one would expect, to investigate how and why these women writers came to be neglected. I investigated whether gender has an impact on the lives and writings of Yemeni women writers. Apart from some articles about some Yemeni women writers, my thesis represents the first academic attempt to investigate seriously Yemeni women's literature. Thus, I attempted to restore, as much as possible, these women's unknown corpus of texts, names, and lives. Looking for a theoretical framework that would fulfil my requirements and do justice to the Arab-Yemeni cultural particularities, I found that the approach to women writers, using gender as an analytical tool, with a concern for gender issues that affect the writing and reading of texts, was applicable. I used feminist criticism as another component of the framework of the present study; in particular, the approach of Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, in which gender was crucial. The concern expressed by Third World Feminist Criticism, that the particularities of each nation and culture should not be ignored when studying its literature and that criticism must accurately describe differences in cultures and create a new idiom to express similarities and common ground, must be recognized. As stereotypes predominate in conventional literary history, it was my aim to go beyond the flat images, recognizing the context of material and social inequalities. We cannot separate the analyses of Yemeni women's writing from

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the investigation of the religion and the system of kinship, which codetermine their work. At the same time, we cannot overlook the importance of sharing experiences and exchanging disciplines and methodologies with the West; women as “engendered” beings are subjected to patriarchal structures which may surpass the boundary of culture or society.

This study is divided into six chapters and a conclusion. Chapter One, the introduction, gives a concise review of the social and cultural situation of Yemeni women and the historical and contemporary contexts which are relevant to understand their lives. Chapter Two expounds the four basic theoretical debates that formed the background of the thesis and determined the point of view in this work. Chapter Three re-positions women writers in Yemeni literary history in the three main current genres: poetry, the short story and the novel. It reviews the position of women writers as depicted in the major contemporary Yemeni literary history books. It gives an overview of women’s contributions in the three genres, the information having been collected by searching Yemeni books, and newspapers and received directly from the Yemeni writers themselves. Chapter Four contains a discussion of some of the works of the first women short story writers in Yemen. The pioneering women short story writers, who belonged to the group of newly educated urban women, present a good example of how Yemeni women writers have introduced themselves back to the literary field after a period of total silence, and what issues they have addressed. In Chapter Five and Six, my investigation of how gender has affected the lives of Yemeni women writers and their creative process, is described. This was achieved through a field research by distributing questionnaires among twenty-eight Yemeni women writers in different Yemeni cities, and by conducting interviews with seven women writers and writing down the life story of one of the writers. The conclusion summarizes the results of the study and the implications of this work.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Yemeni Women's Historical Background

THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN YEMEN

A woman's culture and creativity cannot be separated from her surrounding environment and its physical, social, economic, and political components. In this chapter, the social and cultural situations of Yemeni women are described and the historical and contemporary contexts which have influenced them and which in turn are influenced by them are discussed. We look at the socio-cultural aspects of women's situation in general and their position in Yemeni society.

CONCISE HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

It cannot be said that Yemeni society has always, intentionally, sustained a conservative ideology towards women's rights in various fields, including the political field, throughout its history. History has recorded Yemen's acceptance of women's rule in the pre-Islamic as well as post-Islamic periods. Before Islam, the Queen of Sheba, Bilquis, who is mentioned in several places in the Bible and the Qur'an, ruled Yemen in the 10th century BC.¹ Both the Bible and the Qur'an describe her meeting with the Prophet Suleiman, her splendid throne, and her way of ruling: "I found [there] a woman ruling over them and provided with every requisite and she has a magnificent throne" (Surat Al-Namel 23).² The reason for and aim of her visit "to test the report of Solomon's wisdom and glory" mentioned in the Bible suggests her wisdom. The Qur'anic scripture implies that she was a democratic ruler. Instead of taking a decision by herself when she received the Prophet Suleiman's letter requesting her to follow him, she gathered her people, asked for advice, and pressed for a collective decision: "Ye Chiefs! Advise me in [this] my affair: no affair have I decided except in

1. She belonged to the Sabaean Civilization, the pre-Islamic kingdom that flourished in Yemen from the 10th century BC to the 6th century AD. Her meeting with Solomon is described in the bible (I Kings 10:1-10, 13; II Chron.9:1-9, 12).
2. The translated extracts from the Qur'anic are taken from an electronic version of the Qur'an (Beirut: Future Publisher, 1998).

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your presence” (Surat Al-Namel 32). In their reply, Queen Sheba’s people confirmed their great trust in her and respect for her wisdom. They said, “We are imbued with strength, and given to vehement war: but the command is with thee; so consider what thou wilt command” (Surat Al-Namel 33). Her notable insight and intelligence were reflected in the decision she made. She said, “Kings, when they enter a country, despoil it and make the noblest of its people its meanest, thus do they behave. But I am going to send him a present and [wait] to see with what [answer] return [my] ambassadors” (Al-Namel 34). This is the picture that we get of women’s position in ancient Yemeni history, which implies that respect for women is rooted in this society’s culture.

Yemenis accepted another woman ruler in Islamic times: Queen al-Saeedah Ahmed al-Sulihī, who ruled Yemen after the death of her husband, King Mukrem al-Sulihī (1138-1184).³ History has not recorded any opposition to her because of her being a woman, either from social or from religious leaders. All accepted a woman’s rule, and thus Islam has not stood as an obstacle to women’s rule, as some scholars now claim. Moreover, throughout history, Yemenis have not praised a male ruler as much as they have praised Queen Bilquis and Queen al-Saeedah. They have become the symbols of democratic and wise rule.

The history books also mention several other prominent women who played important roles in various fields in urban as well as in rural areas during the 18th and 19th centuries. Ghazala al-Magdashiyya played an important political role in her village in addition to her contribution to folk literature from Dhamar (Central Yemen). Despite living in a male dominated tribal society, she worked as a mediator between her tribe and other tribes. She was a powerful political voice in her region.⁴ The tribe of Yaf’e (South East of Yemen) had an outstanding military woman leader called Nur who led her tribe in several successful battles.⁵ Shaharah (A northern mountain town) produced the well-known poet and religious scholar Zaineb al-Shahriyya⁶ and the scholar Zaineb al-Mutawakel, who issued laws and sentences in place of her husband Mohammed Ben `Abd Allah ben al-Hussien.⁷ Sheikha Salaha ruled in al-Hujariyya (South Yemen).⁸

Yemeni society’s willingness to accept a woman’s political and social rule when

3. Hussien `Abd-Allah al-`Ameri, “Al-Saleehiyoon,” *Yemeni Encyclopedia*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar-al-Faker, 1992), 2: 573-574. Queen al-Saidah actually started ruling Yemen during her husband’s sickness around 1069.

4. `Abd-Allah al-Baradduni, *Rehelah fi al-sha`er al-Yamani: Qdimah wa Hadithah* [A Journey in Yemeni Poetry: Old & Modern] 5th ed. (Damascus: Dar-al-Faker, 1972), 335-337.

5. Abd-Allah Mohammed al-Hebeshi, “Sana’a Society in and after the 12th Century,” *Al-Ekeleel* (Issues No. 2 & 3, 1983) : 85-86.

6. Mohammed Zabara, *Nasher al-`Uref*, 2 Vols [Spread of Knowledge]. (Beirut: Markez al-Derasaat al-Yemeniyya, nd), 2: 709.

7. `Abd-Allah Mohammed al-Hebeshi, “Sana’a Society in and after the 12th Century,” 85-86.

8. *Ibid.*, 85.

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circumstances made it necessary or when authority imposed it does not mean that backward culture that treated women as inferior to the point of not acknowledging them as human beings had completely vanished. A woman is sometimes seen as a possession, a commodity like an animal, land, or any other property of a man. Even today, most Yemeni women do not have the freedom to choose their husbands and a woman is not an independent entity in the family but has to be under the custody of a male relative: her father, brother, or husband. Though women in rural areas work in the fields in addition to doing housework, an extra workload because their husbands have migrated to work abroad, they are not given basic rights. For example, many tribes in Yemen do not allow women to receive their inheritance, though *Shari'ah* and government law (laws that have been formed on the basis of *Shari'ah* and International secular laws) have given them this right.⁹

Women almost disappeared from urban public life during the Turkish occupation of Yemen and other Arab countries (1849-1918).¹⁰ While women in rural areas had more freedom of movement, participated in social and economic life, and did not wear veils, women in the cities lived in the harem castles culture that was inherited from the Turks during their rule of Yemen. Yemeni employees who worked for the Turks imitated the lifestyle of the Turkish women, considering this the ideal high-class life. These Yemeni officials established a culture in which women could not participate in public life, and could not mix with men. They were limited in their activities and visits were allowed only within their own class. This was continued during most of the period of the al-Mutawakeliyya Kingdom (1918-1962).¹¹

Yemeni newspapers are the best historical source of information about women's lives, during the 1940s-1960s. From the 1940s, Yemen could not be totally isolated from the new forces of the twentieth century. The issues of women's education, women's *hijab* (veiling), and women's political participation started to be raised in the newspapers. Before this period, women were not mentioned in the newspapers except in some cases of adultery.¹²

In 1348 AH (Islamic Calendar), the *Eman* newspaper published an issue about

-
9. It is not a written law but a tribal 'Urf. The lawyer Nabilah al-Mufti says that she has received several issues of tribal women who complain of having been deprived of their heritage
 10. The Turks occupied Yemen three times: 1538-1568; 1569-1613; 1849-1918. *The Yemeni Encyclopedia*, 1: 268.
 11. This high-class attitude which prohibited women's participation in public life had started during the 'Abasi Khelapha. Until the Amawi Khelapha, women were unveiled and allowed mix with men and work together. Basema Kiyal, *Tatoar al-Mara'a 'Aber al-Tareekh* [Women's Development Through History] (Beirut: 'Ez al-Deen Organization, 1981), 110-111.
 12. Mohammed 'Abd al-Malek al-Mutawakel, *al-Sahafa al-Yamaniyya: Nash'ataha Wa Tatawwaraha* [Yemeni Journalism: Foundation & Development]. (Cairo: al-Dubji, 1983), 221. For my references and searches of newspapers, I am indebted to this book and its author, who provided me with newspapers and assistance. He provided me with all the newspapers of which he has full copies in his private library. I have chosen to review the major newspapers and issues that have dealt with women mentioned by him in his book.

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women entitled “The Woman and the West” warning about “the depravity of adultery and fornication.” The issue attacked those Muslims “who imitated the West and brought prostitutes and made them dance as a common practice among men and women... [They encouraged] unveiling, mixing of young males and females, writing unreal love stories as part of literature.”¹³ *The Eman* published without comment two letters from the General Union of Islamic Associations in Egypt about the Syrian law of giving women the right to participate in elections. The two letters are mainly a call for help in the face of the new *fatimah* (temptation) of women’s participation in government.¹⁴ *Al-Sheikh* Salem al-Sabe`, a Yemeni Sheikh, attacked the colonial principles that made women compete with men for seats in government.¹⁵ Though the official newspaper did not actually deal with positive issues about women, the *AL-Hikmah*¹⁶ magazine published an article by Mohammed Ali Rehan about the role of Islam in raising women’s position in society.¹⁷ It discussed how Islam originally made women participate in culture, science, and the fields of *jihad* (war) and work “shoulder to shoulder with men.”¹⁸ Rehan emphasized that women lost this position after the fall of Islam and morals; thus a woman became, in the eyes of man, a piece of merchandise or a piece of property.¹⁹

In the 1950s, women’s issues appeared more frequently in the newspapers. *The Eman* published the news of the opening of a new school for girls in Sana’a and mentioned how “the increasing enrolment of girls indicates the families’ will and desire for a girl’s education and development.” The article discussed the role of a woman in bringing up the next generation with the right hand, and claimed that she could shake the world with her left hand. It stated that women’s value was emphasized by the Prophet’s *Hadith* “Heaven is under mothers’ feet.”²⁰

The newspapers of the 1950s – despite the strong reaction – were in favor of women’s rights. They discussed the most sensitive of women’s issues, such as unveiling, education, work, and equality in duties and rights. The prevailing issues at that time concerned women’s right to education, work, and keeping their faces and hands uncovered. Those daring issues were given importance at that time because they were supported by religious scholars such as Ahmed Mohammed al-Wazeer

13. *Al-Eman* (no.38, 1348 AH): 1. The first novel by Mohammed Luqman, *S`a`eed*, was published at this time. The novel expresses the right of young people to love and know each other before marriage.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.* In the mid-1980s, al-Sheikh Salem al-Sab`e’s daughter became a known poet, who published some of her poems in newspapers, and became a teacher at the university. This event may illustrate the changes in the people’s way of thinking about women.

16. An old Yemeni journal that continues to be published. It was first published in December 1938-1357 AH by Ahmed `Abd al-Wahaab al-Wareeth.

17. Mohammed Ali Rehan, “Islam and Women,” *Al-Hikma* (no. 4, 1357 AH) :119-123.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Al-Eman* (no. 250, 1950): 2.

and Mohammed Yehiya al-Dhari.²¹ The *Saba'a*²² and the *Al-Naser*²³ newspapers raised the issues of women's right to education and published controversial discussions about veiling. What is discussed in these issues, Dr. Mohammed `Abd al-Malek stated, "has affirmed the rough struggle that a woman had in the early fifties to get her right of education."²⁴ In 1950, the *Saba'a* published an article by Hafidah al-Jilani²⁵ – a young woman – defending women's right to education and criticizing the fear that "education would encourage women to commit immoral acts like writing letters to men or taking off the veil. However, the author limits women's roles in society to cooking, sewing, education and nursing."²⁶ During this period (the 1950s), in `Aden, women started to take action to win their rights, and news of this was published in newspapers, too. Some women went on strike, throwing the *sheether* (women's veiling) into the garbage, and went to the office of the *Fatat Al-Jazeera* newspaper to get a report of this act of public protest published.²⁷

Yemeni women's fight for their rights did not pass without resistance from the two authorities in the South and in the North. The colonial authority in Aden took the women who appealed for their rights of equality to court.²⁸ In the North, the government formed a committee for "Enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong." The first decision of the committee was to prohibit women from staying out of doors after the *Meghreb* (sunset).²⁹

The discussions of the 1950s presented an important cultural foundation that helped women's development and progress after the revolution in September 1962 in the North against the royal system and the revolution in October 1967 in the South against the British colonial rule. Women gained opportunities in education and employment in various fields within the context of the histories of the North (the Yemen Arab Republic, YAR) and South (the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, PDRY), which continued to be separate countries until 1990. After the Union in 1990, women's situation continued developing at a steady pace. In the

21. Mohammed `Abd al-Malek, *al-Sahafa al-Yamaniyya: Nash'ataha Wa Tatawwaraha*, 233.

22. A newspaper that was founded in `Aden in 1949 but was closed by the British after a year and a half, and reappeared in Taiz in 1952. Its director is Mohammed al-Sharjabi.

23. *Al-Naser* newspaper was founded by a Palestinian doctor, Dhal`et Y`gub, in 1950.

24. Mohammed `Abd al-Malek, *al-Sahafa al-Yamaniyya: Nash'ataha Wa Tatawwaraha*, 227.

25. Hafida al-Jilani was the first woman journalist that wrote in a newspaper in the North using her real name before the revolution. In 1960 she became the chief editor of "A Woman's Corner" in *Saba'a* newspaper.

26. Hafidah al-Jilani, "Women and Education," *Saba'a* (no. 23, 1950) : 1.

27. *Saba'a* (no. 98, 1955), 6. *Saba'a* republished this article from *Fatat Al-Jazeera* that was published in `Aden and whose chief editor was Lukman. The women were S. al-Kaf, Safinaz Khalifa, Muneerah `Abd al-Kareem, Shafikah `Abd al-Kareem, Nora Khalefa, and Fozziyya No`man. *Fataat Al-Jazeera* was known to be liberal in supporting women's issues. But the newspaper did not encourage this action of the women because it reflected the negative impact of colonization.

28. Mohammed `Abd al-Malek, *al-Sahafa al-Yamaniyya: Nash'ataha Wa Tatawwaraha*, 233.

29. *Al-Naser* (No. 233, 1960), 8.

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1990s, however a major difference in women's situation can be seen in significant amendments depriving women again of rights which had been given to them earlier. This can also be seen in the progress of women's literature from the increased number of writers. In the following paragraphs, I will provide an overview of the development of legislation; literary development is dealt with in depth in later chapters.

DEVELOPMENTS IN LEGISLATION

The developments in legislation throw light on the seriousness of cultural change in society concerning women's issues and progress. Women's issues did not interest the varied *Mathaheb* (religious sects) that had prevailed in Yemen since the beginning of Islam. Women were ruled first by traditions and then by the Islamic laws of *Shari'ah*. Despite the fact that Queen al-Saeedah ruled Islamic Yemeni Society for about seventy years, the predominant Islamic sects in Yemen state clearly that a necessary condition for ruling the country is to be male. Imam al-Hadi Yehyia Ben al-Hussein (896), who was the first to produce a written political system for ruling, emphasized in *Imamah* that to be a man is the first condition.³⁰ Women's issues in the personal status law were limited to inheritance, divorce, and alimony, which could be solved either by *Shari'ah* or *'Urf*.

Yemen did not have the practice of legislating laws or a constitution until the September 1962 Revolution. Before that, the government depended on the known *Shari'ah* laws and, if necessary, on *ijtihad* decisions by the Imam, who reached a decision after a discussion with religious scholars. The Yemeni constitution was issued after the September Revolution of 1962. This was first a temporary constitution, which was amended in 1994. The constitution stated as a basic principle that "all Yemenis are equal in public duties and rights without any discrimination." Ahmed al-Wad'i, a wellknown lawyer, says that both the temporary and the amended constitutions prohibit any sexual discrimination, but the permanent constitution omitted the word discrimination.³¹ For women's rights of citizenship and its duties, Article 34 was added to the 1970 constitution, which states that "Women are the sisters of men according to what is agreed by *Shari'ah* and stated by law."³²

The constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in the South, issued in 1978, had no reservations concerning women's rights. Article 36 states that the government assures "equal rights to men and women in political, economic and social fields. It also provides all the necessary conditions to achieve equality."³³

30. He was the fifth Imam after Yahya Ibn al-Hussein, who was invited to Yemen in 896 AD as an arbitrator by local tribes. That was the beginning of the rule of the Zaydi Imamate of various parts of Yemen for a thousand years.

31. Ahmed al-Wad'i, *Haqooq al-Mara'a Been al-Faqeh wel-Tashree'* [Women's Rights Between Faqeh and Tashree'] (Sana'a: 'Afif Association, nd.), 16.

32. The Constitution of the Yemen Republic, Article (34), 1994.

33. The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Yemeni, Article (36), 1978.

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The constitution of the United Yemeni Government (YR), issued in 1990, confirms this gender equality. Article 27 states that "All citizens are equal in law and they are equal in rights and public duties and no discrimination because of sex, color, origin, language, profession, social position or religion should be made." But when the Union's constitution was amended in 1994, Article 27 was replaced by Article 40, which states, "All citizens are equal in rights and public duties." In Article 31, the amended constitution added the article that refers to *Shari'ah* and law pertaining to the issues of women's rights and duties that was in the constitution of the Yemen Arab Republic before the Union. This meant that women's rights went back to zero and this issue has since been taken up by several women's organizations and interested lawyers.³⁴ By adding the *Shari'ah* as a reference, women's rights can be limited by any *ijtihad* in *Shari'ah* or by a new law passed at any time depending on the mood of scholars and other authorities.

The Personal Status Law has faced a backward development, too. The Union's Personal Status Law was based on the PDRY's 1974 Family Law, which contained the strongest legislative protection of women's rights in the Arab World. However, it also has been amended to deprive women of rights previously given. For example, the Article from the previous Family Law that states that in the case of a second marriage the first wife has the right to be informed by her husband of his proposal to marry a second woman is deleted. More recently, in 2003, a strange law of *Beit al-Ta'ah* – adopted in Egypt – was to be issued according to which a wife by the force of law and police would have to go back to her husband's house even if she does not want to. As a result of a campaign by women's organizations and civil society, the President intervened to stop the passage of this law.³⁵

In general, laws today do not draw a major distinction between men and women. In the laws on work, social care, political parties, and elections, women and men are treated equally. However, according to the study published by the National Women's Committee in 1999, there is still discrimination in the Personal Status Laws. Some Articles of the Personal Status Law, Laws 9-15 and 22-42 and items 71, 136, 149, 150, 157, and 159 are biased against women. The inequality of the laws of inheritance, witnesses in penalties, marriage, and divorce that are stated by *Shari'ah* is still a controversial issue; Muslim scholars give several interpretations and justifications for such laws.³⁶ Judiciary Law is biased in not accepting women at the High Judiciary Institute, which in the long term means that, apart from the thirty two who became judges during the social system of the PDRY and remained until 1990, women can

34. Ahmed al-Wad'i has discussed this in his book of *Haqooq al-Mara'a wa-Tashree'*.

35. This law was adopted and is practised in Egypt.

36. The inheritance laws that are derived from Qur'an designate that a women's share of a male's estate is half the amount of the share of an equally entitled male relative. On the other hand, a male relative is committed to be financially responsible for the family and close female kinship.

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never be judges.³⁷ The Law of Nationality has given males and females equal rights of Yemeni citizenship; however, Article 3 deprives the children of a Yemeni woman married to a foreign man of their rights to Yemeni citizenship even though it gives this right to the children of a Yemeni man married to a foreign woman. The next three paragraphs give an overview of the current situation of women and education, politics and economy.

WOMEN AND EDUCATION

We can safely say that women have made great progress in the field of education in recent years. The percentage of girls who receive formal primary education between the ages of 5 and 6 has risen from 0% to 31%. The percentage of girls in secondary education is 24%. At university level, the rate of females to males had risen 13% in 1998. Women's participation in the field of teaching rose from 15% in 1995 to 18% in 1998.³⁸ The proportion of female teachers in schools is higher than that of male teachers, but most of these female teachers remain in urban areas.³⁹

Whatever women have achieved in education, the rate of illiteracy continues to be higher among women (71%) than among men (29%). Women's progress in education is very low and slow. The high rate of illiteracy among girls is due to social, cultural and financial restraints. Education is not considered a priority for women socially. A woman's priority is to be a mother and a wife. So if a girl is needed at home to help, she stays home instead of going to school. Education plans since 1962 have not considered how to encourage girls' education. Co-education and the great distance to travel to schools are basic constraints to the education of girls.⁴⁰ Marriage is also one of the reasons mentioned by girls in a survey for not continuing their education.⁴¹ Development in education has been characterized by masculine and urban bias; gender perspectives have not been considered. Recent research has confirmed that the enrollment of girls in rural areas or geographically isolated areas is far behind the enrollment of girls in urban areas.⁴²

Girls' education has progressed slowly, trailing behind boys' education because of social and cultural constraints and the gender insensitivity of educational plans. Nonetheless, Sana'a University – the first and today the main public university in Yemen – with the support of the Netherlands opened in 1994 a Women's Studies Unit as part of the Department of Sociology.⁴³ Two years later this Unit was

37. The National Women's Committee and other government and non-government associations, including the Empirical Research and Women's Studies Center, were requested to prepare a report about women's status in Yemen to be sent to the UN, in 1999.

38. Source: CSO and DHS. "Demographic and Maternal and Child Health Survey 1997," November 1998, Sana'a, Yemen.

39. Sharon Beatty, *Basic Education of the Girl Child in Yemen: Country Case and Study*, submitted to UNDP, 1996, 39.

40. *Ibid.*, 41.

41. Nadeem al-Shar'i, "Women's Situation for Yemeni Girls: Shabua as a Study Case." First issue 1995.

42. Sharon Beatty, "Basic Education of the Girl Child in Yemen: Country Case and Study," 39.

separated from the Department of Sociology and developed into The Empirical Research and Women's Studies Center (ERWC) in 1996. It gave a one-year diploma and a two-year master's degree in women's studies and sent some students to obtain a PhD degree at its counterpart university, Tilburg University.⁴⁴ In spite of various academic and policy barriers, such as a lack of local teachers and full support of the Sana'a University Board,⁴⁵ the ERWC continued developing its programs and enhancing the capacity building of its students, who feel that the ERWC has transformed their way of thinking.⁴⁶ In 2000, following an International Conference on the Challenges of Women's Studies held by the ERWC in Sana'a, the Center faced great opposition to its programs from different institutions of the society, the media, parliament, mosques, and both official and non-official individuals. The politically motivated opposition to the Center led to its closure, but it was reopened in August, 2003, by the University Board, with the help of the Women's Research Center. In addition to all the reasons given by researchers and writers who wrote about the closure of the ERWC, we see in this experience the contradictory forces which determine the lives of women in Yemeni society and the ability of authority to impose its will.⁴⁷

WOMEN AND DECISION-MAKING

The political situation of Yemeni women has improved since the Revolutions of September 1962 and October 1967. They have been able to attain better positions in public life. However, they are still far from holding positions of power, though many women have received advanced education and are as well qualified as their male colleagues. Thus, many women are lower in position than lesser-qualified men. I provide an overview of women's status in some major fields to trace the very slow progress of women in getting decision-making positions at various institutions.

Women's participation as voters in the legislative elections of 1997 was 1, 2272, 073 but the participation of women as candidates was 18, only 2 of whom won a seat out of the total of 301 candidates elected. In the later legislative election of 2003, only

43. Tineke Willemsen and Alkeline Van Lenning, "Women's Studies Project in Yemen: Experience from the Counterpart's Viewpoints," *The Women's Studies International Forum*, 25 (2002): 516.

44. The author of this dissertation is one of the students who were sent to Tilburg University to obtain a PhD in Women's Studies.

45. Tineke Willemsen and Alkeline Van Lenning, "Women's Studies Project in Yemen: Experience from the Counterpart's Viewpoints," 517.

46. In addition to the author's own experiences, which were published in Marta Plauch (ed.) *Yemeni Voices: Women Tell Their Stories* (Sana'a: The British Council, Yemen, 2001), the author has held several interviews with diploma and master's students who studied at the Center.

47. In addition to the hundreds of articles written about the Center, two academic articles have been published about the project by the people who were involved in the project: Margot Badran (2000) "Gender: Meanings, Uses, and Discourses in Post-Unification Yemen." *Yemen Times Online*, 10, no. 25 (Part 1), no. 26 (part 2), no 27 (part 3), <http://www.yementimes.com>. Tineke Willemsen and Alkeline Van Lenning (2002) "Women's Studies Project in Yemen: Experience From the Counterpart's Viewpoints," *The Women's Studies International Forum*.

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one woman won a seat. In the government, a woman minister was appointed in 2002 as the first and only minister of the new Ministry of Human Rights. A year after her appointment (2003), she was replaced by the first and only woman ambassador, the ambassador to the Netherlands from 2000-2003. Women were excluded from the Consultative Council, which consists of 59 members. In the Presidential and Government Offices, there are 40 women, making up 20% of those working at the two offices. However, for the first time in these two offices, women are the chairpersons of five committees, with the rank of general directors. Women's participation in administration is symbolic compared with that of men. So far, no woman has been appointed a governor, a rector, or a dean at the university. In Judiciary and Law, there are no women at the judiciary council or at the Supreme Court. In political parties, there are no women in leadership either in the ruling party or in the opposition. There are small percentages of women on the central or permanent committees. In the General People's Conference Party – the party now ruling the country – there are 35 women in the permanent committee, which consists of 700 members. In the Yemeni Reform Party Shoura council, there are seven female members out of 160; in the central committee of the Social Party there are 3 women members out of 74. However, women have attained leadership positions in private journalism. Some women journalists managed to form their own newspapers and be the chairpersons of these; examples are *The Women's Newspaper* by Saedah al-Dilmah, *al-Shaqaiq* by Ruqiyya al-Hajeri, and *Adam Wa Hawa'a* by Nabilah al-Kebsi.

WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

Yemeni women have always contributed to the national income, but most of their participation has remained unrecorded in the official economy statistics because it belongs to the category of the reproduction-work or is part of a small or medium-sized sex-segregated business. The percentage of working women (women who work outside the home) has now reached 18-20%: 50% in agriculture, 6% in the mining of minerals, 4% in the production of electricity and water, 16% in industry, 2% in the insurance and financial sector, and 9% in the administration and service sector. The percentage of women who do unpaid work is 26-33%; 35-40 % do paid work, of whom 17% are paid for their own private work. The number of women who work in private business does not exceed 30, mainly in schools owing to social and cultural constraints that limit women's movement.

Women's great participation in agriculture and farm work, which reaches 70% in some regions, does not indicate that women have access to capital or decision-making. The ownership of lands and important decisions concerning capital or land remain within a man's jurisdiction.⁴⁸ Women head the family and do most of the work, from

48. One of the outcomes of two workshops of RWDGD/ KIT "Gender Concepts, Planning Cycle and Monitoring and Evaluation," 10th August – Thursday 15th August 2002 and 17 August – Thursday 21.

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agriculture to the production of milk, cheese, and handicrafts, owing to the migration of men for better opportunities either in the city or outside the country. To prevent the loss of the families' land, families deter women from owning land, giving them other parts of the inheritance instead.

Despite the various economic reform plans and strategies drawn up since Unification (1990), economic difficulties have a significant impact on the lives of people, particularly women.⁴⁹ Recent researches conducted for the Poverty Reduction Strategy indicate that "a female-headed household implies a higher risk of being poor by about 20%."⁵⁰ In addition to this, the main reason for girls dropping out of schools is the poor economic situation of families who cannot afford the expenses of education. When there is a chance for a child to study, they would rather choose the boy. For example, last year, the Faculty of Engineering Administration received a request from a family to take their son instead of his sister, who had passed the entrance exam and won a place.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the economic difficulties have not had a completely negative impact on women. It has been noted that economic problems have contributed positively to changing the social attitude towards women's work. Many families have reconsidered women's work and the importance of women's economic contribution.

CONCLUSION

To understand the reasons for the contradictory images of women both as queens who are respected by all Yemenis as powerful figures who are capable of influencing their society economically, scientifically, politically, and even militarily, and as property, an in-depth historical analysis that is not within the purview of this dissertation is required. Considering how powerful women as Queen al-Saeedah or the tribal mediator Ghazala al-Maqdashiyya gained their authority, we could conclude that when circumstances make it necessary or when there is a sincere willingness of higher authorities and decision-makers, women can attain better opportunities and equal rights. This idea is supported by the contemporary examples of what has occurred in legislation (Personal Status Law) and the Empirical Research of Women's Studies Center. However, only this uneven acceptance of women's traditional role has given Yemeni women opportunities to attain education and exercise authority. Nonetheless, we cannot neglect the social patriarchal heritage of bias against women that can be found in daily life.

Though Yemeni women have recently gained several rights as we have seen, for example, in the field of education and in most laws, they still have to confront wrong ideologies about women and what women should and should not do. All of this must have inevitably influenced women's writings. In the following chapters, I will be dealing

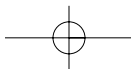
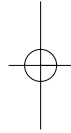
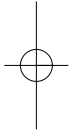
49. *Republic of Yemen* (2000), 2.

50. *Ibid.*

51. I was told this story by a university colleague who teaches at the Faculty of Engineering, Sana'a University, Sana'a.

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with past and present experiences of women in showing how women writers work and live under these circumstances and how their literary texts interpret, mirror, and try to come to terms with their condition.



Chapter 2

Theoretical Background and Framework

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces briefly the four basic theoretical debates that formed the background of my thesis and determined my point of view in this work. Firstly, I introduce the concept of gender developed mainly as an analytical tool in the West; secondly, I look at gender in Islam and the development of gender in the Arab world, particularly in Yemen; thirdly, I deal with feminism and its various debates; fourthly, I discuss the relation of gender and feminism to literary criticism, and, in particular, the impact of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. The framework used for the investigation of Yemeni women's literature and what had to be done to present adequately this corpus of writing will emerge out of this discussion.

THE CONCEPT OF GENDER

The concept of gender in the West is the outcome of the long discussions and studies of the feminist movement, which has raised many women's issues. This movement has influenced the academic world, to such an extent that it has led to the foundation of women's studies programs. Gender, as a theoretical concept was introduced by John Money and Robert Stoller. It was taken over by many others, until it reached, in 1985, an influential academic definition that is still widely accepted, by Joan Scott. The concept of gender emerged during a period when there were many controversial issues in science and knowledge.⁵² Money and Stoller were confronted with individuals who did not live in accordance with, or believe that they belonged to, their physical sex. Thus they – out of their clinical experiences – started searching for the relationship between physical body (sex) and culture or psychological and social identity (gender). Along with the unsettled debate of what was real and what was

52. Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review*, 91 (December 1986) : 1066. In the discussion of the development of gender, I have used Scott's discussion as my main guide.

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discursive, if reality is “construed” or “constructed,” Stoller came up with a definition of the concept of gender dissociating “gender” from “sex”:

Gender is a term that has psychological and cultural rather than biological connotations: if the proper terms for sex are male and female, the corresponding terms for gender are masculine and feminine, these latter being quite independent of (biological) sex. Gender is the amount of masculinity and femininity found in a person.⁵³

As the concept of gender developed, it took several meanings to serve various purposes and concerns and different approaches. The first phase of the feminist movement was centered on developing the theory of equality by trying to remove the social and cultural differences between women and men. For example, in *The Second Sex* by Simon de Beauvoir, re-addressed the issue of equality between men and women. Kate Millet and Shulamith Firestone advocated strongly that the patriarchal domination would be eliminated when the “natural” reproduction by women was replaced by technology.⁵⁴ They argued that the only way of liberating women and achieving equality is to be liberated from the reproductive role. In 1972, Ann Oakley published her book *Sex, Gender and Society*, in which she questioned the presumed natural order of women’s positions and destinations.⁵⁵ In her book, Oakley ascertains the biological meaning of sex “that refers to the biological differences between male and female,” the cultural meaning of gender that is “the matter of culture”, and the “constancy of sex and the variability of gender.”⁵⁶

Marxist / Socialist Feminists approached the concept of gender wearing the lens of Marx’s explanation, which basically argued that the transformation of capitalism would require the emancipation of all members of society, whether male or female. Socialist feminists basically deleted the role of physical differences in defining or shaping gender relationships which are defined specifically by productivity.⁵⁷ They adopted Engels’s definition of materialism in which production is the main factor of any change in human society:

According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This,

53. Robert Stoller, *Sex & Gender* (1968), quoted in Ann Okaley, *Sex, Gender & Society* (London: Temple Smith, 1972), 158.

54. Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Avon Books, 1971). Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York: William Morrow, 1970).

55. Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender & Society*, 158.

56. *Ibid.*, 16.

57. Annet Kuhan and Mararie Wolpe (eds.), *Women and Modes of Production* (London: Routledge, 1978).

again, is of a two-fold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species.⁵⁸

Annette Kuhn and Annemarie Wolpe have confirmed that though they consider that the theoretical approach of Marxist feminists is still in its early stages, “materialism” was the core element in the construction of their framework.⁵⁹ Rosin McDonough and Rachel Harrison argued that the patriarchal relationship was “shaped within the historical concreteness of a mode of production.”⁶⁰ However, Joan Kelly in “The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory” has developed the materialist concept to include sexuality in the explanation of gender relations, stating that “the relation of sexes operates in accordance with, and through, socio-economic structures, as well as sex/gender ones,”⁶¹ but the concept continued to be referred to as the economic factor in defining relations. By 1983, American Marxist feminists, influenced by Michel Foucault, had further developed and explored the crucial role of sexuality in forming relations.

Since 1980, the definition of gender has developed and evolved in different academic studies. It has become a core analytical tool in many fields of studies such as law, economics, humanities, and social sciences. Many studies have developed the definition of gender in relation to all symbols of culture. Feminists have focused more on the discussions of the great diversity of feminism and the use of the new term “feminisms.” A large number of feminists have raised questions that have led to the need for a new concept and an analytical tool to be used in research. In dealing with the concept of gender, the two main psychoanalytic approaches presented by the Anglo-American school and the French school have been concerned with the process by which the subject’s identity is created and with the impact of the early stages of identity development in the formulation of gender identity. Nancy Chodorow’s article “Gender, Relation, and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective” sums up much of what the women’s movement has been trying to achieve, saying that “particular bodily attributes would not necessarily be determining who we are, what we do, how we are perceived, and who our sexual partners are.”⁶² She argued that “we are not born with perceptions of gender differences”, but that these develop through the

58. Fredric Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the States*. Quoted from Annette Kuhn and Annemarie Wolpe (eds.), *Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production* (London: Routledge, 1978), 7.

59. Ibid. 7-10.

60. Rosin McDonough and Rachel Harrison, “Patriarchy and Relations of Production,” *Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production*, Annette Kuhn and Annemarie Wolpe (eds.): 12.

61. Joan Kelly, “Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory,” quoted from Joan Scott: “A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” 1059-1060.

62. Nancy Chodorow, “Gender, Relation and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective,” *The Polity Reader in Gender Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 41-49.

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different stages of a child's realization of the world around it.⁶³ In a reverse of the ideas of Freud, she argues that the dynamics of maleness differs significantly from that of femaleness. According to Chodorow, it is the boy who must dissociate himself from the mother in a critical way rather than the girl.⁶⁴ While the Anglo-American school focuses on conscious psychic life and on family relationships, the French psychoanalytic school has taken the debate into the unconscious, focusing on "language in communicating, interpreting, and representing gender."⁶⁵ Jacques Lacan emphasizes the unconscious as a crucial element in the construction of the subject in which sexual division takes place.

Discussing and analyzing almost all early approaches to gender, Joan Scott in 1985 came up with a new definition of gender, which is considered to be the first academic definition of the term which is still accepted as "state of the art." She says,

My definition of gender has two parts and several subsets. They are inter-related but must be analytically distinct. The core of the definition rests on an integral connection between two oppositions: gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.⁶⁶

She persuasively argued that almost all the earlier approaches to the concept of gender were limited in that they could not be adopted by different cultures, disciplines, and periods. She argued that there was a need for an analytical tool that would "scrutinize our methods of analysis" and "must ask more often how things happened in order to find out why they happened."⁶⁷ The gender analyses should encompass the individual as well as the organization of society. Thus for the first part of her definition, Scott defined four basic interrelated parts that should be looked at to understand how gender works: symbols, norms, subjective identity, and social institutions and organizations. To clarify the structure of gender and to know how and to what extent gender has an effect and influence on social life and its development, we should scrutinize these four interconnected elements. A researcher should examine the available cultural symbols, considering which symbols are used and how and in what context. As the meaning of these symbols is set forth by fixed and dominant norms, unquestionable normative statements should be scrutinized and analyzed. Scott emphasizes that "kinship" is not the only factor of social organization that is related to gender as it is a part of all other organizations, which should not be neglected. This broader and comprehensive view can be used in examining the construction of

63. *Ibid.*, 44.

64. *Ibid.*, 44-45.

65. Joan Scott, 1062.

66. Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," 1053-1075.

67. *Ibid.*, 1067.

subjective identity, and psychoanalysis is an important part of its construction but should be related to other factors such as collective activities, social organizations, and cultural representations.⁶⁸

In the second part of her definition, Scott focuses on the interrelated relationships that make up society and the influence of gender on politics and vice versa:

Gender, then, provides a way to decode meaning and to understand the complex connections among various forms of human interactions. When historians look for the ways in which the concept of gender legitimizes and constructs social relationships, they develop insight into the reciprocal nature of gender and society and into the particular and contextually specific ways in which politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics.⁶⁹

THE CONCEPT OF GENDER IN THE ARAB WORLD

It is generally accepted that cultural understandings of gender vary with the changes in historical time and from one society to another. For example, the Toda, a tribe from the Nilgiri hills in South India, see domestic work as a sacred task which is to be entrusted to men.⁷⁰ The Tcambuli, a West African tribe, consider men to be emotionally dependent and irresponsible.⁷¹ On the other hand, the Mundugomor and Arapesh, both tribes living in Papua, New Guinea, see males and females as possessing essentially similar qualities.⁷²

Different ideas of what constitutes “masculinity” and “femininity” show that cultures construct distinctive and self-fulfilling categories of gender for their members.⁷³ These gender categories are then assumed to be factual, inalienable, and axiomatic, and consequently inform the myriad of beliefs and ideas shared by members of the specific cultural group. Gender constructs, therefore, form a part of the shared cultural consciousness expressed in the dominant worldview of a given society.⁷⁴

The Arab world has similar global features but still has its own particularity. The analytical tool of gender has developed during long years of work by feminists all around the world, including Muslim feminists. Margot Badran, a Middle Eastern historian, pointed out that gender was not “purely a western creation but a new field

68. Ibid., 1068.

69. Ibid., 1070.

70. L. W. Richardson, *The Dynamics of Sex and Gender: A Sociological Perspective* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), 63.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid., 3. According to Richardson, the Mundugomor see human beings as fundamentally violent, competitive, and aggressive whereas the Arapesh view humanity as being gentle, kind, and loving by nature (1981:63).

73. M. Lowe, “The Dialectic of Body And Culture,” in M. Lowe, & R. Hubbard (eds.), *Woman's Nature* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1983), 39

74. Richardson, *The Dynamics of Sex and Gender: A Sociological Perspective*, 3-4.

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in which many scholars from different parts of the world played a part.”⁷⁵ Fatima Mernissi, a Moroccan scholar, is a pioneer Arab intellectual, who did her Ph.D. research about gender in the 1970s. Her dissertation was published as a book entitled *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society* in 1977.⁷⁶ Nawal el-Saadawi’s pioneering books and articles are important contributions to feminism as well as to gender studies. The first thesis on gender by a Yemeni female student, Bilquis al-Shar’ie, was submitted at the University of Pittsburgh in the United States in 1992. It was titled, “Attitudes of Students at Sana’a University toward Gender Roles in the Republic of Yemen.”

In the Arab countries, gender as a concept, emerged within the context of development and was emphasized by the foundation of academic women’s studies in some countries and at different times. During the 1990s several centers of women’s studies as an academic discipline were founded at Arab universities such as Ahfad University in Sudan, Bir Zeit University in Palestine, and the universities of Fez and Rabat in Morocco. In the programs of these departments and centers, the gender perspective had been taught as a basic approach in their core courses and research methodology.⁷⁷ Several NGOs throughout the Arab World, such as NAD (Naswiyya Arab Development) consider gender to be a basic element at the regional level, raising the slogan of gender equality: “Together for sustainable development, gender equality, and just globalization.” They have built a network of interested people – particularly women – discussing mainly women’s and gender issues.

Within the last 5 to 10 years there has been a growing trend among women researchers and scholars – Muslim or those who adopt a Muslim standpoint – to investigate issues concerning gender from the point of view of Islam. They discuss and analyze discourses and methodologies from within indigenous Muslim tradition, which can be employed or developed to articulate gender awareness, and can be applied to make intelligent use of Islamic principles in the acquisition of rights or for revising discourses that encourage subordinate gender consciousness. Several issues that are being debated at this time have positive influence on changes such as a return to a more direct examination of the Qur’anic text and message, and the consideration of inner-Qur’anic references in viewing the overall picture of certain themes and issues, considering seriously the Qur’anic view of women’s integration in the public sphere and the evolving problematic of the private-public dichotomy (i.e., how much of it is actually Qur’anic and how much is cultural and historical).

Different researchers have provided alternative egalitarian and feminist interpretations and readings of gender dynamics in the Qur’an by emphasizing non-

75. Margot Badran, “Gender: Meanings, Uses, and Discourses in Post-Unification Yemen.” *Yemen Times*. (2000) 19 June-9 July.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

sexist ideals for Muslim society. Muslim authors and researchers in many different parts of the Arab world have been engaged with the issue of gender inequality in their particular contexts.⁷⁸ This is evident from a study by a Lebanese feminist, Bouthaina Sha`aban (1991), in which she presents numerous interviews with Arab Muslim women in Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Algeria, who confirm that Islamic law gives women more rights than they have in most Muslim countries. The global Networking for Muslim Intellectual Activists (Islam 21) discusses different topics in Islam, trying to encourage a broad-minded interpretation of Islam, approaching several topics in gender.⁷⁹

GENDER IN YEMEN

As in other Arab countries, in Yemen, explicit gender theory has been used mainly as an analytical approach in the development projects which focus on gender undertaken since the 1990s. Four main factors that contributed to the approach of gender caused suspicion and confusion among the conservative majority: development projects and international NGOs, the State's commitments to national development in economy, human rights, and democracy, the foundation of the ERWSC at Sana'a University, and the Human Rights movement.⁸⁰

Since the 1990s, the development projects – particularly those funded internationally – have had gender as their main focus. Local as well as international NGOs have participated in gender development by organizing several workshops. For example, the British Council – funded by the British Council, the Royal Netherlands Embassy, and the World Bank – has arranged several courses in gender for women leaders. Several workshops about gender have been arranged in Sana'a, Aden, and Hadramout, such as “The Economic Reforms through Yemeni Women's Eyes” in Sana'a from 10-11 March 1997. Local NGOs – aiming to get international support – participate in such events. For example, Queen Arwa University founded a department of Gender Studies in 1998.

The government founded departments of gender in most ministries following requests by donors and complying with the new strategy of the government in achieving development progress and democracy. In 1993, a unit of Women's Studies was established at Sana'a University – the first and main national university in Yemen – as part of the Sociology Department. In the same year, the National Preparatory Committee for the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women to be held in Beijing

78. For example: L. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); A. Hibri (ed.) “A study of Islamic History: Or how did we ever get into this mess?” in *Women and Islam: Women's Studies International Forum* 5 1982 : 207-219; or F. Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

79. On the Internet ([http:// www. Islam 21.com](http://www.Islam21.com)). After 11th September more Islamic websites were established such as admin@islamtoday.net or info@islam21.net as a response to the great movement against Islamic Culture

80. Margot Badran, “Meanings, Uses, and Discourses in Post-Unification Yemen.”

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was formed by the government (Republican Decree 251) to formulate its position and strategy on gender issues. In 1995, the National Women's Committee was established by cabinet decree with a mandate to formulate national gender policy.

In 1996, after the transference of the Women's Unit to the Empirical Research and Women's Studies Center headed by Dr. Raufah Hassan, the Center adopted gender as a main approach for its courses. It was proposed that the center be named The Empirical Research and Gender Studies, but the title was rejected as unfamiliar.⁸¹ However, the Center has aimed to meet the increasing need for qualified researchers in gender in different fields. The Center focused its courses on gender studies and gender research methodology.

By 1999, the term gender had become familiar to the academic staff and students participating in the ERWSC's activities and to the employees working at the gender departments or international NGOs. The ERWSC's International Conference focused on gender. The four panels – Law, Mass Media, History, and Oral History and Language and Literature – dealt with gender. The severe opposition to the ERWSC compelled it to be closed after the conference presented the great challenges that women's studies and gender studies face in the 21st century. The term gender has become widely known in Yemen but it is so badly misinterpreted that many NGOs have hesitated to use the English term. The term and concept of gender has come to be associated with a Western invasion that seeks to culturally invade Islamic societies, and with the radical feminist movements in the West.

This resistance notwithstanding, the definition of the concept of gender has developed and taken various directions; it has been used to serve different purposes and objectives. In this study, the term gender was used as an analytical tool to enable me to look at the cultural and social structure of the society that has defined certain roles for women and men and has influenced the development and writings of women. The recent development in gender as an analytical tool has broadened and has covered almost all academic fields: social development, economics, education, language, and literature. The gender perspective analyses power relations and their cultural application. It seeks not so much to empower women over and above men as to redress the balance and ensure fairness. It includes women's perspective for holistic purposes, emphasizes issues of unequal distribution of power, and promotes women's agency and negotiating stance in our culture and history.

FEMINISM AND ITS DEBATES

This thesis was primarily concerned with a study of gender and Yemeni women writers. Thus I refer briefly to the development of Feminisms and Feminist literary criticism, focusing on Virginia Woolf's approach in *A Room of One's Own* as a basic

81. Raufah Hassan – the head and one of the main founders of the center – has said this on several occasions.

foundation from which gender as an analytical tool has developed and from which I mainly derived my approach for this study.

The term “feminism” comes from the Latin *femina*, originally meaning “to have the qualities of a female.” Since 1895, the term has increasingly been used to refer to the theory of sexual equality and the movement for women’s rights.⁸² The contemporary usage of the term suggests that, in addition to being a doctrine and movement for women’s equal rights, it is also viewed as “an ideology of social transformation aiming to create a world for women beyond simple equality.”⁸³ This transformation of relations within society, as distinct from mere empowerment within a given status quo, is the pervading theme within a number of strands of contemporary feminism. However, the definitions of feminism have been varied and contested. There is a more complex global debate in and about feminism. The popular taxonomies of feminist theoreticians divided feminist schools into liberal, socialist, radical, and, recently, the third world streams.⁸⁴

The liberal feminist approach was the view of woman as an individual with emphasis on the importance of freedom of choice and right to self-determination for women. The liberal feminists’ solution was rooted in the ethos of the American women’s suffrage movement of the 1920s; they held that gender inequality would be eradicated if women were politically empowered and received equal opportunities and education.⁸⁵

The women’s question was viewed by the socialist feminists as intrinsically related to the socio-economic order.⁸⁶ They argued that the relations of production and exploitative capitalist class structures, rather than the prejudices, were responsible for the oppression of women.⁸⁷

Radical feminism viewed the hierarchical relationship between men and women as the cause of female oppression and coined the expression “the personal is political.”⁸⁸ By this they suggested that the “domestic” sphere and intimate relationships between men and women involved power relations and were in fact political. Their criticism and activism focused on the areas of sexual oppression and the control and colonization of women’s bodies, sexuality, reproduction, and male violence against women. In its most radical expression, radical feminists viewed all men as the “enemy” and lesbianism as the only solution to the oppression of women.

82. L. Tuttle, *Encyclopedia of Feminism* (Essex: Longman, 1986), 107.

83. Maggie Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (Harvester: Wheatsheaf, 1989), 74.

84. S. Rowbotham, *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 7.

85. Two classic works which served as pioneering texts of liberal feminism are Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Right’s of Women*, written in 1789, and John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*, written in 1869.

86. J. Mitchell *Women: The Longest Revolution* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

87. A. Meulenbelt, *A Creative Tension: Key Issues in Socialist Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1984). Rowbotham, *Women’s Consciousness, Man’s World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

88. The term was coined by Carol Hainisch and used for the first time in her “Notes from the second year” in 1970. (Humm 1995:204).

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Third World women criticize the putatively racist and ethnocentric assumptions upon which dominant strands of Western feminism were based. There exists a widely held perception among Third World women that, by and large, the dominant trends of Western feminism have been characterized by such bias. This critique has been recorded in a number of works by Third World women.⁸⁹ Many Western feminist movements referred to “the” situation of women, presuming a generic “woman” and the notion of a global sisterhood. However, Third World feminists argued that this supposedly essential womanhood represented only the realities of a particular group of women, namely, First World, white, middle-class women. They illustrated how the homogenization of women forms part of a broader colonial discourse and knowledge project which attempts to suppress the experiences of the non-Western “other”. This imbalance of power relationship is aptly reflected in the words of a Third World feminist, Chandra Mohanty:

Power is exercised in any discourse when that discourse sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit referents, i.e., the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural others. It is in this move that power is exercised in discourse.⁹⁰

Mohanty points out that the appropriation of “Third” World women’s lives and realities by Western feminist discourse is often embedded within exploitative power relations as “colonialism almost always invariably implies a relation of structural domination and a suppression of the heterogeneity of the subjects in question.”⁹¹

Several Muslim feminist critics have illustrated how the Muslim women’s self-definition is not identical with the Western feminist definition. Fedwa al Guindi, who studied veiling among women in contemporary Egyptian Islamic movements, found that the rationale for veiling by Egyptian Muslim women is different from the dominant Western feminist presentation of veiled Muslim women as submissive beings. Such women deliberately wear the veil as an assertion of their identity. Leila Ahmed shows how Western feminist discourse during the British occupation of Egypt in the nineteenth century was employed in the service of colonialism.⁹² She argues that the adoption of the veil by many Muslim women at the time was a symbol of their resistance to colonial definitions.⁹³ Edward Sa’id in his book

89. B. Hooks, “Ain’t I a Woman?” *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); C. Moraga, & G. Anzaldúa, (eds.) *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour* (Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press; A Oakley, 1981); H. Roberts (ed.) *Doing Feminist Research* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Hull, G., Scott, P & Smith, B, 1982); G. Joseph, & J. Lewis, *But Some of Us are Brave* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1981); D. Lewis, *Common Differences: Conflict in Black and White Feminist Perspectives*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1993).

90. C. Mohanty, A. Russo, and L. Torres (eds.) *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, 55.

91. *Ibid.*, 52.

92. Lila Ahmed, *Women and Islam: An historical and Theological Enquiry*, 151-155.

93. *Ibid.*, 164.

Orientalism (1978) describes the manner in which Western Orientalist scholars situate the Occident (the West) as “positional superior” to the Orient (the East).

A ROOM OF ONE’S OWN AND LITERARY CRITICISM

Feminist literary criticism has developed as an outcome of the women’s movement and feminisms, and its various phases have reflected the developed ideas and theories of feminism and gender studies. The first modern work of feminist criticism is considered to be Virginia’s Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), which addresses the social, literary, and cultural aspects of female difference. It is considered one of the most important pioneering approaches in feminist literary criticism, and has influenced several theories. Many commentators have noted “the prescience of Woolf’s ideas and her capacity to anticipate the concerns of feminists in the future.”⁹⁴ It was “the first literary history of women writers and the first theory of literary inheritance in which gender was the central category.”⁹⁵ The book “has served the needs of various strains of feminist criticism, not all of them compatible with each other.”⁹⁶ In 1973, the novelist Margaret Drabble emphasized how *A Room of One’s Own* expressed her own conditions as a writer: “I could hardly believe that a woman from her background... could speak so relevantly to my own condition.”⁹⁷ Several contemporary literary critics consider *A Room of One’s Own* to be “the twentieth century’s most important statement on the question of women and writing.”⁹⁸

Mary Ellmann’s *Thinking about Women* (1968) was one of the main books that spotlighted how the critical estimates of women’s literature were constantly prejudiced. She exposed what she called “phallic criticism,” which was practiced by male academics and reviewers.⁹⁹ Ellmann has presented many examples of 19th century opinions about the inferiority of women. Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1969) drew attention to the stereotypical images of women in mainstream literature. In the seventies, feminist critics turned to women authors for alternative images of women, Mary Anne Ferguson’s anthology *Images of Women in Literature* (1973) is an early example of many anthologies of women texts.

In the 1970s, another disciplinary field of feminist criticism influenced by *A Room of One’s Own* appeared. The new approach focused on the rediscovery of lost

94. Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: Introduction to the Major Works* (London: Virago Press, 1994), 350.

95. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman, *A Room of One’s Own: The Politics of Creativity* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 11.

96. Ibid.

97. Margaret Drabble, *Virginia Woolf: A Personal Debt* (New York: Aloe Editions, 1973), 3; quoted in Ellen Bayuk Rosenman, *A Room of One’s Own: The Politics of Creativity* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 10.

98. Julia Briggs.ed, *Virginia Woolf: Introduction to the Major Works*, 359.

99. Mary Ellmann, *Thinking about Women* (New York: Harcourt, 1986), 6.

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and ignored literature written by women; it is called “gynocriticism.”¹⁰⁰ Three major books contributed to set up this approach: Ellen Moers’ *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (1976), Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979). In this Feminist approach, critics aimed “to give a material shape, and revalue women’s culture and writing.”¹⁰¹ This approach has contributed greatly to the “rediscovery” of many writers and many undervalued works by the traditional, masculine literary canon. In *Literary Women*, Moer stated three reasons for dealing with women writers separately. First, the amazing results such separation produces; second, the realization that “we already practice a segregation of major women writers unknowingly;” third, for a better understanding of women’s history.¹⁰² She proved that women’s writings, drawing their themes from their own experiences and cultures, measured up to any literary standard, but they have been misread and misjudged.

Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* focused on the same conceptual ground. She emphasized that “to rediscover” the past and form “a sense of collective identity is a must for any movement.”¹⁰³ In this book, Showalter gave an academic emphasis to many neglected or forgotten women writers. Later, in her article “Towards a Feminist Poetics,” Elaine Showalter defined two distinct modes of feminist criticism: “feminist critique” which designates the critical attitude towards male writings, and “gynocritics”, which means “scholarship concerned with woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women.”¹⁰⁴

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic* came to assert this direction. They developed a theory of “female literary response to male literary assertion and coercion.”¹⁰⁵ They focused on “female literary creativity” and “the anxiety of the author”, exploring “the difficult paths by which nineteenth century women overcame their anxiety of authorship, repudiated debilitating patriarchal prescriptions, and recovered or remembered the lost foremothers who could help them find their distinctive female power.”¹⁰⁶ Gilbert and Gubar argue that women could not both write and remain feminine without transgressing the norms set up by patriarchal

100. Elaine Showalter, “Towards a Feminist Poetics,” Elaine Showalter (ed.) in *The New Feminist Criticism* (London: Virago, 1986), 128. In this article Showalter developed a theory of women’s writing. She argued that feminist criticism could function in two modes: “feminist critique” and “gynocritics.”

101. Maggie Humm, *Contemporary Feminist Criticism*, 9.

102. Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), xv.

103. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 11-12.

104. Elaine Showalter, “Towards a Feminist Poetics,” 128.

105. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), xii.

106. *Ibid.*, 59.

authority. Thus the woman writer was faced with a double burden. They themselves raised and answered the questions about the options open to the woman writer.¹⁰⁷ They showed how women from Jane Austen and Mary Shelley to Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsest works whose surface designs conceal and obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning.¹⁰⁸

Since the 1980s, feminist criticism has followed various traditions, but all are related to gender analyses and gender theory: French feminist criticism, Marxist / Socialist-feminist criticism, Poststructuralist / deconstruction / Postmodernism, Third World feminist criticism, Black feminist criticism, and Lesbian feminist criticism. By 1985, the French feminist approach started playing a vital role in shaping feminist literary criticism by presenting a new conceptual framework. In *Sexual Textual Politics* (1985), Tori Moi criticizes the approach of Gilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman* as well as other representatives of Anglo-American feminist criticism. She supports the approach of feminist French criticism presented by Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Helene Cixous, who focus on language and its relation to gender, literary forms, and men and the psyches of women. She focuses on a separate feminine literary identity that has its own beauty and characteristics.

The Marxist/Socialist-feminists critics such as Tillie Olsen, Juliet Mitchell, Lilian Robinson, and Michele Barret stress the identical phase of literature and life. In general, "Marxism argues that literature is the ideological representation of life experience."¹⁰⁹ It focuses on economic relations. Though gender is not at the center for Marxist-feminist critics, the idea of gender is part of this theory. Robinson in *Sex, Class and Culture* (1978) argues that literature describes women's social roles. They focus on the "ways of institutions in which representations of gender and representations of institutions such as class and the family interconnect."¹¹⁰

Poststructuralists focus on how literature works in particular contexts. It attacks binary oppositions between men and women. Their arguments are in line with those of Marxist/socialist feminist criticism: "no language or literature can ever be 'free' from the conditions which produce it."¹¹¹ Jonathan Culler in *Structuralist Poetics* says that "the notion of rational identity is crucial to the semiotic or structural analysis of all kinds of social and cultural phenomena, because formulating the rules of the system one must identify the units on which the rules operate and thus must discover when two objects or actions count as instances of the same unit."¹¹² Michel

107. Ibid., 13.

108. Ibid., 73.

109. Ibid., 74.

110. Ibid., 82.

111. Ibid., 134.

112. Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1975).

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Foucault analyzed the way in which discourses control and define women and men. Poststructuralists present a discipline for understanding literature and gender as constructions. To them, the literary values which are used to define and choose the literary canon are not fixed but are based on class and gender forms of control and power. French feminist criticism and Poststructuralist feminists share an interest in the idea of subjectivity which focuses on the role of language in literary form: the specific linguistic representations of masculinity and femininity and what alternative representations can be constructed, considering literature to be the accumulation of subjectivity.

THE APPROACH OF A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

Virginia Woolf's approach to women's writings in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) provides an eminently applicable and suitable thematic and formal technique for use as a framework to investigate Yemeni women's writings. She takes up the issues which are significant for women writers in Yemen. Virginia Woolf showed how "the representation of female experience in literary form is gendered."¹¹³ In the first sentence of her book, Virginia Woolf sets the framework she used in her investigation of women and fiction:

But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction – what has that got to do with a room of one's own?¹¹⁴

In this quotation, Virginia Woolf announces her new approach to literature. She announces the "sociology of art" in which art cannot be discussed apart from its social context. She sees the need not to offer extended individual readings of literary works at this stage; instead, she speculates about why and how women wrote as they did or were absent and marginalized.¹¹⁵ In other words, Virginia Woolf used gender as a crucial analytical tool in her investigation of women and fiction. She traced the effect of social restrictions on female personality and creativity, and the hostile environment in which women wrote in the 19th century. In her essay "Women and Fiction," which is an outcome of *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf refers to the appearance of some women novelists such as Jane Austen and Bronte during the 19th century owing to the social changes emphasizing the importance of gender as a category in society:

113. M. Humm. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 2.

114. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Edinburgh: Penguin Books, 1945), 5.

115. In her later essays *Three Guineas*, "Women and Fiction", and "Professions for Women", and her collected essays, Virginia Woolf included many discussions of individual women writers.

Thus it is clear that the extraordinary outburst of fiction in the beginning of the nineteenth century in England was heralded by innumerable slight changes in law and customs and manners. And women of the nineteenth century had some leisure; they had some education.¹¹⁶

In addition to the gender approach, Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* suggests three main stages for the investigation into women's writings: (i) Revision; (ii) Recovering a Female Tradition; and (iii) Rewriting History. In *A Room of One's Own*, she explored and used extensively the first stage. In addition, she set the seeds of the two other stages, and in her later works she used the other two stages in recovering individual writers. For the purpose of my work, I used mainly the first stage, but also the other two stages. I used also Virginia Woolf's cautious style. Virginia Woolf is less provocative in *A Room of One's Own* than in *Three Guineas*. When, in *Three Guineas* "her feminism became more pronounced and overt,"¹¹⁷ Virginia Woolf announces her strategy in *A Room of One's Own*:

When a subject is highly controversial – and any question about sex is that – one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker.¹¹⁸

Revision is the main strategy that was used in *A Room of One's Own*. Virginia Woolf's statement of the central argument of the book, that "a woman must have money and a room if she is to write fiction,"¹¹⁹ does not refer only to money and space but implies all the different kinds of oppression and victimization women have to confront. She discusses the several obstacles that prevent women from being well-qualified writers. She discusses the external constraints on women's creativity that were imposed by patriarchy, lack of material, lack of education, lack of social experience, lack of access to publishing, and lack of freedom of mind. She argues that these barriers influence women's writings and creativity. She argues that some of these constraints have been unconsciously internalized by the women writers to form internal self-censorship and constraints that influence the writing that women could produce. In 1984 in *How To Suppress Women's Writing*, Joanna Russ expounded in detail this approach, giving more examples of how women's writings have been suppressed.

Though *A Room of One's Own* was written and published after British women had

116. Virginia Woolf, "Women and Fiction" in *Women and Writing*, introduced by Michele Barrett (London: The Women's Press, 1979), 45.

117. Julia Briggs (ed.), *Virginia Woolf: Introduction to the Major Works*, 365.

118. *A Room One's Own*, 6.

119. *Ibid.*, 5.

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already won full suffrage in 1928, the narrator presented several impediments to women's creativity which were the outcome of the patriarchal social organizations and ideology.

In her thoughts on "Oxbridge," the narrator of *A Room of One's Own* presents stories about how she found herself shut out of a significant cultural institution by a patriarchal law which considered her visit to "Oxbridge" to be a trespassing of a male domain. As she was walking to the library, remembering great male writers such as Lamb who "came to Oxbridge perhaps years ago" and she imagined that she was going to "follow [his] footsteps across the quadrangle to that famous library where the treasure is kept," "instantly there issued, like a guardian angel barring the way with a flutter of black gown instead of white wings, a deprecating, silvery, kindly gentleman, who regretted in low voice as he waved me back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the college or furnished with a letter of introduction."¹²⁰ Woolf's combining of the incidents of her narrator's imagination of the existence of male writers and their work in Oxbridge a hundred years previously and of the prevention of her entry by the guard is a skilful contrast indicating the long period of continuous institutional patriarchal practices against women that ultimately led to their absence from and inferiority in cultural life.

The famous British Museum – once again an important and assumed "neutral" place of knowledge – is another example of patriarchal institutions in *A Room of One's Own*. The narrator, after her failure to find answers in Oxbridge, goes to the British Museum to find answers to her questions about the inequality of the sexes and the relationship between the material and the intellectual: "Why did men drink wine and women water? Why was one sex prosperous and the other poor? What effect has poverty on fiction? What conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art."¹²¹ She chooses to go to the British Museum, "picking up a notebook and a pencil" to write down the truth:

An answer to be found was only to be had by consulting the learned and the unprejudiced, who have removed themselves above the strife of tongue and the confusion of body and issued the result of their reasoning and research in books which are to be found on shelves of the British Museum.¹²²

In her tour, the narrator finds out that her positive assumptions of the British Museum were wrong. She discovers that the authors of all available books are men of different qualifications and ranks; the common thing between them is that they are males. Ironically, the narrator does not get any answers but finds instead that patriarchal

120. Ibid., 8-9

121. Ibid., 23.

122. Ibid.

ideologies supported by well-known males confirm the inferiority of women. Many of these male authors had written about women, who seem to be “the most discussed animal in the universe.”¹²³ For example, the well-known poet Pope says that “Most women have no character at all;” Napoleon thought that women were incapable of education; “Some sages hold that they are deeper in the consciousness.”¹²⁴ In her imaginative representation of Professor Von X, Woolf deconstructs the holy and objective picture of such a professor and his work. She pictures him as a subjective, mentally biased person, who wants to confirm his superiority by emphasizing women’s inferiority. The narrator concludes her visit to the British Museum by saying that,

The most transient visitor to this planet, I thought, who picked up this paper could not fail to be aware, even from this scattered testimony, that England is under the rule of a patriarchy. Nobody in their senses could fail to detect the dominance of the professor. His was the power and the money and the influence. He was the paper and its editor and sub-editor. He was the cricketer; he owned the racehorses and the yachts. He was the director of the company that pays two hundred percent to its shareholders. He left millions to charities and colleges that were ruled by him-self.¹²⁵

The above conclusion of the narrator gives an insight into the main argument of the book. It indicates that Virginia Woolf implicitly argues for a change in the whole social structure that defines men’s and women’s roles and positions in society based on sex as a pre-requisite of creative writing. She argues for a change in the patriarchal society in which women are inferior and have no place either in its ideology or institutions: “His was the power and the money and the influence.” It is plain that Virginia Woolf indicates by a room the whole social situation of the woman writer that, to some extent, determines the nature of work produced. She built up her argument through detailed observations.

A Room of One’s Own shows that women writers faced not just institutional patriarchy. As Joanna Russ later emphasized, though there was no absolute prohibition of women’s writing, there were other powerful devices that discouraged and trivialized women’s writings. Though “writing was a reputable and harmless occupation” in which “the family peace was not broken,”¹²⁶ *A Room of One’s Own* depicts several ways in which women writers were discouraged from writing. In her essay “Professions for Women” Virginia Woolf discusses how informal constraints such as social norms

123. Ibid., 24.

124. Ibid., 26-27.

125. Ibid., 29.

126. Virginia Woolf, “Professions for Women,” 57.

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and the taboo against women speaking about sexuality hampered the writing that women could produce. Some of these constraints were unconsciously internalized to become self-censorship rather than social constraints. Virginia Woolf found it difficult to write “the truth about [her] experience as a body.”¹²⁷ She said that even if writers have managed to solve external constraints, “Inwardly, I think, the case is very different; she has still many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome. Indeed it will be a long time to write a book without finding a phantom to be slain, a rock to be dashed against.”¹²⁸ Joanna Russ confirmed that “the absence of formal prohibitions against committing art does not preclude the presence of powerful, informal ones.”¹²⁹ Discouragement had several guises. As one form, for example, Joanna Russ showed that society did not consider writing and publishing to be a proper activity for women and that it was not acceptable for women to write about all topics: “a woman must never write anything but posthumous works. For a woman, under fifty, to get into print is submitting her happiness to the most terrible of lotteries; if she has the good fortune to have a lover, she’ll begin by losing him.”¹³⁰ According to Rousseau, “A female wit is a scourge to her husband, her children, her servants and everybody.”¹³¹

Although at the time when *A Room of One’s Own* was published, women had most of their legal rights, they in general and writers in particular still suffered from patriarchal ideology, which inevitably affected their performance. Women had been deprived of education for centuries, and when they started to receive some in the 19th century, the rise of some novelists occurred. However, what had prevented Victorian women from receiving education, or higher education, from writing was actually the Victorian ideology of what women should do or should not do. While Virginia Woolf’s brother went to Cambridge, she was educated by her parents and by private tutors. Virginia Woolf showed that, until the 19th century, women did not have proper access to education. Her visit to a women’s college contrasted with her visit to Oxbridge demonstrates the unequal educational opportunities given to men and women. In contrast to the images of greatness and wealth of Oxbridge, Virginia Woolf shows the poverty of the women’s college as a result to the patriarchal control of authority and economy. Russ presented examples of how the discouragement of female learning is “still prevalent” except that “discouragement usually takes less obvious forms.”¹³² In the story of Flowerence Howe, whose family celebrated her brother’s decision to go back to university but discouraged hers for it “it would be waste money,” we see “how education of women was... unimportant compared to the education of men.”¹³³ The

127. Virginia Woolf, “Professions for Women,” 62.

128. Ibid.

129. Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women’s Writing* (London: The women’s Press, 1984), 7.

130. Ibid., 31.

131. Ibid.

132. Ibid., 12-13.

133. Ibid., 12.

statements collected by women graduate students in sociology at the University of Chicago in 1969 from some of their professors are sufficient examples of females' educational discouragement:

"Any girl who gets this far has got to be a kook."

"The admissions committee didn't do their job. There is not one good looking girl in the entering class."

"They've been sending me too many women advisees. I've got to do something about that."

"I know you're competent and your thesis advisor knows you're competent. The question in our minds is *are you really serious about what you're doing?*" This was said to a young woman who had already spent five years and over \$10,000 getting to that point in her Ph.D. program."¹³⁴

Such discouragement must have an impact on a woman and on women writers. Virginia Woolf, who was conscious of society's direct and indirect suppression, felt and internalized that her brother, as a male educated in Cambridge, has a better understanding than she did. In a letter to her brother requesting him to explain things that she could not understand about Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, she says, "I find them beyond me – Is this my feminine weakness in the upper region?"¹³⁵ Russ narrated a story of a student who came to her "weeping" because her family opposed her writing, not taking her work seriously.¹³⁶

Throughout the book *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf emphasizes money as being of crucial importance in the lives of women and in writing fiction. She reflects upon women's poverty throughout history. In her essay "Professions for Women," Virginia Woolf mentions that writing, compared to other professions, needs the least money: "For ten and sixpence one can buy paper enough to write all the plays of Shakespeare – if one has a mind that way."¹³⁷ Through these apparently contradictory quotations, we can see that Virginia Woolf's central argument implies much deeper and complex discussion. She means that a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction, as women's conditions influence the psychology of writers as well as their writings: "these webs... are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the house we live in."¹³⁸ Joanna Russ explained and extended this point by saying that "poverty and lack of leisure" are certainly powerful deterrents to art:

134. Jo Freeman, "How to Discriminate against Women without Really Trying," (Pittsburgh: K.N.O.W. No.03306,n.d.), 1. Quoted from Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress a Woman*, 12-13.

135. (Quoted from Ellen Bayuk Rosenman.

136. Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, 13.

137. Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women," 57-58.

138. Ibid.

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“most nineteenth-century British factory worker, enduring a fourteen-hour day, was unlikely to spend a lifetime in rigorously perfecting the sonnet.”¹³⁹ Virginia Woolf confirmed that poverty hampered independent middle-class women, who were only few.¹⁴⁰ Having money means having leisure time in which a person can squeeze a time for writing. Emily Dickinson, as Russ showed, “had to ask her father for stamps and for money to buy books;” she hardly had time to write for she had to nurse her mother and do housekeeping.¹⁴¹

Marriage and reproduction are also important obstacles that hamper women’s creative writing. The narrator of *A Room of One’s Own* looked in history books to find out how married women had been treated throughout history. She found, for example, “wife-beating was recognized as a man’s right and practiced without shame by high as well as by low.”¹⁴² In 1470, a woman had no right to choose her husband and the daughter who refused to marry the gentleman of her parents’ choice was liable to be locked up, beaten and flung about the room, without any shock being inflicted on public opinion,” and “Betrothal took place while one or both of the parties was in cradle.”¹⁴³ Virginia Woolf, discovers that before inquiring whether women had written poetry during the Elizabethan age, she should find out “whether they were taught to write; whether they had sitting-rooms to themselves; how many women had children before they were twenty-one; what, in short, they did from eight in the morning till eight at night.”¹⁴⁴ In “Women and Fiction,” Virginia Woolf relates the experiences of some women novelists as a result of marriage and reproduction “[It] was no longer the exception for women of the middle and upper classes to choose their husbands. And it is significant that of the four great women novelists – Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot – not one had a child, and two were married.”¹⁴⁵ Joanna Russ has presented examples of several writers who realized the impossibility of combining writing with full-time house-keeping, and wife and being a mother. In the 20th century, the situation did not change much. Sylvia Plath, who was a mother and a wife, explained the impossibility of not giving up writing with the triple load on women:

When the youngest of our four was in school... the world of my job... and the writing, which I was somehow able to carry around within me, through work, though home. Time on the bus, even when I had to stand... the stolen moments at work... the deep night after the house-hold tasks were done... there came a time when this triple life was no longer possible. The fifteen hours of

139. Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women’s Writings*, 6-7.

140. *Ibid.*, 7.

141. *Ibid.*

142. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 36

143. *Ibid.*

144. *Ibid.*, 39

145. Virginia Woolf, “Women and Fiction,” 57-58.

daily realities became too much distraction for the writing. I lost craziness of endurance... always roused by the writing, always denied... My work died.¹⁴⁶

In her imaginative story of Shakespeare's sister, Judith, Woolf summarizes other elements that are crucial for creative writing and that the women writers of her time were deprived of. While Shakespeare was given the opportunity of formal and proper education, freedom of wide experience of the world, freedom of personal life, freedom of work, and freedom of expression by his family, society, and literary critics,

Meanwhile his extraordinary gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was as adventurous as imaginative as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picked up a book now and then, one of her brothers perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers. They would have spoken sharply but kindly, for they were substantial people who knew the conditions of life for a woman and loved their daughter – indeed, more likely than not she was the apple of her father's eye. Perhaps she scribbled some pages in an apple loft on the sly, but was careful to hide them or set fire to them. Soon, however, before she was out of her teens, she was to be betrothed to the son of a neighboring wool-stapler. She cried out that marriage was hateful to her; and for that she was severely beaten by her father. Then he ceased to scold her. He begged her instead not to hurt him, not to shame him in this matter of her marriage.¹⁴⁷

When Judith decided to leave her family and roamed by herself, finding her own life in London, she could not find a shelter. Though she was a gifted actress, audiences laughed at her and she was dismissed by the manager for it was naturally accepted that no woman "could possibly be an actress." Though she was very much like her gifted brother, Shakespeare, in mind as well as in body "with the same gray eyes and rounded brows," the manager saw only her feminine body that could bear a child. Thus she committed suicide. Judith's ending implies Virginia Woolf's meaning and implications. Virginia Woolf confirmed explicitly that "it is unthinkable that any woman in Shakespeare's day should have Shakespeare's genius."¹⁴⁸ It was not because women were innately incapable as the bishop may think but because of the patriarchal circumstances they had to confront.

146. Tille Olsen, "A Biographical Interpretation," Appendix to *Life in the Iron Mills or the Korel Woamn*, by Rebecca Hardin Davis (Old Westbury: The Feminist Press, 1972). Quoted from Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writings*, 9.

147. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 40-41.

148. *Ibid.*, 42.

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In Judith's experience and in other parts of *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf exposed the prejudiced notions of literary criticism about women's work and the impact of this on women's writing. Unlike her brother, who is free to study, seek sexual experience, leave home, and act and write, Judith confronts encoded prohibitions wherever she turns. This is done through biased sexual responses, exclusion, isolation depicted in literary history books, and the "false categories" that were practiced against women writers. The manager of the theater cannot understand Judith's mental talent; he proposes marriage to her because all he can see in her is her feminine body. What happened to the imagined Judith in London almost happened to Ellen Glasgow in New York. A publisher whom she visited to give her novel told her, "You are too pretty to be a novelist. Is your figure as lovely as in the altogether as it is in your clothes?" and he attempted to rape her.¹⁴⁹ Robert Souther commented on Charlotte Brontë's poems by advising her to quit writing poetry for "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life and ought not to be a business of a woman's life."¹⁵⁰ A similar attack was used against some writers whose talent was admitted, such as Anne Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Emily Brontë; they were criticized for "coarseness or a lack of ladylike refinement."¹⁵¹ *Jane Eyre* was accepted by many critics as "a masterpiece if written by a man, shocking or disgusting if written by a woman."¹⁵² This device of discouraging women is what Russ called the "pollution of Agency", which disseminates "the idea that writing or painting is immodest and hence impossible for any decent woman."¹⁵³

Virginia Woolf's main objective in *A Room of One's Own* was to show how these formal as well as informal, external as well as internal constraints and discouragement ultimately influenced women writers' identities and their writings in many ways. For a long period, some women writers had to use pseudonyms. Virginia Woolf mentioned how "publicity in women is detestable" and that "Anonymity runs in their blood. The desire to be veiled still possesses them."¹⁵⁴ She assumed that "Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman."¹⁵⁵ During the period 1850-1880, a time when anonymity was considered to have been abandoned, Elaine Showalter lists twelve examples.¹⁵⁶ According to Virginia Woolf, some women

149. Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writings*, 11.146. Tille Olsen, "A Biographical Interpretation," Appendix to *Life in the Iron Mills or the Korel Woamn*, by Rebecca Hardin Davis (Old Westbury: The Feminist Press, 1972). Quoted from Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writings*, 9.

150. Ibid.

151. Ibid., 27.

152. Ibid.

153. Ibid., 24.

154. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 77.

155. Ibid., 42.

156. Elaine Showalter, "Women Writers and the Double Standard," in Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (eds.), *Woman in Sexist Society; Studies in Power and Powerlessness* (New York: New American Library, 1972), 476-77, 475, 456. Quoted from Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writings*, 28.

writers had had mental breakdowns as a result of trying to resist all these constraints and oppressions. Some women writers consciously or unconsciously denied their own identities as women: "She wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman, so that her pages were full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself."¹⁵⁷ Some women writers suffered from a split of identity in trying to meet the high expectations of society and be good at everything. The poet Sylvia Plath suffered an extreme form of split of identity and committed suicide at the age of thirty-one.¹⁵⁸ The same kind of identity conflict is seen in Anne Sexton, who said in an interview in *The Paris Review* in 1968,

All I wanted was... to be married, to have children. I thought the nightmares, the visions, would go away if there were enough love to put them down. I was trying my damndest to lead a conventional life, for that was how I was brought up, and it was what my husband wanted... The surface cracked when I was about twenty-eight. I had a psychotic break and tried to kill myself.¹⁵⁹

Though Virginia Woolf did not discuss fully the stage of Recovering Female Tradition in *A Room of One's Own*, she put forward the seminal concepts of this stage, which were developed in many different ways by later feminist critics:

We think back through our mothers if we are women. It is useless to go to the great men writers for help, however much one may go to them for pleasure.¹⁶⁰

In the preceding quotation, Virginia Woolf implicitly emphasizes that women writers need women writers as examples. They need to see what women have written. Virginia Woolf presented several women writers in her collected essays. She asserted the recovery of female tradition for she believed that each sex has its own values, which should not be given up, and that education should bring out differences and not similarities:

It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only? Ought not education to bring out and fortify the difference rather than similarities?¹⁶¹

157. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 77.

158. Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writings*, 16.

159. Quoted by Barbara Kelves, "The Art of Poetry: Anne Sexton," *Paris Review* 13 (1970-71):160. Quoted from Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writings*, 16.

160. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 63.

161. *Ibid.*, 72-73.

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In looking back to the values of both sexes which must have influenced her writing and literary criticism, Virginia Woolf stated how masculine values and experiences had been given priority whereas female values and experiences were always trivialized and considered to be inferior. This view has led critics to value highly those books that deal with mostly males' experiences, such as war, and trivialize books that deal with females' experiences, such as family life:

It is obvious that values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex; naturally, this is so. Yet it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are "important;" the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes "trivial." And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction. This is important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room. A scene in a battlefield is more important than a scene in a shop – everywhere and much more subtly the difference of values persists.¹⁶²

At several points in *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf suggests implicitly the re-writing of history through research by female researchers that would add "a supplement to history":

It would be ambitious beyond my daring, I thought, looking about the shelves for books that were not there, to suggest to the students of those famous colleges that they should rewrite history, though I own that it often seems a little queer as it is, unreal, lopsided; but why should they not add a supplement to history, calling it, of course, by some inconspicuous name so that women might figure there without impropriety? For one often catches a glimpse of them in the lives of the great whisking away into the background, concealing, I sometimes think, a wink, a laugh, perhaps a tear.¹⁶³

Virginia Woolf gives excellent ideas for the new history by changing some of its known standards. It is a history which is an "elaborate study of the psychology of women by women; a study of the reasons for men's opposition to women's emancipation; a research into the lives of ordinary women in different historical periods that can compete with the standard history of wars and political life. In her own words, "Thus, towards the end of the eighteenth century a change came about which, if I were rewriting history, I should describe more fully and think of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses."¹⁶⁴

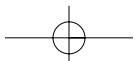
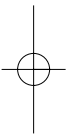
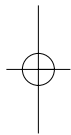
¹⁶². Ibid., 61.

¹⁶³. Ibid., 39.

¹⁶⁴. Ibid., 61-62.

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Virginia Woolf's ambitious suggestion of a new standard of history was a revolutionary method which was adopted by later feminists. For my own humble work, I did not use her view in rewriting history, for, at this early stage, Yemeni woman writers need first to be known and included in the mainstream of the literary canon. I am still answering the question – asked by even educated people – are there any Yemeni women writers? Thus, in rewriting Yemeni literary history, my aim was only to fill the gaps where women were lost and neglected.



Chapter 3

The History of Poetry, the Short Story, and the Novel

In this chapter, women writers are placed in Yemeni literary history in the three main current genres: poetry, the short story, and the novel. I first review the position of women writers as depicted in the major contemporary literary Yemeni history books. In the second part, I give an overview of women's contributions in the three genres based on my search of Yemeni books, and newspapers, and on the information I have received directly from Yemeni writers themselves. Detailed information about almost all writers is provided in a bibliography in the appendix.

A search of the major Yemeni literary history books of the three genres shows that women writers have not taken their proper place in this field; they are neglected or marginalized in history. This raises some questions. What are the reasons for such neglect and in what way has this neglect affected Yemeni women's writings? Gender must at least be considered and researched as one of the main reasons for women's absence in the contemporary literary Yemen history books, since biased ideology considers women's voice *`awra*. Women's literature has remained in the private sector and has not been documented as men's literature has been. Another possible reason is that, when contemporary literary historians started documenting Yemeni literature in the 1960s, women were noticeably absent from public life, particularly in the northern and urban areas of Yemen. Their absence in the literary history books lasts until the late 1990s, when a greater interest in the publishing of articles and studies about Yemeni women's literature arose internationally. However, Yemeni women poets are not in the mainstream of literary history even at the present time.

WOMEN POETS AND LITERARY HISTORY BOOKS

In the past, poetry was an integral part of Arab people's lives. It was part of their daily life, and conversation, and entrenched in their culture. The word literature in the Arab World has been used to refer mainly to poetry. The history of Yemeni poetry, as in other Arab countries, was not written separately: it was included as part of the history of the nation and the nationality of the poet was mentioned only if deemed necessary.

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In the 20th century, however, Arab countries started to review and rewrite the history of literature from the point of view of each country as each Arab country started searching for its own unique identity in literature. Owing to a policy of isolation, mandated by the Imam after the Turks left northern Yemen and during British colonization in the South, Yemeni history suffered from complete isolation. Consequently, little was written about its literature and only a few brief items regarding Yemeni history were noted in general terms in the history of Arab literature.

In 1927, Taha Hussein – a famous Egyptian literary writer and critic – included a chapter about Yemen's pre-Islamic literature in his book entitled *Al-Adab Al-Jaheli* [Pre-Islamic Literature]. In this book, the author, relying on little information about the history of Yemen and few resources, calls into question that Yemen had any pre-Islamic poets and finds only a trace of poetry even after Islam.¹⁶⁵ As a result of the complete isolation of Yemen, this judgment was not refuted directly or indirectly by any Yemeni historian until around 1960.

In the 1960s, Yemeni literary history was included in the general history books. For example, the names of literary writers – men and women – can be found in some general anthologies of well-known people in the country, and some literary facts can be found in history books about this period.¹⁶⁶ Since the 1960s, several books have been written about Yemeni poetry, but until now there has not been a complete history of Yemeni poetry. The major literary history books were attempts to document available pieces of literature and information so they would not be lost to history. Those books were mainly written by the poets themselves, and each writer traced the history of poetry according to his own subjective perception, including some names and neglecting others. For example, the poet Zaid al-Wazeer, the author of the first book of history about Yemeni poetry *Derassat fi al-Shi`r al-Yemeni: al-Qadim - al-Hadith* [The Studies of the Yemeni Poetry: Old – Modern] apologizes at the beginning of the book – as several writers did later – that “the book is not a history of Yemeni poetry nor an evaluation; it is only an attempt to give a summary of the journey of poetry in Yemen.”¹⁶⁷ The author adds that no changes have been made in the new edition except that he has added the poet Ahmed al-Shami, whom he did not mention in his first edition for personal reasons. He has admitted that this was not fair and that this lack of objectivity was a general defect in the pioneer literary history books. Ahmed ben Mohammed al-Shami – a poet – in *al-Shi`r al-Mo`aser fi al-Yemen: Naqed wa Tareekh* [Contemporary Poetry in Yemen: Criticism and History] accuses critics, writers, and researchers of Yemeni poetry of not being accurate in

165. Taha Hussien, *Fi al-Adab al-Jaheli* [Pre-Islamic Literature], (Beirut: Dar Al-'Odah, 1927), 191.

166. For example Ahmed Mohammed Zabarah, *Nasher al-'Uref 2* [Spread of Knowledge]. 2 Vols. (Beirut: Markez al-Derassat al-Yemeniyya, nd.); or 'Abd Allah al-Hebeshi, *Mu`jem Al-Nisa' al-Yemeniyyat* (Sana'a: Dar Al-Hikma al-Yemeniyya, 1988).

167. Zaid Ali al-Wazeer, *Derassat fi al-Sha`er al-Yemeni: al-Qadim - al-Hadith* [Studies in Yemeni Poetry: Old and Modern] (London: Yemeni Heritage and Studies Center, 1964). 2nd edition, 1991.

documenting literary history. For example, in `Ez al-Ddin Isma`il's book, a poem is ascribed to `al-Zubairi which is not his poem. Some of the poems published after the revolution have been documented as if they were pre-revolutionary. Also, the author has neglected to give credit to many poets who played a great role in the people's awakening during the revolution.¹⁶⁸

Most Yemeni history books have neglected women poets. Yemeni women poets are given a passing reference or no mention at all in these literary history books. In the first literary history book, the author mentions that one of the love poems that was ascribed to Mohsen al-Mutawakel could be, as mentioned in one of the reference books, *Taeab al-Sahir*, by the Yemeni woman poet Zaineb al-Shahariyya. The author does not confirm the information but only comments by saying that if the poem is by the woman poet; it indicates that a good level of women's poetry existed in Yemen. The author mentions the works of two writers, Zaineb al-Shahariyya and her sister Fatemah al-Shahariyya, as examples of the existence of good poetry during 11th and 12th centuries AH.¹⁶⁹ Note that the author does not present these two women writers in the same way as he does men poets. He simply mentions that they were distinguished poets "according to al-Shaokani's book."¹⁷⁰ Ahmed Mohammed al-Shami's book *Qasset al-Adab fi al-Yemen* [The Story of Yemeni Literature] (1970)¹⁷¹ narrates the story of Yemeni poetry from the beginning to the 1960s, including the main periods of history: the Pre-Islamic period, the Mid-Islamic, *Amwi* period, the *`Abasi* period, and the Modern period, and documenting each period with examples of many famous poets and their works, with some analysis or evaluation, but does not name a single woman poet. Scholars who were not poets neglected women poets. The two literary history books by non-Yemeni scholars, *Shu`era'a al-Yemen al-Mo`aseroon* 1966 [Contemporary Yemeni Poets]¹⁷² by Naji Helal and *al-Shi`r al-Mo`aser fi al-Yemen* 1986 [Contemporary Poetry in Yemen] by `Eiz al-Ddin Ismail, introduce some contemporary Yemeni poets but neither refers to any contemporary women poets.¹⁷³ The most recent scholarly book by Ahmed Qasem al-Mekhlafi, *al-shi`r al-Yemeni al-Mo`aser bin al-Asala'a wa al-Tajdeed* [Yemeni Contemporary Poetry: Originality and Innovation], which I was advised to read for a more comprehensive and complete analysis of Yemeni poetry, has not given any space to any Yemeni woman poet. No

168. Ahmed ben Mohammed al-shami, *Al-Shi`r al-Mo`aser fi Al-Yemen: Naqed wa Tareekh* [Contemporary Poetry: Criticism and History] (Beirut: Dar al-Nafis, 1980), 49-82.

169. AH refers to the Islamic Calendar which begins with the emigration (*Higira*) of Prophet Mohammed to Madinah.

170. Ibid.,

171. Ahmed Mohammed Al-Shami, *Qasset Al-Adab fi al_Yemen* [The Story of Literature in Yemen] (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tejari, 1970).

172. Helal Naji, *Shu`era'a al-Yemen al-Mo`aseroon* [Contemporary Yemeni Poets] (Beirut: al-M`aref Association, 1966).

173. `Eiz al-Ddin Isma`il, *al-Shi`r al-Mo`aser fi al-Yemen* [Contemporary Yemeni Poetry] (Cairo: Jablawi Publishing, 1986).

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woman writer is mentioned throughout all the periods analyzed and discussed by the author. The author discusses women's issues as part of social factors with reference to Renaissance poetry, in particular Mohammed al-Sharafi's poems on women.¹⁷⁴ The author believes that those women's issues (women as objects) did not have a special interest for the Renaissance poets because women's issues were part of the main national issue. He criticizes Mohammed Al-Sherafi's great interest in writing about women, claiming that the poet is only looking for fame and reputation and that Yemeni women do not need to imitate "corrupted" movements in other Arab countries.¹⁷⁵

Some literary history books present the same one or two women poets, which may indicate that those are the only women poets in the history of Yemen. The two books of literary history of poetry, *Rihelah fi al-shi'r al-Yemeni: Qadimah wa Hadithah* [A Journey in Yemeni Poetry: Old & Modern] (1972; 5th ed. 1992)¹⁷⁶ and *Al-Ab`ad al-Modo`iyya wel Faniyya fi Harket al-Shi'r al-Mo`aser al-Yemeni* [The Artistic and Subjective Dimension of Contemporary Poetry in Yemen] (1978)¹⁷⁷ by the well-known poets `Abd Alla Al-Baradduni and `Abd Al-`Aziz al-Maqaleh, both present the same folklore woman poet, Ghazala al-Maqdashiiyya. In *Rihelah fi al-shi'r al-Yemeni: Qadimah wa Hadithah*, the author categorise Yemeni poetry in different schools according to period, place, and people: the Pre-Islamic Period, the Renaissance Period, the school of Iryani, and the period of the Revolution. The author then gives a brief introduction to major poets during the 1950s-1970s. The author starts discussing the pre-Islamic period by presenting women poets. However, this section is very short, biased, and negative. The author starts by saying that the "poetry of women had a lot of similarities and that the difference between one woman poet and another was very little in the older days. Jalilah, Bothinah and Hend bent `Otbah are just one poet."¹⁷⁸ He excludes al-Khansa'a, who was "advantaged with her wisdom rather than her poetry."¹⁷⁹ The author continues by saying that "it was strange that most of the poetry of women consisted of elegies."¹⁸⁰ He then provides the answer: "for sadness was a woman's nature."¹⁸¹ The author ends this section on women's poetry by presenting some lines

174. Mohammed al-Sharafi may be considered a pioneer male feminist poet; many of his poems deal with women's issues and their rights of equal freedom.

175. Ahmed Qasem al-Mekhlafi, *Al-shi'r al-Yemeni al-Mo`aser bin al-Asala'a we al-Tajdeed* [Yemeni Contemporary Poetry: Originality and Modernity] (Beirut: Universal Center of Documentation and Communication, nd.), 322-328.

176. `Abd Allah al-Baradduni, *Rihelah fi al-shi'r al-Yemeni: Qadimah wa Hadithah* [A Journey in Yemeni Poetry: Old & Modern] 5th ed. 1972; (Damascus: Dar-al-Faker, 1992).

177. `Abd Al-`Aziz al-Maqaleh, *Al-Ab`ad al-Modho`iyya wel Faniyya fi Harket al-Shi'r al-Mo`aser al-Yemeni* [The Artistic and Subjective Dimension of Contemporary Poetry in Yemen] (Beirut: Dar al-`Oda, 1978).

178. `Abd Allah al-Baradduni, *Rihalah fi al-shi'r al-Yemeni: Qdimah we Hadithah*, 28.

179. Ibid.

180. Ibid.

181. Ibid.

by al-Merhabiyya, concluding, without analysis, that women's poetry is a simple and undifferentiated form that deserves to be documented but does not call for criticism. The author does not attempt even to compare women's elegies with the same kind of poetry by men. Since the 1990s however, these two poets have changed their attitudes towards women's literature and have contributed introducing a new generation of women poets by writing introductions to some writers' collections of works or by writing about them in newspapers or encouraging them to write.¹⁸²

The only two main references to ancient women poets, in addition to those in the general history books, are found in *Mu`jam al-Nesa'a al-Yemeniyat* [The Dictionary of Yemeni Women] by the historian `Abd Allah al-Hebeshi and an incomplete and unpublished anthology of some Yemeni women writers by the researcher `Abd al-Salam al-Wajeeh. Those two authors collected the names of famous ancient Yemeni women from various general Yemeni and Arab history books. As women writers have not been taken seriously as literary writers, only a line or a few lines of their poetry have been documented and most of the information is about their male relatives.

The various ways of suppressing women's writings that have led to women writers' absence in the mainstream of literary history bring to mind what Joan Russ has discussed as a denial of women's writings by "False Categorizing," a tool that has been used to suppress women's writings in British and American literary history:

False categorizing: She is not really [an artist] and it is not really it [serious, of the right genre, aesthetically sound, importance, etc.] so how could she have written "it"? Or simply: Neither "she" nor "it" exists. (simple exclusion) But sometimes it is admitted: She wrote it. That is, some "wrong" authors do make it into the canon of the Great, or (at least) the serious.¹⁸³

Several American and British writers, like Yemeni writers, have been categorized under the names of their male relatives or under a specific genre to exclude them from the "serious arts." Russ discusses how women writers are suppressed even when they are re-categorized in literary history for they are not included in the main literary canon that is considered "broad, general, humanistic, universal," but in "a new re-categorization" of "women studies", that is, "narrow, special, political biased." For this reason, I attempted to re-position women poets in the mainstream of literary history. I have chosen this method, rather than Virginia Woolf's suggestion of creating a new history, because there is a need to include women poets in the mainstream of the literary canon. I aimed to present a review of Yemeni women's poetry adopting the most common division of the history of Yemeni poetry: Pre-Islamic Poetry, Post

182. Al-Baradduni wrote the introduction to Nadia Mar'i's first collection of poetry. Dr. al-Maqaleh has introduced several women poets in newspapers. Both writers introduce the collection by poetry of Moneirah Al-Dailami's *Tranin Wajed Yemeniyya* [Yemeni Love Music].

183. Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, 49-61.

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Islamic poetry, Renaissance poetry, and Contemporary poetry. This division helped me to include as many women poets as possible, drawing on the general features of their work. As poetry was an essential part of the Arabs' discourse and a way of communication, Yemeni women must have used and practiced poetry but very little has survived from the pre-Islamic period, a little from the Islamic period, and almost nothing from the Renaissance period, and there is a progress in the contemporary period.

OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S POETRY**The Pre-Islamic Period**

The pre-Islamic period reflects the impact of the particular history of the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula. It includes the impact of the war and knighthood culture of the northern part of the Peninsula as well as the ancient culture of the particular civilization of Yemen. The *Humaini* poetry, which is a mix of classic and folk poetry, presents the particular culture of the southern peninsula. This kind of poetry is not known in other Arab countries and it is written in the Yemeni dialect.

The few available extracts of the poems by women writers during this period present the same kind of poetry as was written and recited by men poets. The Yemeni woman poet Zaineb al-Surdadi wrote *Humaini* poetry in praise of kings. Al-Hebeshi narrates a story of her visit to one of the sheikhs of Tahama along with other Yemeni poets. The only two documented lines of her poem present a strong *Humaini* poem.¹⁸⁴ Om Sareeh al-Kendiyya, a poet from Hadramout, wrote an elegy on her sons, who were killed in a battle. She describes – as was common during her period – the courage and bravery of her sons who refused to run away and found honor in a brave death.¹⁸⁵

The Islamic Period

This period extends from the emergence of Islam in Yemen to the beginning of the Renaissance Literature period (1930s). It is a long period that some historians have tried to divide into sub-periods. Islam had an enormous impact on Yemeni life and on Arab life in general. Islam became the main source of culture and life even for some non-Muslims in the region. The Yemeni poetry of this period has some features of the pre-Islamic period as well as with the new soul of Islam that is illustrated in Wadah al-Yemen's poetry.¹⁸⁶ Both content and style were influenced by Islam. New topics that dealt with God and spirituality, reflections on the power of God, and on

184. `Abd Allah al-Hebeshi, *Mu`jem Al-Nisa'a al-Yemeniyyat* [Yemeni Women Dictionary] (Sana'a. Dar-al-Hikmah al-Yemeniyya, 1988), 108.

185. `Abd Allah al-Saqaf, *Tareekh al-Shu`ra'a al-Hadrameen* [History of Hadrami Poet]. Vol. 3 (Tayef: Maktabet al-M'aref, nd.), 27.

186. `Abd Allah al-Baradduni, *Rihelah fi al-shi'r al-Yemeni: Qdimah we Hadithah*, 29.

the Prophet Mohammed, were included in poetry. Poetry had found a new source of expression and imagery in the Qur'an. In general, post-Islamic poetry can be categorized, based on style, mainly into three kinds of poetry: classic poetry, which was written in a classic Arabic language and rhymed lines (*al-shi'r al-'Amodii*); folk poetry (*al-Humaini*), which was written or recited orally in mixed dialectic and the classic language of the area or the region; and religious poetry, which consisted of lyrical songs written for God. The three kinds of poetry dealt with a wide range of themes: political and national poetry, and poetry that dealt with everyday life such as lyrical poetry, satire, invective, sarcasm, love poetry, patriotic poetry, *Mawashahat* (melic poetry), and folk poetry (*al-Humaini*, *Zamel*, *Bala*).¹⁸⁷

Islam raised the status of women in the Arab world, and particularly in the Arabian Peninsula, where they buried newborn girls. Islam caused the low social status of women to be changed and women's role in life to be given more respect. This could be the reason why more documented works of poetry and works by women can be found in the history books of Arab literature in this period. There were several prominent women poets whose poetry could not be ignored. However, it should be noted that there were not as many women poets as there were men poets.

According to the available references, women poets wrote on several topics in classic poetry. Love was one of the subjects of poetry: either love in general or love of their husbands. Om Hamadah al-Hamadaniyya wrote about the power of love which passes by everyone, but stops when it passes by her. She presents her topic "love's power" in a dramatic situation, imagining that she is complaining about love to a female friend who thinks that she is exaggerating the power of love. She describes how Love's power controls the whole body of a person, and says that even a person's bones will be shaken by the strength of love:

I complained about love to her, but she said you're lying
I can see no sign of love in your body.
Wait until love overwhelms your bones that would heavily shake¹⁸⁸

Shames al-Nehar Ben Ahmed Ben Saba'a ben Abi al-S'ood expresses her disappointment in her lover, who deserts her and leaves his city, Taiz, for Aden. She admonishes him for abandoning her, wondering how he enjoys staying away from his home and how a lover can desert his beloved. The lover stays in Aden, replacing the "hooking"

¹⁸⁷. Al-Zamel is a short poem consisting of two to four lines and sometimes as many as 14 lines. It expresses the feelings of the poet and describes the place where the poet lives. It is used to encourage people during battles or work or important social occasions. It is sung collectively along with a dance called Al-Bar'e in which the dancers carry guns. *Balla* is a similar kind of poetry that is also accompanied with dance, but it is usually performed on less formal occasions such as weddings.

¹⁸⁸. A'bd Allah al-Hebeshi, *Mu'jem Al-Nisa'a al-Yemeniyyat*.

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of the antelopes of Taiz by the hooking of the beautiful girls of the fishers and shippers of the mountain of “Seera” instead of the mountain of “Saber” that was the “sultan” throughout the history of Yemen.

Poetry was used as the highest language to make requests or to complain about daily life. Delegations of poets were sent to the rulers. Women poets contributed to such delegations. Suda Bent `Amara ben al-Asak al-Hamdaniyya al-Yemeniyya,¹⁸⁹ who supported `Ali ben Aub Taleb against M`wiyya during the battle of Khelapha, visited M`wiyya Ben Abi Sufyan after he became kheleepha, in a delegation of her people requesting the removal of one of the khelapha’s despotic employees in Yemen. When M`wiyya – the khelapha – reminded her of her famous lines in which she encouraged her brother to fight against him (M`wiyya) whom she thought did not deserve to become khelapha, she was not afraid. She frankly told him that `Ali was a just ruler, and she recited two lines of a poem praising Abutilon’s justice:

My God bless a soul of a man in the grave where justice is buried. He had continually allied with the right, till he became paired with Right and Faith¹⁹⁰

In praising her own people, which was especially common during wars, `Amera bent Zaid ben al-Hareth from Khulan wrote a poem praising her people as the best people in their region, “Guda`a”, in different situations. They were of noble origin and they were the descendents of kings. When they ruled they were just and in war they were as strong as lions. In peace they helped their neighbors and were never dictatorial even with their enemies.¹⁹¹

During this period and in particular during the 11th and 12th centuries AH (18th - 19th centuries AD), a group of poets who were mainly scholars played an important role in political and public life. Most of this group were related to the rulers of that period. They wrote on different topics. Most of their works are still stored in the private libraries of their families. Nevertheless, I found information about some of them. Shems al-Hoor bent al-Hadi ben Ibrahim ben `Ali ben `al-Murtada’ al-Wazeer was well educated and made a famous contribution to social and public life.¹⁹² She wrote an elegy about some of her relatives, indicating a skillful use of language and style.¹⁹³

Another well known example is Zaineb bent Mohammed al-Shahariyya, who lived during the 11th century AH (18th century AD). She belonged to the royal family so she had the opportunity to receive a good education, in a scholarly and political environment as her grandfather (her mother’s father), al-Moyaid Mohammed ben al-Qasem, ruled Yemen at that period. Though she was a scholar in religion and chemistry,

189. Ibid., 120. Quoted from Tareekh Demasheq [History of Damascus], 178.

190. Ibid.

191. Ibid., 144. Quoted from al-Eqlil.

192. Ibid., 125. Quoted from Matel’e al-Badoor

193. Ibid.

she was well known as a poet and her work was documented by the authors of several general history books, who considered her one of the prominent poets of her period.¹⁹⁴ Zaineb was different from the common women of her period and even from women of her class. According to the historians, her personality as well as her poetry was the main reason for her failure three times in marriage. She was not “an obedient and suppressed wife” as others were, and she was “too proud” in that she tried to be a partner to her husbands.¹⁹⁵ To her first husband, a prince poet `Ali al-Mutawakel, she wrote her best love poems. In a letter to him she joined beautiful pieces of poems and prose requesting him to forgive her mistakes:

Noble people are forgiving.
 Free people disregard others' faults, but admit theirs.
 Pardon is good and to disregard a fault is a noble deed.
 Loyalty is an honor
 Forgiveness with might is generosity
 And desert after confession is spendthrift.¹⁹⁶

She wrote different kinds of poems: love poems, elegies, *muwashah*, and *humaini*. She lamented the death of her nephew in a very well-written elegy, describing – as was common – the characteristics of the dead. She ended the elegy by reflecting upon death.

Folk poetry was one of the main types of oral poems used on different occasions. It was used as one of the main weapons in struggles between tribes, and was used in various social events, such as national and individual festivals. Women contributed actively in this tradition until recent times. Though women folk poets, particularly in rural areas, wrote a significant part of this kind of poetry, their contribution has been neglected by most studies, and their contributions have been categorized as “home and private poetry.”¹⁹⁷

Ghazala al-Maqdashyya was a well-known poet of this period and she has been recognized by contemporary historians of folk poetry.¹⁹⁸ Like almost all rural folk poets, she did not have any official education and could not read or write. She practiced two kinds of folk poetry: *al-Zamel* and *al-Bala* tribal oral poetry. Ghazala al-

194. She is mentioned only briefly in the first literary history book, but is written about in almost all general history books. Al-Wajeeh recently published a booklet about her, collecting and documenting all her work that is found in history books.

195. `Abd al-Salaam al-Wajeeh, *Zaineb al-Shahariyya* (Sana'a: Dar al-Turath al-Yemeni, 1991), 26-27.

196. *Ibid.*, 54.

197. W. Flagg Miller, “Public Words and Body Politics: Reflections on the Strategies of Women Poets in Rural Yemen,” *History of Women*. Indiana University Press, 14 No. 1 (Spring 2002), 94.

198. `Abd Allah ??al-Baradduni, *Rihalah fi al-Shi'r al-Yemeni*; `Abd al-'Aziz al-Maqaleh, *Al-Ab'ad al-Modho'iyya wal Faniyya fi Harket al-Shi'r al-Mo'aser al-Yemeni*; `Abd Allah al-Hebeshi, *Mu'jem Al-Nisa'a al-Yemeniyyat*.

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Maqdashiyya was famous not only for her poetry but also for the role of her poetry in the politics of her tribe and of her strong and daring personality. She was a representative of her tribe as a negotiator, solving critical problems with other tribes. One of the stories that is narrated about her courage and her natural skill of spontaneous *zamel* tells of when her tribe, `Ans, faced a dangerous situation that might have led to a war with another strong tribe, al-Hada'a, because a person of her tribe stole a sheep from the other tribe.¹⁹⁹ The *Sheikh* of the other tribe went to Ghazala's village reciting a poem, addressing her as a representative of the tribe. She answered in a poem using the same rhyme as the *Sheikh's* poem, trying to lessen the anger of the *Sheikh* and providing a solution to the problem by welcoming the *Sheikh*, and apologizing to him, and promising to give two sheep in place of the stolen one:

Welcome as firmly as the woolen mats of Rada'a are tightened
 A welcome that fills Shar'a valley, [where] you carry and cinch,
 Arise, my Bukhait, and go home.
 `Ans will solve,
 Al-Ju`la will satisfy Al-sufi by two for one.²⁰⁰

Ghazala wrote about different topics in the forms of *zamel* and *bala*. Her well-known strong *zamel* in which she argued for equality among people was put at the entrance of a lecture room carrying her name at the Women's Studies Center.²⁰¹

All equal created by God
 No one born free and the other slave
 All children of nine
 No one from such a family and the other not²⁰²

Some Yemeni historians say that Ghazala al-Maqaashiyya wrote this poem because she was from a lower-class family known as (al-*khumes*), but a recent study by W. Flagg Miller, who visited Ghazal's village and interviewed some of her relatives, showed that she was actually from a high-class family – a *shiekh's* daughter. He confirmed that she would not have been able to represent her tribe if she were from *Bani al-khumes*, who could not have the authority to make decisions for the tribe and represent the tribe.²⁰³

Ghazala al-Maqaashiyya wrote excellent poems in the form of *al-Bala*. One of her

199. W. Flagg Miller, "Public Words," 96.

200. Quoted from W. Flagg Miller, "Public Words," 96.

201. This lecture room was the first and only room named after a famous woman poet, though there are several rooms named after men poets such as Al-Zubairi Lecture Room.

202. `Abd Allah al-Baradduni, ?? *Rihalah fi Al-Shi'r al-Yemeni*, 335.

203. W. Flagg Miller, "Public Words," 111.

famous *Bala* was an attack on an official person who came to evaluate the taxes the village should pay, and who asked for her hand in marriage. She criticized him because he said she had to accept his proposal or he would increase the tax. Then addressing men, she threatened him, saying that she should not be blamed if she slapped him on his head or tied him with his shawl, or *Emameh* (a Yemeni traditional scarf worn by men):

O men of the region, the tithe-appraiser has been errant
 Has he come to look for sorghum, or for women?
 He said he wants Ghazi Or else he increases the [tithe] penalty.
 I'll strike him on the skull Or else tie him up with a turban.
 If he should return [after that,
 O men there is no blame on me.²⁰⁴

Dabiyya al-Nameeriyya is another example of the folk poets of this period. She was as famous as Al-Maqdashiyya but she did not have the strong and influential personality of al-Maqdashiyya. As she was an only child, her father was suspicious of anyone asking for her hand in marriage She had to fight for her right to marry the man she loved, and her tool was poetry. In a strong metaphor, she pictures herself and her body as a land that cannot be turned to waste if it is not cultivated:

Ye Maya camels tell that lovely lad
 His crops are yielded and full...
 let him come and harvest or they will wither²⁰⁵

The Renaissance and Revolutionary Period

The Renaissance started later in Yemen than in the rest of the Arab World. Whereas it started in the 1920s in most of the Arab region, it started in the late 1930s in Yemen, after the Turks left. The beginning of the renaissance was influenced by Arab thinkers and literary men such as al-Kwakebi, Georgi Zidan, and Mutran.²⁰⁶ The poetry of this period went along with political and national struggle, which was the "coal" that fired the poetry movement. This active period can be divided into three stages of development and modernization. The first generation consisted of political, literary, and religious men. They continued writing in the Arabic traditional standard represented by Ahmed `Abd al-Wahab al-Wareeth, who played an effective role in this movement; Ahmed al-Mota`, `Abd Allah al-Azeb, and Zaid al-Moasheki. The second

²⁰⁴ W. Flagg Miller, "Public Words," 98.

²⁰⁵ `Abd Allah al-Baradduni, *Rihalah fi al-Si'r al-Yemeni Qademah we Haditha* 338.

²⁰⁶ `Abd Allah al-Baradduni, *Rihalah fi al-Si'r al-Yemeni Qademah we Haditha...* 58. Zaid Ali al-Wazeer, *Derassat fi al-Shi'r al-Yemeni: al-Qadim - al-Hadith*, 186.

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generation was influenced by modernization in the traditional form of the poem; they wrote poetry in the traditional old form as well as in the new free form. These poets included Ahmed al-Shami, `Abdo Othman, `Abd al-`Aziz al-Maqaleh, and the Prison of Haja'a's group of poets.²⁰⁷ Out of these two generations of poets emerged the third generation. A modern form of poem (*qasida*) emerged, which was embraced by prominent poets such as Ahmed al-Shami, who is considered to be the poet who introduced this form of poetry, which was later adopted by several other poets. The main feature of this period is the mixture of traditional poetry and a new spirit and form of poetry which dealt with different subjects, particularly nationalism and revolution. During this period, national poetry was the more common kind of poetry as it was used as a main and effective weapon in the national struggle.

There is no record of women's poetry during the Renaissance period, which is strange since women are highly affected by war. During the long periods of Renaissance, Revolution, and even post-revolution until the 1970s, the history of women poets was dropped completely. Reviewing history books concerning this period, we noticed that the whole history was focused on national movement but there was no mention of participation of or role for women, except some names in the South. This lack of women poets prompted me to interview some literary historians. The disappearance of women in this period is probably a result of the too-conservative policy of the Imam in the North, as well as illiteracy.²⁰⁸

The Post-Revolution Period

Review of newspapers (for example, *Al-Thawrah*), shows that the 1970s mark a strong and daring beginning for women's participation in public life. Gaining some education, and with revolutionary and national feelings, pioneer women in different fields, particularly in the media, journalism, universities, and the writing of literature, tried to take a position in public life. Most of the poets who emerged during this period, however, did not continue writing or publishing poetry. They wrote poetry as a way of self-expression and self-liberation. Jameela `Ali Raja²⁰⁹, who started as a poet but later turned to media and politics, published a poem that expresses women's struggles during that period to find themselves space in public life as they were hampered by the social notion that women were considered to be merely females, defined by their bodies and their reproductive role. The poem, which was published in a magazine under a section called Excess Ambition, was entitled "Sufis" and written in a modern

207. Several poets were imprisoned after the 1948 Revolution and they formed in prison a Cultural Movement in which prisoners expressed themselves and their prison situation in poetry. This "School" played an important part in the literary history of poetry.

208. The question was directed to Mr. Zaid al-Wazeer (the author of the first literary history book of poetry. However, this period requires further research in the private libraries and oral poetry).

209. Jameelah `Ali Raja'a was recently (2003) the Republic of Yemen's representative at the Arab League in Cairo.

style which was not committed to a certain rhyme. The poem describes the contrasts between the soul and the body. As she greets and welcomes her soul as the symbol of love and eternity, she portrays the body as hateful, with sinful desire that has hampered her progress:

I hated you body, your desires, your faults
 I hated you for you hamper me from going up
 I hated you with a prisoner's hatred for her/his prisoner
 With the hatred of a bird for its cage
 With the hatred of a free person for her/his chains²¹⁰

In 1973, Dr. `Abd Al-`Aziz al-Maqaleh introduced four women poets in *al-Mostaqbel* journal.²¹¹ He considered their poems the promising works of talented poets: Faten Mohammed, Amat Al-`Aleem al-Sosowa, Anisa Ghanem, and `Aza Mohammed. However, those names have disappeared completely from the field of poetry.²¹² During the 1970s and 1980s, a new movement of modernization occurred in the form of poetry. It was the beginning of the use of free verse, influenced by such famous Arab poets as al-Siyab and Nazek al-Malekah. A young competent generation of poets emerged, including Isma`il al-Wareeth, `Abd al-Wadood Saif, Mohammed Haiythem, Amal al-Shami, Yesmin Rajeh, and Fatema al-`Eshbi, confirming the introduction of free verse, which became more acceptable to the audience. During this period, three women poets – Amal al-Shami from Sana'a, Yesmin Rajeh from Aden, and Fatemah al-`Eshebi from a village in the north – started writing and publishing poetry and continued for a period that allowed them to produce collections of poetry. The new poets wrote in the traditional verse forms but some also used the new form.

Amal al-Shami wrote several kinds of poetry: the song, traditional classic poetry, and the *humaini* poetry dealing with varied topics. She described herself as follows: "I have been a writer and a poet for twenty-four years. This is my birth date which I love. I always have a feeling that I was born more than once and history usually suppresses and forgets me."²¹³ This feeling is expressed in her poem "Salah al-ddin", in which she imagines herself as a wife, and complains of polygamy and how she is suppressed as a woman. Her early work is filled with strong Arab national feelings, and she wrote songs and poems about several Arab countries. In a song entitled "I'm an Arab Citizen," she calls for the Arabs' Dream of Unity:

210. *Ma`in*, Issue 8 (May 1979).

211. *Al-Mostaqbel*, Issue 3 (1973): 118-125.

212. Amat al-`Aleem al-Sawsoa turned to politics and was the first woman ambassador of Yemen in Netherlands in 2001, and later the minister of Human Rights.

213. In a letter sent to me after my first interview with her in 1999.

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Don't ask about my country the country of my father and mother
All Arabs are my brothers I'm an Arab citizen.²¹⁴

In the 1980s, Amal daringly published love poems, which were taboo.²¹⁵ She used the simple traditional style, which uses mainly similes and keeps a consistent rhyme throughout the poem:

I love you as sun after rain as beauty.²¹⁶

Amal was a feminist in philosophy as well as in poetry; her poems, even the light ones, express women's issues. In a poem written in response to another poet's love poem, she says:

I'm a woman with passion astonished when found beauty,
Love, innocence and truth in the faces of tall and strong men.
I can love only one and not many as male poets.²¹⁷

At the memorial service organized by the Women's Studies Center in 1998 following the death of Huriyya al-Moyaid, Amal cried while reading a poem. In this poem, she expressed Huriyya's difficult path, which was hers as well as that of all women.

Yesmin Rajeh wrote poetry mainly as a form of self expression.²¹⁸ Her poetry is in the narrative verse form. Her published volume *Qaeed wa Ene'taq* [A Fetter and Liberation] is mainly about love; there are undefined limits between love of man and love of homeland, on the one hand, and the woman and the homeland, on the other:

You penetrate into my body
You are the essence of art²¹⁹

Personal love is mixed with collective and local love. She sees in him the love and kindness of her country:

214. Manuscript.

215. She published her first collection, *Bara'ah* [Innocence], but it has disappeared, even from the Library of Yemeni Research and Studies Center. The Librarian, who worked there for more than twenty years, told me that it was there but it is lost. *Al-Thawra* published a short article about it.

216. Manuscript.

217. Manuscript dated 11/6/1996.

218. Lila Mohammed Saleh, *Adab al-Mara'a fi al-Jazeera wal-khalij al-'Arabi*: al-Juza'a al-Thani al-Yemen wa `Oman [The Art of Women in Arabian Gulf: 2nd Part Yemen & `Oman] (Kuwait: That al-Salsel Publication, 1987), 272.

219. Yesmin Rajeh, *Qaeed Wa Ene'taq* [A Fetter and Liberation] (Aden: Dar al-Hamdani, nd.), 90.

You are the kindness of home
 Its wonderful, original colors
 And the birth of something original and new²²⁰

Fatemah al-`Eshbi, who started writing in the 1980s and started publishing in the 1990s for she had to face fierce opposition from her father,²²¹ wrote two types of poetry: the *Humaini* and modern free verse. One of her *Humaini* poems – as it happened, with al-Magdashiyya – saved her tribe from a battle with another tribe. Her later poems are characterized by frankness and directness of rhythm and an outcome of the repeated rhymes as in the early poems of free verse. Words and poetry were the main part of her concern, as she believed that this was a way of change:

I want a song that would explode my memory²²²

Fatemah al-`Eshebi is also a strong feminist voice. In addition to her themes and her interest in homeland, the past and the future, she is concerned about woman, man, social taboos, and the strong determination of woman that is able to change things for the better. The themes of her early poems were very nationalistic, dealing with national issues in Yemen as well as in the Arab world. In her published collection of poetry, which includes only her 1990s poems, is a poem titled “Ya Qudes” which expresses nationalistic feelings towards al-Qudes (Jerusalem) as a symbol of Arabs’ lost identity. In the feminist poem “Rajul men Wareq” [A Man Made of Paper], she daringly draws a picture of a love experience in which a woman finds great disappointment in discovering the fragility of man. She wishes that her lover would remain as a dream that would accompany her worried nights:

I wish he had remained a dream
 That keeps one company in sleepless nights.²²³

She continues narrating her wishes until the last stanza where she describes the moment when she hugs him and finds only ashes. She discovers that he is made of paper that can be burned easily:

This ash that is...
 Embracing me

220. Ibid.

221. In her published testimony “Qissati M’e al-Shi`r” [My Story with Poetry], Fatemah narrated how her father was about to bury her alive for writing poetry; the other solution was to marry a man of the age of her father. *Al-Hikmah*. Sana’a (July-September 1997). 93.

222. Fatemah al-`Eshbi. *Enha Fatemah* [It is Fatemah] (Baghdad: Maktabet Mada’a, 2000), 98.

223. Ibid.

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Is nothing but my love that was only...
A man made of paper²²⁴

Fatemah al-Eshabi shows awareness of women's low position in society, ending her poem "Hal Tamout al-Sama'a?" [Does the Sky Die] by saying that a woman – like the feminine letters – is quietly thrown in a trash can by the society:

Every feminine letter is quietly put in the dust bin.²²⁵

CONTEMPORARY POETRY

Since the 1990s, modernization has been more accepted in the literary field and by (common) readers. Free verse has become a respected form of poetry and prose verse has emerged and developed to gain wide acceptance in contemporary cultural life. New young poets, male and female, such as Mohammed al-Shebani, Mohyee al-ddin Jermah, Ahmed al-Zar'i, Jamel Hajeb Mohammed al-G'ood, Nabilah al-Zubair, Ibtisam al-Mutawakel, Huda'a Abelan, Nabilah al-Kebesi, Nadiyah Me'ri, Amnah Yusef, and Azhar Fay'e, have taken their places in the literary field.²²⁶

For women poets, this period marks the beginning of a new, more durable era for professional poets. This period is most active and favorable for women poets, and women writers in general, as a result of the development of society, education, printing, journalism, and positive criticism. Most, if not all, of the poets, of this period have chosen the modern forms of free verse and prose verse. The main artistic characteristics of their poetry are artistic poetic language, use of symbols and images, intensity instead of directness and length, emphasis on the female, and great interest in women's issues.

Nabilah al-Zubair – who started writing poetry in the late 1980s and published her first collection of poetry in 1991 – has experienced and tested her own form and content of poetry throughout her four collections, in which she had made extensive use of untraditional and playful forms of language filled with feminist messages. Her first collection, *Motawalyat al-Ketheba'a al-Ra'ea* [Consequences of the Wonderful Lie], represents her first attempt to develop her own style, but it is still a mixture of innovative and traditional forms. She used directed rhymes but introduced several new expressions, oppositions, conceits, and superposition. The main theme that runs through this collection and her other collections is self-discovery in relation to the social context and man. In the first poem, she, as a symbol of a woman, confirms she is not a free individual who knows herself and she gives the reasons for her suffering and depression, which will last to the Resurrection Day:

224. Ibid.

225. Ibid., 108

226. Biographical and bibliographical sketches of Yemeni women writers are provided in the appendix.

I know I'm suffering duality
 And something called schizophrenia
 Still, remain a wretch till the Day of Judgment

The first poem of the second collection, *Thamet Baher Y'awedeni* [There's a Sea Returning to Me], "Tawtheeq" [Documenting] has the same concern:

Between a poem and a poem...
 There is an age...
 Of memory's emptiness...
 Who will document nonexistence?...
 It is the age of the poet

In the process of self-discovery, the poet realizes the alienation and difficulties of a woman, and of a woman poet in particular:

I feel a woman inside me that has left my veins

 And I feel a woman inside me that has been forsaken by the poem²²⁷

In this collection, Nabilah focuses on creating her own new style regardless of traditional forms, structure, and grammar, in order to break the traditional rules and create poems that are typical of her revolutionary and mysterious self. Her poems are visual and need to be read carefully and repeatedly to understand them.²²⁸ For example, her poem "Mazal" [Still]:

Whenever my head shattered a wall
 I said: "I still have a head"
 Whenever a wall shattered my head
 I said: "There is still a wall in front of m."²²⁹

Note how Nabilah has played with the positions of subjects and objects and lines of parallelism and contrast to express her idea of the cycle of life and struggle. In the first two lines her head is the subject and in the last two lines her head is the object; the first two lines denote a feeling of optimism and the last two denote pessimism with a sense of challenge.

Though Nabilah doesn't use traditional forms of poetry, she is interested in using

227. Ibid.

228. Hatem al-Saker, [The Creativity of Arab Women in the 20th Century], p.13.

229. Nabilah al-Zubair, *Thamet Baher Y'awedeni*, 47.

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symbols and concepts from her culture and from ancient Yemeni history. Her third collection, *Mahaya* (Obliteration), was dedicated to “Bent Thuban an old woman poet, who paid a very high price for writing poetry 2500 ago.” This sums up Nabilah’s increasing focus on gender discrimination and feminist topics. Nabilah’s fourth collection, *Tenween al-Gha’eb* [The Third Person Pronoun], explicitly presents her feminist attitudes. Her themes as well as the language of images, and the concepts strongly support her outspoken feminist attitudes. The main theme of this collection is the very close spiritual status of woman and man, but the woman throughout the poems of the collection is the active subject, and the more dynamic while the man is static. For example, note the contrast in the image of the moving wave (woman) and static beach (man):

The wave was broken again
The beach is still in its place²³⁰

In the first six poems of the collection titled *Gasa’aed Naqesa* [Incomplete Poems], Nabilah explicitly changes the common gender roles of men and women. The titles of these short poems indicate the sarcastic way in which she deals with gender roles: “The Game of Difference;” “The Game of Locking;” “The Game of Flood;” “The Game of Mind;” “The Game of Writing;” and “The Game of Passion.” In the first poem, “The Game of Difference,” she requests that he play her role of motherhood and she play his role of manhood:

I will play with you motherhood (for I was never a full mother)
You play with me your manhood (for)
Then we would change roles
You will be a full mother
And I will be a man of a first class.²³¹

In her poem “al-Kanayes al-Naema’a” [The Sleeping Churches], Nabilah draws images of the fears and worries of a woman writer who, despite her fears, tolls the bells and escapes to man’s shelter, but by the end of the poem she realizes that words are a better shelter and she is just a poet whose strength is words:

Our hands are upon the bells of Rome
The city will arise soon
And will wonder who has jingled the bells
I’ll seek sanctuary in you

230. Nabilah al-Zubair, *Tenween al-Gha’eb* (Sana’a: al-Afaq Publishing House, 2001), 14

231. *Ibid.*, 8.

And steal away from the watchman
 Of hazardous utterances
 I just couldn't be hushed
 I'm a poet, and my wager is speech.²³²

Ibtisam al-Mutawakel is another poet who adopted an untraditional attitude in writing mature prose verse, particularly in her late poems. In her collection *Shatha'a al-Jamer*, 1998 [Scent of Embers], Ibtisam is basically concerned with the woman in her country, relating her to historical places, focusing on presenting the particular feminine features of a place, as in her poems, "al-Hadramiyya, al-'Adaniyat." For Ibtisam, as for Nabilah, women's issues are the priority in her poems, which express an explicit feminist voice. In her poem entitled [How to Become A Man], she radically criticizes the social norms of bringing up a man. In a parody of books like, "How to Learn English in Five Days," she builds her poem:

How to become a man without a teacher
 In the course of five nights
 "How" a title I wonder how much is published
 In response to it
 The hearts of a million girls are suffering
 But that is not important
 It was never a disaster
 When a young man learns...
 A woman pays the dues²³³

Samet al-Nesa'a [The Silence of Women] is a strong prose verse in which the poet announces the hidden meaning of women's silence that would lead to explosion:

To those who will accept silence if it is an explosion
 Give up your mirror of wishes to false accusations - drought
 Take no notice of it
 And illuminate the balconies of the bird that was slung
 By curses
 By yesterday which turned to dust.²³⁴

The presence of rhythm and clarity can be seen in the structure of Ibtisam's poems.

232. Ibid., 42.

233. Ibtisam al-Mutawakel, *Shatha'a al-Jamer*, [The Perfume of Embers] (Sana'a: Public Book Authority, 1998), 9.

234. Ibtisam al-Mutawakel, *Shatha'a al-Jamer*, 25.

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Unlike in Nabilah's poems, the meanings of the poems are in sequence. The poem gradually reaches its climax in the final stanza, announcing:

Release the poem of your mined oppression
 Don't forget them
 This is not an ignominy
 It is the ignominy of those who mount the silence of women
 Tell them the silence of women became an explosion²³⁵

Huda'a Ablan is another poet whose three collections present strong prose verse with many connotations and images. In her "Dream", published in her first collection *Nasef Enhena'a* [A Half Bow], she expresses her wishes and her need for peace and love in her life in order to compose poetry:

A Dream
 If God's heaven granted me hot rains
 Leaps of the poured fever
 And a dancing earthy flame siege me
 My warbling doesn't turn to charcoal
 Since I will dream a little
 Of peace
 Coldness
 And you²³⁶

Huda'a Ablan is also concerned with women's issues. In her poem *Mohwalet Tathaker Mahedeth* [An Attempt to Remember What Happened], which carries the title of her second collection, Huda narrates the moment of creation which defines the fate of women:

In the moment zero...
 The heart's vessel expanded...
 God put the fevered fire-wood...
 Taking a stick of kindness...
 Blazing me beside
 His night face²³⁷

235. Ibid., 25

236. Huda Ablan, *Nesf Enhena'a* [A Half Bow] (Damsacus: Dar `Akrameh, 1997), 76.

237. Huda Ablan, *Mohwalet Tathaker Mahedeth* [Trying to Remember What has Happened] (Cairo: al-Shreqah Girls' Club, 1999), 8-9.

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As in many prose verses by Huda'a, the beautiful "blazing" moments turned suddenly to "a broken pot." The kind Lord turned to "the lord of Darkness," whose name was used to commit crimes. In this bloody environment, there were only "blood," "ashtray," and an "extinguished woman" including in her suffering the suppressed creatures in the world:

In the place that was a roof and hands
 A meter of love
 No more than a wound dangled by the Lord of Darkness
 No more than two seats on the page of firebrands
 No more than a cup of blood
 An ashtray
 And an extinguished woman²³⁸

Amnah Yusef is a competent poet who has a sense of traditional poetry in her preserving of rhythm, but she follows the modern form of poetry. In her later, very short poems, in her collection *Gasayed Hkawf* [Poems of Fears], she frees herself of any singing rhythm. Besides her attempts to preserve rhythm, Amena plays with the structure and shape of her poems using punctuation: numbers, dots between words, and sometimes the replacement of whole lines with dots:

I don't see common dividers!
 I don't see... except

²³⁹

In content, as the title of her collection suggests, Amena expresses her fears as an individual, as a citizen, and as a female poet. In her poem titled "Khawf" [Fear], she states her fear of her dreams that could be expressed through poems:

I'm afraid of a dream
 Which would testify that there is no fragility like me?
 I'm afraid of a dream
 Which would explode like a mine?²⁴⁰

She goes on to give more detail about her fear and its relation to things around her until it is clarified in the last stanza:

238. Ibid., 9.

239. Amnah Yusef, *Qasa'd Khawf* [Poems of Fear] (lathiqiyya: al-Yemamah, 1997), 62.

240. Ibid., 10

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I'm afraid.....
 It grows round in my eyes
 It drops from the embers of my letters²⁴¹

Amnah's poems – as their titles indicate – "Fear", "Burning", "Alienation", "Thirst", "Space", and "Crying," present a sense of an unsettled and disturbed self. The images of bewilderment and lack of confidence are repeated. "Day" is a metaphor for reality, where she believes that she has no place, therefore the status quo has no place in her poetry. As in the poetry of Huda and Nabilah, the image of a poet as a fire is used. In "Hareeq" [Burning] she portrays the suffering of a poet in an era that does not value literature:

My era heavy and not worth a butterfly
 Filled with thorns
 But passion
 Held back part of the nectar
 So that it was in the burning
 It considers
 Giving birth to a new poem
 Transform yourself into a burning fire
 In whose blood
 Are features of truth?²⁴²

The theme of nationality and alienation from her own country takes up much of Amnah's poems. She tries to draw her dream, her love, and her alienation from her own country, as in "Nasheed" [Song], "Ghurbah" [Alienation], "Dhama'a" [Thirst], "Hamesh" [Margin], and "Boka'a" [Crying], which is about Sana'a, the capital of Yemen:

Here is Sana'a!
 The sun said
 Thus the evening cried!²⁴³

Nadiyah Mare'I, of the same group, also adopted the free-verse style of poetry. Her collection of poems titled *Azaheer al-'Atesh* [Flowers of Thirst] 2001 is generally concerned with universal questions; therefore, she produces unconnected images of despair that are related to neither specific time nor a specific place in spite of her dedication of some poems to friends and relatives. In the first poem, "Beitti" [Home],

241. Ibid.

242. This poem was translated by Ryme Katkhouda and Jenny Seymore

243. Amnah Yusef, *Qasa'd Khawf*, 54.

she dreams about heaven as another idealistic world, of safety and confidence:

A dream of heaven inhabited me
Of the other...Life and legends
Our confusion is getting bigger...Safety, Confidence²⁴⁴

As she is a woman poet, women's issues take a special place. Her poem titled "Al-kwakeb al-`Asher" [The Tenth Planet] is dedicated to the chairwoman of the Women's Studies Center, Dr. Raufah Hassan, as a symbol of women that describes the global distress and plight of women, especially in developing countries:

Pulling me back-cycling – galaxies
Strange, miserable, lonely
Not accepted by Earth nor Zuhel
Without a sky
All galaxies deny me²⁴⁵

YEMENI LITERARY HISTORY BOOKS AND WOMEN SHORT STORY WRITERS

The Yemeni modern short story emerged in the late thirties. It began with publication in newspapers and journals. It started in a simple narrative form, aiming to preach and give moral lessons following the old Arabic form of narration. The first women's short story in Yemen was published in the South in 1960, at the beginning of the decade that was to witness national liberation movements in both the South and the North. In the South, independence was gained from British colonial control in 1967, when the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen was formed. Women from the South began to publish short stories during this decade. In the North, the revolution of 1962 led to the creation of the Yemen Arab Republic, ending the rule of the Imams. But for the rest of the decade there was instability and fighting between the republican and the loyalist forces. Women from the North began publishing short stories in the 1970s. Since then, Yemeni women have continued to write and publish their stories in newspapers, magazines, and anthologies.

Yemeni women short story writers have been marginalized in major literary history books of short stories. The first literary history book of short stories was `Abd al-Hamid Ibrahim (1977) *Al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya al-Mo`aserah 1939-1976* [The Contemporary Yemeni Short Story 1939-1976].²⁴⁶ This book is, until now (2004), the main historical reference source of Yemeni short stories. The first chapter deals with

244. Nadia Mar'i, *Azaheer al-`Atesh* [Flowers of Thirst] (Sana'a: Public Book Authority, 2001), 23.

245. *Ibid.*, 61.

246. `Abd al-Hamid Ibrahim, *Al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya al-Mo`aserah 1939-1976* [Contemporary Yemeni Short Story] (Beirut: Dar al-`Awdah, 1977).

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the foundation of the short story and its progressive development. The development of the short story is divided into four periods: the Period of Preparation, the Period of Enlightenment, the Period of Variety and Circulation, and a separate “Period” dedicated to Mohammed `Abd al-Wali, whose works the author felt could not be placed in just one period as they continued developing. In this valuable literary history book, Dr. `Abd al-Hamid did not include women writers in the regular four stages of the development of the Yemeni short story. Even in the bibliography, which includes almost all Yemeni short stories published in newspapers and journals, he omitted many women writers who wrote in the same newspapers and journals. In the two books written by Dr. `Abd al-`Aziz Al-Maqaleh *Kiraat fi al-Adab Wel Fen* 1979 [Readings in Literature and Art] and *Qerah fi Adab al-Yemen al-Mo`aser* 1984 [Readings in Contemporary Yemeni Literature], which include some critical renderings of several short stories, he failed to include any woman short-story writer.

Nevertheless, both authors gave some recognition in their later works to women short-story writers. In *Alwan men al-Qissah al-Qaseerah* (1981), Dr. `Abd al-Hamid allotted some space to women short-story writers.²⁴⁷ This book is a selective collection of some Yemeni short stories and an introduction to the development of the Yemeni short story. The collection includes twenty-five stories by different writers, but there is only one short story by a woman writer. It is a story by Shafiqah al-Zoqari, *al-Tha'r al-Sagheer* [The Young Revolutionary]. In the introduction, which is about the development of the Yemeni short story, Dr. `Abd al-Hamid attacks women's short stories in a “kind” tone. He appreciates women's increasing participation but he has dealt with women short story writers as one group that exhibits the same basic features of writing. He describes their work as being self-obsessed and as having a too-exaggerated tragic tone. He asserts that the main contribution of women writers was to add the perfumed feminine touch: “Women's contribution in this field will add a new tone that would lessen the world of sadness, and aggressiveness, and anger.”²⁴⁸ He refrained from looking at women's work objectively, because women writers were too sensitive and might stop writing if they heard any criticism.²⁴⁹

In *fi al-Riwayya wa al-Qissah al-Qaseerah* 1999 [Studies of Novel and Short Stories], Dr. `Abd al-`Aziz al-Maqaleh introduced two women writers, a short-story writer and

247. `Abd al-Hamid Ibrahim, *Alwan men al-Qissah al-Qaseerah* (Beirut: Dar al-`Awdeh, 1981).

248. `Abd al-Hamid Ibrahim, *Al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya al-Mo`asirah*, 116. The book like many other books dealing with the role of literature in the September and October revolutions, neglected women's contributions.

249. Ibid. Taha Hassain said the same regarding women writers in Egypt in 1939. He said that he would treat them with far more gentleness and kindness than he would their male counterparts. He claimed that it was not because of any weakness on their part, but to show “care, regard and good patience.” Joseph T. Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 232.

a novelist, but it was not an in-depth analysis.²⁵⁰ They were included in a chapter which contained the introductions to books written by the author. This brings to mind al-Baradunni's opinion of ancient women poets and `Abd al-Hamid's view of women's short stories. There is encouragement for women's writing, but there is still a feeling that women's literature is not yet worth serious consideration and does not have enough depth to be included in the great canons of literature.

Although Yemeni women have been publishing short stories for more than three decades, beginning with F. Ahmed, who published *Dhalim ya-Mujtam'a* [Society, You Tyrant] in 1961 in the `Adeni journal, *Saut Al-Janub* [The Voice of the South], their work received little critical attention until the 1990s²⁵¹. In 1992, two years after the union of the North and the South, Nahlah `Abd Allah published *Aswat Nisa`iyya fi al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya* [Yemeni women's Voice in Short Stories], which was the first anthology of Yemeni women's short stories. The seriousness with which Nahlah `Abd Allah treats woman's short stories is a far cry from the patronizing disdain `Abd al-Hamid Ibrahim displayed in the first literary history of the Yemeni short story and novel, *al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya Al-Mo`sira* [The Contemporary Yemeni Story], published in 1977. Many newspapers, such as *Al-Jumhuriyya*, now give considerable space to women and publish their literary work to the extent that some readers feel that newspapers compete to publish women's writings. As I mentioned above, women have also recently founded their own newspapers, such as *Al-Mar'a* [The Woman] in 1994, *Al-shaqa'aaq* [The Anemone] in 1996, *Al-Yemeniyya* [The Yemeni Woman] in 1998, and *Adam Wa Hawa'a* [Adam & Eve] in 1999, which publish women's literary works and serve as an open window for self-expression. Some women have published collections of their short stories independently, and some have also received help from the Ministry of Culture. The Empirical Research and Women's Studies Center at Sana'a University offers courses on Yemeni Women's writings, and it supports research on women's literature.²⁵² In 2003, and as a result of the nomination of Sana'a as the Arab Cultural Capital for 2004, the Ministry of Culture, with the cooperation of the Yemeni Literary Union and Markez `Obadi Publishing, many literary books by male and female writers were published.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S SHORT STORIES

The first Yemeni story published in *Al-Hikmah*²⁵³ by a male writer was Yehya al-Nahari's

250. `Abd al-`Aziz al-Maqaleh, *Derassat fi al-Riwayya wa al-Qissah al-Qaseerah* [Studies in Novel and Short Story] (Beirut: Al-Mosasa Al-Jam'iyya, 1999), 353-377

251. Nahlah `Abd Allah, *Aswat Nisa`iyya fi al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya* [Yemeni Women's Voices in Short Story] (Sana'a: Dar al-Mufadhel, 1992), 15.

252. Dr. `Abd al-`Aziz al-Maqalah, a professor of Arabic Literature and literature and a well-known Yemeni poet and critic, teaches and coordinates these courses with specialists in the field such as Dr. Yuman'a al-`id and Dr. Hatim al-Saker.

253. An old Yemeni journal that continues to be published. It was established in December, 1938 AD/1357 AH by Ahmed `Abd al-Wahab al-Wareeth.

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short story “Kif Yudafa Palestinians `an Biladehem: Tadhiah Nadereh” 1358 AH [How Do Palestinians Defend their Country: A Unique Sacrifice]. `Abd Al-Hamid Ibrahim and other literary historians who based their histories on his book consider Ahmed al-Bareq’s story “Ana Sa`eed” 1359 AH [I’m Happy] to be the first short story, though al-Nahari’s was published first. These stories share similar characteristics. Both follow the old Arab narrative style.²⁵⁴ Both are didactic stories in which the narrator interrupts the narration to preach and give a moral lesson. Both stories represent the early seeds of short story writing. With the publication of *Fatat Al-Jazeera* in 1940,²⁵⁵ there were various new efforts in the writing of short stories, such as “Ens fi `Alem al-Jen” by Dendan.²⁵⁶ Mohammed `Ali luqman, the first Yemeni novelist, published some short stories such as “Al-`Asheqah” [The Adorer] and *Ana “Astartet Zoji” [I’ve Got Back MY Husband]* in 1945. I could find no short stories written by women during this early period of the short story in Yemen in my search of several newspapers, such as *Al-Hekmah*, *Fatat Al-Jazeera*, *Saba’a*, *Al-Yemen Al-Jadeed*.

Between 1945 and the 1970s, Yemeni short stories made great strides, particularly in the South, and during this period valid “Literary Criticism,” also developed.²⁵⁷ In the 1960s, various new artistic techniques were used in the writing of short stories, but realism was still the main core. Direct preaching nearly disappeared, the portrayal of characters was no longer flat, and the psychological inner development of a character was recorded more accurately with more convincing analysis, such as in Mohammed Sa`eed “Saut al-Modares” 1956 [The Teacher’s Voice]. Many critics considered Yemeni short stories to be a true picture of what happened in real life. Fawzi M`aruf, a known literary critic, called the short story a “panorama.”²⁵⁸ The main themes during this period were political themes that dealt with the goal of the two revolutions. Short stories contributed actively in the battles of the two revolutions. The short story was used as a weapon.²⁵⁹ `Abd Allah Salem Bawazeer considered his collections *Thorat al-Borkan* [The Volcano] and *Mamnoe’ al-Dakhool* [No Entrance] 1968 to be a simple contribution of the pen to a struggle, and an incomplete record of that great period.

Since the 1960s women short story writers have participated actively in the development of short stories. The very beginning of women’s short story writing was mature and played an important role in the development of short story writing. Thus I provide a brief overview of women’s short stories here, and I deal in depth in the next chapter with some short stories written by women writers.

254. Ibid., 27.

255. An independent weekly newspaper. Its chief editor, Mohammed Luqman, was one of the first educated Yemenis to call for Women’s liberty, introducing new ideas of the relationship between men and women. Its editor is the writer of the first Yemeni novel: *Sa`eed* (1939).

256. Was published in two parts under two subtitles in *Fatat Al-Jazeera* (30 September & 21 October, 1945).

257. `Abd al-Hamid Ibrahim, *Al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya al-Mo`asirah*, 39.

258. “Famous Issues in Contemporary Yemeni Short Story,” *Al-Hikmah* (July, 1998), 73.

259. Ibid., 48.

In form, the realistic and traditional approach has been the major approach to writing short stories. This does not mean, however, that women writers have not used artistic techniques for narrative writing. Thuriyya Manqush used the techniques of stream of consciousness in “Mata Tuftah al-Abwab?” [When Will the Gates Be Opened?] 1972. Zahera Rahmet Allah used several techniques of narration in her collection of short stories *Bedayah Okhera'a* [Another Beginning] 1970s. In this collection, she introduced dialogue to narration, which was not common in the stories of the period. In the thirteen stories in this collection, Zahera used many ways to begin and end stories. Ramziyya al-Iryani’s collection of short stories *L`alah Y`ud* [He Might Come Back, published in 1981], includes an interesting narrative style. Though Ramziyya’s style follows the realistic approach, her short stories are full of elements of anxiety and excitement. In the same collection, her story “Imagination After the *Qat*”²⁶⁰ is built skillfully and with excitement to serve its twin themes: the rejection of the habit of chewing *qat* and the black clothes with which women cover themselves (*al-sharshef*). The story starts in the late evening after a session of *qat*-chewing; the hero `Afif has just left the *qat* session. While walking home, he sees three girls waving at him. He tries to speak to them, offering his help. He thinks they are considering and discussing his offer. He tries to convince them he is not going to harm them, but they do not answer. As he approaches them and tries to catch the hand of one of them, he discovered that what he imagined to be women are only three black garbage bags. The writer here indirectly and sarcastically attacks two taboos in Yemeni society by presenting a convincing and sarcastic picture of the bad effects of *qat* and of *sharshef*, which looks like a black garbage bag. The satire is well written in such a way that no social blame can be directed at her.

Women short story writers have dealt with a wide variety of themes. During the two revolutions, in September and October, women writers wrote about the national struggle: for example Thurayya Manqush’s “Mata Tuftah al-Abwab?” [When Will the Gates be Opened?] 1970; Shafiqh al-Zuqeri’s “Armalat Shadid” [A Martyr’s Wife] 1968; and Ramziyya al-Iryani’s “Al-Rahinah” [The Hostage] 1979, which I discuss in the next chapter. Women short story writers have dealt with various social subjects: *qat*, administrative corruption, family, and education, but it must be noted that most of their concerns and topics deal with women’s issues. All, except one, of the protagonists of Zahera Rahmet Allah’s thirteen stories are women.. The stories deal with various social themes but the author brings to light the impact of social problems as they relate to and affect women in particular. For example, her first story, “Al-Hub fi Hesar” [Seized Love], deals with the problem of love in Yemeni society for both men and women who cannot marry the person whom they love because of social norms: a man has to marry his brother’s wife if the brother dies; if there is a tribal quarrel between his tribe and her tribe, or if his family objects to his marriage for any reason,

260. A plant, the leaves of which the Yemeni people chew every day.

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they cannot marry. Though these constraints concern men and women, the focus of the story is women. The story of those lovers is presented from the female point of view. The story takes place in a female psychiatric doctor's clinic which is described as "gloomy, still, and dull", reflecting the psychology of the doctor, who appears to have her own problems. She automatically pushes the button and starts to receive patients. The first patient is a depressed woman who comes in announcing, "I do not want to live any more." This patient tells the doctor that her lover has deserted her because he has to marry his dead brother's wife. Though the second patient is a man who complains about his tribe, which will not allow him to marry his lover from another tribe, the narration focuses on the fact that this has led to the death of the woman he loves. The third victim of the social norms is the doctor herself. Her third visitor is her ex-husband, who comes to tell her that he has decided to marry a rich woman whom he does not love, but he says that love comes after marriage. The doctor remembers that she married him in the same way. She married him in a traditional way through her mother's friend without knowing him prior to the marriage. Thus, their marriage failed. As the patients leave, the doctor herself lies on the sofa, reflecting on her own problem. She loves her colleague at the hospital and he returns the feelings, but he suddenly disappears from the hospital and she discovers later that his family prevented their marriage because she is divorced. Though both women and men suffer from social constraints on love, the author has focused on the women's perspective.

Since the 1990s, the writing and publishing of short stories has progressed noticeably. New generations – of both men and women short story writers – have contributed to the development of the short story and we can see in their stories new and varied techniques of narration. In addition to newspapers and independently published collections of short stories, *Al-Hikmah* magazine has made a comprehensive collection of samples of short stories written by women and men writers in the 1990s.²⁶¹ Out of twenty-five short story writers, there are ten women, which is a reasonable representation of women writers.

Women writers' contributions to the short story have increased and have been noticed by readers as well as critics. Many new young women writers who use varied forms of short story writing have been introduced. Short stories can generally be divided into three categories according to style: advanced traditional narration, symbolic narration using abstract concepts, and traditional folk narration. The writers have dealt with a wide range of issues. All women and men writers have approached women's issues from different angles: soul, body, the individual, and society. In late contemporary women's writings, there is a growing awareness of feminist writing using focalization, subjectivity, and un-stereotyped characters.

Many writers continue to use the traditional method of simple narration and

261. *Al-Hikmah* (July-September 1998, Issue 211), 81-176.

concepts, but they have started to use many new artistic techniques such as advancing events, delaying events, and round characterization. Realism continues to be the main source of their themes, but it has been used artistically. This approach can be seen in Nadiah al-Kawkabani's, Mahasen al-Hwati's, Riya Ahmed's, Zahera Rahmet Allah's, and Bushra'a al-Maqtari's works, and in the writings of many others who have not yet published their work in collections.

Nadiah al-kawkabani's second collection, *Daherajat* [Rollings] 2002, is an advanced narrative collection of short stories. In almost all the stories, women have a distinguished position in the narration as an outside narrator or the protagonist of the story, and the stories are told from the point view of women. In her story "Sandooq Raqem 3" [Box Number 3], she presents the torture of a wife who is socially obliged to accept her married life and considers it an ultimate and fixed fate. The protagonist, Nabeeha, has accepted her fate of having no children, for her husband cannot have children; she has to accept the idea of living with her husband's family though she is not on good terms with his mother; she has to accept her husband's decision to leave her and immigrate to another country; and, finally, she has to accept being a widow. This theme is not new, and is taken from social life, but the new thing is the women's character focalization that allows the reader to sympathize with the woman who is more likely, for example, to be convinced by Nabeeha's friend, who decides, for reasons relating to Nabeeha's problems, to get a divorce and marry another person.

Mahasen al-Hewati's collection, *Al-Hukem `Ala Zaineb* [The Sentence on Zaineb] 2000, takes the reader to a new setting, a poor marginalized neighborhood. Using a simple form of narration, Mahasen presents artistically the lives and concerns of marginalized, poor people, with a focus on women. The protagonists of most of the stories are women. The first story of the collection, "Al-Hukem `Ala Zaineb" – whose title was chosen for the collection – throws some light on the critical situations of Yemeni immigrants coming back after the Gulf War in 1990. It is the story of a Yemeni family who return home to fulfill the wish of the father, who has died recently in Vietnam, where they were born and grew up. The family is headed by the eldest daughter of about 18 years of age, who has to take care of her mother and five young brothers. Back home, they hope to live peacefully with relatives, but the family is unable to prove its identity as Yemenis because of the complicated procedures of getting a citizenship identity card. The uncle, realizing that his niece and nephews will share with him the family's heritage, denies them. Tossed between the village and government offices, Zaineb decides to bribe the officer to get an ID card, and since she has no money, selling her body is the only way to save her family from starving.

In reaction against traditional simple narration, some writers have introduced a symbolic form of narration in which poetic prose substitutes the normal progress of events, names of places, and events. The reader has to consider each word and its implications; otherwise the idea might be missed. The length of this kind of story varies from two lines to two pages. This approach is used by several short story writers such

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as Huda'a al-'Atas, Nabilah al-Kabesi, Afrah al-Sadeeq, and 'Afaf Al-Basheeri. Huda'a al-'Atas's two collections, *Hajes al-Rooh and Hajes al-Jassed* [The Obsession of Soul and Body] 1996 and *La Anha'a* [Because She Is] 2001, are written mainly in this form. Huda'a writes about a woman's secret concerns, mental, sexual, and social. It may be for this reason that she preferred to use a style that cannot be understood easily by common people, fully aware of what the result would be. Huda'a, particularly in her second collection, makes women characters the main active subjects of her stories. The stories are narrated and presented from a woman's point of view. Her characters do not have names, and each can be any women in our society. In her very short story entitled "Ekhdhela" [Soaked], she symbolizes the role of women in society and of sexual intercourse using a spoon that stirred – "danced" – the sugar actively in a cup of tea, but as soon as the sugar was diluted and the spoon's job was done, it was thrown on the plate as if it were a dead body. Her story "Adwar" [Roles] is a revolutionary idea in which the prostitute is a man and he is paid by a woman. Afrah al-Sadiq, who uses the same style as Huda'a in a less abstract way, wrote a similar conceptual story entitled "Taqlaad" [Imitation], in which the gender roles of women and men can be changed easily. The hero of the story decides that a man can imitate any thing and succeed but when he imitates a bird in flight he fails. When he imitates a woman by dressing like her, he succeeds in that everyone in the streets thinks that he is a woman. Rayya Ahmed's collection *Qatrat men Fidah* [Drops of Silver] includes some stories in this form, but she has added to her style an element of science fiction and prediction. Thus, she identifies herself on the cover page with a fortune teller.

Some writers have gone back to old folk narration and have adopted some of its techniques. This style of writing was introduced by Arwa 'Othman into Yemeni literature. The writer of these types of stories garners her tools for writing from the environment which surrounds her, i.e., the characters, the setting, the language, the plot, and the theme. The environment and heritage, particularly rural, becomes a basic part of the narration of a story. Arwa Othman is the chief writer who has used this form of narration. It should be noted that most writers have not accustomed themselves to the old traditional way of narration either in the Arab Literature as in *A Thousand and one Nights* or in the local oral narration in which many of the expressions used in Yemeni folk narration are used.

In a very local and sarcastic style, Arwa 'Othman exposes political and social hypocrisy and falsity. Though she deals with women's issues in some stories, she does not put a particular focus on these issues. She exposes the general suffering of women as well as men in society. Her characters are more like caricatures than real people. Her first collection "MA Yehdeth fi Belad al-Namis" [It Happens in Tanka'a, the Country of Mosquitoes]²⁶² 2001, a meaningless and sarcastic title, gives an indication of her sarcastic style. The fourteen stories included in this collection are

262. The collection won the first Shareqah Creativity Prize 2001.

all presented in the same style of narration. All of them take place in the same imagined place and narrate different imaginative and unbelievable stories from that imagined country. Though Arwa's stories are exaggerated and illogical, her narration is successful in building the inner logic of the growing events. Her style reminds the reader of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

In her story "Al-Mukhber" [The Spy]²⁶³ – one of her best structured stories which, strangely enough, is not included in the collection – Arwa sarcastically exposes the official spies working in the government. She succeeds convincingly in destroying the (image) and character of a spy. Ahmed `Ateef – an uncommon last name – dropped out from a traditional school and decided to go to the city to be "a Republic spy." By referring to "Republic", Arwa is criticizing the republic's political system, which did not lead to change, as was expected after the Yemeni September 1962 revolution against the royal system. The job of the spy is to tell his officers about neighbors' and friends' news collected by his mother. The spy has no worthy or credible work. Thus, he busies himself with hypocritical actions to prove to himself and to others the importance of his new job. The story ends with Ahmed's madness and death after a sixth month stay in prison.

This approach was also adopted by Riya'a Ahmed, who attempted to use culture/heritage as topics for some of her stories, but unlike Arwa, she used only the main theme and the names of some places. Her collection *Qatrat men Fidah* [Drops of Silver]. 2003 includes two stories about Jennies that are taken from folk stories.

The themes of the short stories of the 1990s were broader than those of earlier decades. As women contributed more to the public life, they started depicting in their writings more aspects of public and political life, as can be seen in Arwa's story "Al-Mukhber." Women writers also started approaching taboos such as sex, but women's issues still occupied considerable space in their stories. Note that issues of gender inequality were stronger and more visible, as in Huda'a al-'Atas' story *Adwar*. Below, I show this using another illustration of gender inequality that can be witnessed in Maha Naji Salah's two very short stories published in the collection of *Al-Hikmah*:

JUSTICE²⁶⁴

She crossed the street running. She wanted her father to see her school full of excellent certificates. But he did not notice her presence at all. He was busy with drying the tears of her failed brother.

TRANSFORMATION²⁶⁵

She is transformed to a man. Her tolerant soul has got tired of forgiveness.

²⁶³. *Al-Hikmah* (July-September 1998, Issue 211), 81-176.

²⁶⁴. *Ibid.*, 145.

²⁶⁵. *Ibid.*

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YEMENI WOMEN NOVELISTS AND LITERARY HISTORY BOOKS ABOUT NOVELS

In the Arab world and its written language, the novel with its modern techniques introduced by E. M. Foster's *Aspects of the Novel* is a relatively new genre that has developed as the result of the Arabs' contact with Europe and of the translation of European novels into Arabic, such as Mustafa Manfaluti's translations and the imitation of European models. Most Arab critics document Haikel's novel *Zaineb* (1913) as the beginning of the novel, but Bouthina Sh`aban has proved that the first novel was written more than a decade earlier by Zaineb Fewaz, *Hussen al-'Awaqeb* [The Good Endings] 1899.²⁶⁶ In Yemen, though the first Yemeni novel was published in 1939, the development of the novel was slow compared to the development of poetry and the short story. After more than half a century, only about forty novels have been written most of, which were written in the 1970s. Critics ascribe this slow development of the novel to several facts. Hussein Salem Basdeek, a Yemeni novelist and critic, has referred to the nature of writing a novel that requires "a quiet place, a settled and calm psychology, encouragement and no family or social connection, no interruption since the writer has started writing which can be for about six months to a year."²⁶⁷ Dr. `Abd al-`Aziz al-Maqaleh considers poetry to be a genre which is more rooted in the Arab culture than narrative, and still regards the novel as an absent genre in Yemen.²⁶⁸ Though the first novel by a Yemeni woman writer was published in the 1970s, *Dhahiyat al-Jash`e* [The Martyr of Greed] by Ramziyya al-Iryani, it took more than twenty-five years to publish a second novel by a woman writer in 1997.

Little has been written about the history of novels besides a chapter in a book or some articles in journals and newspapers. Thus there is not a complete chronological and analytic study of the development of Yemeni novels. The first book to throw light on Yemeni novels was *Al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya al-Mo`aserah 1939-1976* [The Contemporary Short Story 1939-1976] in which the author devotes one chapter to the novel. This chapter does not deal with the history of the novel in details. The author considers that most of the published novels lack the basic standards of a novel. Thus, he selects four novels which he considers to be artistically written and which represent different stages of the development of the Yemeni novel. Women novelists have been given space in this book, though as an illustration of a negative point. The writer chose Ramziyya al-Iryani's novel *Dhahiyat Al-Jash`e* as an example of how most Yemeni novels of that period are simply a picture of real situations or an expression of particular emotions. He states that the whole value of Ramziyya's novel is that it is written by a Yemeni woman from the North.²⁶⁹ Dr. `Abd al-`Aziz al-Maqaleh's book

266. Bouthina Sh`aban, Ma'yet `Am men al-Riwayya al-Nessiyya al-`Arbia [100 Year of Women Arab Novelists] (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1999), 46. Zaineb Fewaz, *Hussen al-'Awaqeb* (Cairo: 1899).

267. In an interview in *Al-Thaqafah al-Jadidah*, Issue. 4, July 1992, 260-261.

268. `Abd Al-`Aziz al-Maqaleh, *Derassat fi al-Riwayya wa al-Qissah al-Qaseera* (Beirut: Al-Mosasa'a Al-Jam'iyya, 1999), 79.

269. `Abd Al-Hamid Ibrahim, *Alkaseah Alyemenia Al-Mo`aserah 1939-1976*, 14.

Derassat fi al-Riwayya wa al-Qissah al-Qaseera [Studies in Novel and Short-Story] 1999, for which he examined six Yemeni novels in depth, includes a short introduction of the second Yemeni novel by a woman, *Ahlam –Nabilah* by `Azizah `Abd Allah.²⁷⁰

Later studies, either in books or in journals, do not include the novel by Ramzziyya al-Irayni.²⁷¹ In 1992, *Al-Thaqafah al-Jadidah* journal [The New Culture] devoted a whole issue to the Yemeni novel. It included some studies of the development of the novel, some chapters from various novels, some examples of folk tales, interviews with some novelists, the testimonies of some writers, and a bibliography of Yemeni novels.²⁷² In `Ayed Khesbak's book *Khsosyet al-modh'e fi Riwayya al-Yemeniyya* [Particular Themes in Yemeni Novels], the author analyses the particular themes of the Yemeni novels but does not include Ramziyya al-Irayni's novel, though it could represent a particular theme of the Yemeni novel.²⁷³ Ramziyya al-Irayni's novel was not chosen as an example of the Yemeni novel in the only critical study by a woman critic and poet, *Taqnyat Al-Sard fi al-Naderiyya wa al-Tatbiq* 1997 [The Narrative Techniques in Theory and Practice] by Amnah Yusef.²⁷⁴

Separate studies and articles however, have dealt with women's novels, such as Dr. Hatem al-Saker's paper "The Approach of Realism in *Ahalm-Nabilah* by `Aziz `Abd Allah and *Inho Jassadi* by Nabilah al-Zubair", which was presented at the Empirical Research and Women's Studies Center's Conference in 2000, and `Abd al-kaffi's article about *Ahlam-Nabilah* that was published in *Al-Hikmah*.²⁷⁵

A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF YEMENI WOMEN'S NOVELS

Before providing a review of the history of the women's novel, I briefly discuss the early beginning, development, and features of the Yemeni novel. Mohammed `Ali Lukman's novel *Sa`eed* (1939) marks the beginning of the novel. Other novels were written before, such as `Ali Ahmed Bakatheer's novels, but because he was an immigrant in Egypt when he wrote his novels, historians consider Lukman's novel to be the first Yemeni novel for it was written in Yemen drawing its events and themes from the Yemeni environment.²⁷⁶ Hussein Basadeeq considers Yemen to be late in starting to publish novels in comparison with the rest of the Arab world.

270. `Abd Al-`Aziz al-Maqaleh, *Derassat fi al-Riwayya wa al-Qissah al-Qaseera*, 377-379.

271. When I contacted the author for a copy of this novel, which I could not get in the public libraries, she apologized, requesting me to check with her old friend, who had lost it, too.

272. *Al-Thaqafah Al-Jadidah*, issue no.4, July 1992.

273. Ayed Khesbak book *Khsosyet Al-modh'e fi Al-Riwayya Al-Yemeniyya*: 1962-1990 (Sana'a: Markez `Obadi, 1996).

274. Amnah Yusef, *Taqnyat al-Sard fi al-Naderiah wa al-Tatbik* [Narrative Techniques in Theory and Practice] (Damascus: Dar al-Hiwar, 1997).

275. *Al-Hikmah* (Issue October-December 1997), 10 – 17.

276. Hussein Salem Basdeek, "The Yemeni Novel and the Complications of its Beginning and Development" in *al-Thaqafa al-Jadidah*, issue No.4. July 1992.

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Nevertheless, the dates of the first published novels in the Arab world show that Yemen was the eighth country to publish a novel.²⁷⁷

Sa'eed (1939) is important because it is the “the legal child”²⁷⁸ of the Yemeni Renaissance culture in the twentieth century. The novel is mainly didactic; it aims to participate in social reform. Thus, it is full of direct preaching. The narrator, who is clearly the voice of the author, interferes from time to time to preach directly. For example, the narration stops suddenly to end a scene with some advice: “Mothers’ upbringing shouldn’t be like this. You should watch the behavior of your girls and boys....”²⁷⁹

The development of the novel continued very slowly until the 1970s. It took nine years for *Yumyat Mubrshet* (1948) [Mubrshet’s Diary] by al-Taiyb Arslan to be published. This novel had a new style and content. It contained some new artistic tools of a novel, such as dialogue. According to Basedeeq, this novel fulfilled the artistic criteria of a novel of this period.²⁸⁰ It was more than a decade before the next novel was published. `Ali Mohammed `Abdo wrote *Arabet al-Hussan* [The Horse Carriage] in 1959 and *Muthakrat Amel* [The Diary of a Worker] in 1966. These two novels deal with Yemeni workers and how poverty and work suffocate childhood. A child of twelve has to start working and be responsible for a whole family. The next novel of the sixties came from the northern part of Yemen: *Massat Wag Al-Wag* [The Tragedy of Wag Al-Wag], 1960, by the popular and revolutionary poet Mohammed Mahmoud al-Zubairi. The author did not use one fixed style that can be categorized as belonging to a certain school. The main theme of the novel is the political system that ruled Yemen at that period. With sarcasm similar to Jonathan Swift’s in *Gulliver’s Travels*, al-Zubairi dealt with the political situation in Wag al-Wag (Yemen).

In the 1970s, the number of novels increased; about fourteen novels were written during this period, the greatest number of Yemeni novels written in any period. Most of the themes of the novel during this period were taken from Yemeni social and environment life. Some novels dealt with immigration, such as Mohammed `Abdul Wali’s *Ymotoon Ghuraba’a* [They Die as Strangers] and Ahmed Mohammed al-Alimi’s *Ghurba’a fi Otanhim* [Strangers in their own Country]. Some novels dealt with the people’s lives before the two revolutions, such as Hussein ba-Sadeeq’s *Tareeq al-Gheum* [The Way of Fogs] and Mohammed Haniber’s *Garyet al-Batool* [The Village of the Batool]. Some novels dealt with the revolutions of October in the South and of September in the North, such as Hussein Saleh Messibli’s *al-Yatimah* [The Orphan].

277. Lebanon (1870), Egypt (1913), Palestine (1920), Iraq (1928), Saudi Arabia (1930), Tunis (1935), Syria (1937), Yemen (1939), Jordan (1940), Algeria (1947), Sudan (1949), Morocco (1957), Libya (1961), Kuwait (1962).

278. Hashem `Ali bin `Ali. Quoted from Hussein Basdik’s article “The Yemeni Novel and the Complications of its Beginning and Development” in *Al-Thaqafa Al-Jadidah*, issue No.4. July 1992.

279. `Mohammed `Ali Luqman.Sa`eed. In *Al-Thaqafa Al-Jadidah*, issue No.4. July 1992: 173-231.

280. Basdeeq, “The Yemeni Novel and the Complications of its Beginning and Development,” 72.

This decade marks the beginning of women's contribution to the novel. Ramziyya al-Iryni wrote *Dahiyet al-Jashe'*, dealing with an aspect that was not taken by other novelists. This novel deals with the common social problem of forcing a young girl to marry a rich old man for the sake of money.²⁸¹ The title is simple and realistic, taken from a common saying. This saying is used for a person who seeks money as the primary objective for everything. The creative new use of this saying – throwing light on the sad ending of the story – is the use of the sensitive social issue of the high marriage settlements requested by the fathers of brides, whose concern is not their daughters' happiness but their own desire for money. The protagonist is forced to marry a rich old man for the sake of his money. She cannot bear living with her old husband and is driven to commit suicide. As can be seen, the plot of the story is simple and direct. The writer, like other writers of her generation, confirms that the story is real and that she herself talked with the protagonist. We do not know how much of this is true, but we acknowledge that the realistic approach is used as a technique to attract and raise the anxiety of the readers. Dr. `Abd al-Hamid Ibrahim confirms that the story is a reflection of what happens in Yemeni society.²⁸²

In the 1980s, there was a decrease in the number of novels published.²⁸³ The novelists of this period attempted to combine the traditional and the new contemporary styles of writing, believing that the old should not be neglected and the new must not be totally rejected. Examples of such novels are Ahmed `Abd Allah Fadaek in *al-Qariyah alti Tahlem* [The Village that Dreams], Salem Basdeeq's two novels *`Athra'a al-Jabel* [The Virgin of the Mountain] and *Al-Ebhar `Ala Mten Hasna'a* [Sailing on the Back of Hasna'a], Yehya al-Iryani's *Rukam wa Zaher* [Rukam and Flowers], and *al-Rahinah* [The Hostage] by Zaid Mutee'a Damaj.²⁸⁴

Since the 1990s, the novel has continued its slow development as new-generation novelists are introduced to the field and they introduce modern techniques to the novel as a result of changes in cultural life. Writers have more access to other cultures through translated books and novels, cinema, the internet, and travel. Some of the novels are published as books, such as *Shizan* by Yehya al-Iryani. Some of the novels are still published in the old way as a series in newspapers, such as *Shayteen al-Ens* [The Evils of Humans] by Mohammed `Ali ben al-Wazeer.²⁸⁵ Though the realistic approach is still dominant, new-generation novelists such as `Aziza `Abd Allah Mohammed Mothana'a, Nabilah al-zubair or Wajeddi al-Ahdel, Saleh Ba`amer, and Mohammed `Abd al-Wakeel Jazem have used new techniques of narration such as stream of consciousness and political sarcasm, cinemas shots, symbolism, and un-stereotypical characters.

281. I could not get a copy. Even the writer herself said she had not got any copy left.

282. Ibid.

283. Based on the recent bibliography, the number of published novels in the 1980s was half of the number in 1970s.

284. Basdeeq, "The Yemeni Novel and the Complications of its Beginning and Development," 79.

285. Mohammed `Ali ben al-Wazeer, *Shayteen al-Ens. Al-Shoura*, Issue.No. 273 May 1998: 11.

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For women novelists, this decade marks a strong new era that has produced five novels. In addition to Ramzziya al-Iryani, two other novelists were introduced to the field: `Aziza `Abd Allah and Nabilah al-Zubair. These three women novelists represent two generations of novelists. Ramzziya al-Iryani and `Azizah `Abd Allah represent the first generation, which uses the Yemeni environment as a source of themes, emphasizing the approach of realism and the use of traditional techniques of narration, and the second generation, which continues to refer to the Yemeni environment but with the use of modern techniques of narration.

`Aziza `Abd Allah published three novels in two years: *Ahlam... Nabilah* (1997), *Arkenha al-Faqeeh* (1998) [Rely on a Priest], and *Taeef Walayya* (1998) [The Image of Walayya]. The newspapers, readers, and Yemeni critics received this novel with much praise and encouragement: "This narrative work which is called the first attempt heralds the birth of a new writer who has an attractive style and expressive, emotional language and great ideas that reflect inner sufferings and an attitude towards political and civilized values."²⁸⁶

Ahlam-Nabilah can be categorized as a realistic novel. The novel reveals the social and political situations of the country through the historical life of a female protagonist, Halima, who both as a woman and as a citizen in a corrupted social and political society undergoes a series of difficulties and terrible experiences. The first part of the novel, which takes place in Haraz – a territory that includes some villages; about a hundred kilometers from Sana'a – presents a powerless female controlled by gender roles and traditions that deprive her of the simple right to choose her own life and future. Her father is the one who decides when and whom she should marry. Her father is the one who decides to divorce her from her husband when he quarrels with her husband after the failure of their business together, and he is the one who decides that she should marry again. In the second part of the novel, which takes place in the capital, Sana'a, where the protagonist moves with her family because of indigent circumstances in Haraz, the writer presents her protagonist not only as a suppressed female character in a gendered society but as a suppressed citizen in a country that suffers from dreadful administrative corruption. The writer moves from a narrow scope to a broader scope which includes a woman and a man and the whole of society that suffers from unexpected corrupt situations after the revolution. The outcome of this must be a sick generation that is symbolized by a young child, Nabilah (which means Noble). Nevertheless, the view is not pessimistic; there is a hope that Nabilah will be a healthy child again and live her own life. In the chapter entitled "Union is Coming", the author hopes that the Yemeni Union between the two parts of Yemen (1990) will be the remedy for the deprived situations. The last chapter of the novel, entitled "A Beginning and an End", signed by the author, can be

²⁸⁶. Dr. `Abd Al-`Aziz al-Maqaleh in the introduction to the novel that was published again in his study of the Novel and Short Stories.

excluded from the main part of the main text. It is a direct request by the writer to the authorities and officials to end recent corrupt situations and fulfill the noble dreams of the revolution. The writer in this chapter confirms the reality of her story and apologizes for not narrating the whole detailed story of Halimah, Ahlam, and Nabilah. Some critics may consider this part a defect, but to me, with a Yemeni cultural background, it is a clever technique that motivates readers to read, since reality is more attractive to Yemeni readers than the world of imagination.

`Aziza `Abd Allah's *Arkenha al-Faqeeh* 1998 [She is Promised by the Faqeeh] deals with the problem of the dominance of a religious person in society. The theme is taken from social life. A young girl is seduced by the *faqeeh* (religious scholar), who has promised to marry her but then deserts her and leaves her alone to face her pregnancy and the punishment of society. The third novel is *Taeef Walayya*, 1998. It deals with the problem of Yemeni immigrants. In my opinion, neither of these novels has reached the level of the first novel. Either they were written in haste or they were written before *Ahlam... Nabilah* and published later.

In 1998, Ramziyya al-Iryani published her second novel, *Dar-al-Saltanah: Riwayyia Tarikhyia* [Al-Saltanah Palace]. It is a historical novel, as is stated on the front cover.²⁸⁷ The novel is about Queen al-Saeedah. In a form of novel similar to that of the translated historical novel by George Zidan, the story presents Queen al-Saeedah's life: her childhood, education, marriage, and career, through which the attractive, strong, and wise aspects of her personality are presented.

Ramziyya al-Iryani and `Aziza `Abd Allah's novels have some similar features. For example, both writers confirm the sincerity of their novels *Ahlam... Nabilah* and *Dar Al-Sultanah*, in representing true reality. The titles and settings of these two first generation novels follow the traditional realistic technique. The titles of the novels are taken from the names of places and protagonists representing the main concerns of the novels. The settings are real physical places and their roles do not exceed their physical importance. On the first page of *Ahlam... Nabilah*, the author confirms the reality of her story, noting under her signature that her role as an author has been limited to the arrangement of events which were narrated to her by the protagonist. The settings of the two novels are taken from actual regions in Yemen.

Both novels depict real women's issues, such as the theme of marriage. As in reality, we see in *Ahlam... Nabilah* the common issue of arranged marriage in Yemen particularly in rural areas. The protagonist Ahlam does not have any freedom to choose her two husbands. Both are chosen by her father and she is the last to know who her husband will be. The protagonist is under the authority of her father and husband, and when there is a clash between the two, she is the victim who has to pay the price. Ahlam has to leave her first husband and young child because her husband

²⁸⁷. Ramzziya al-Iryani, *Dar al-Saltanah* (Sana'a: n.p. 1998).

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has had an argument with her father. This struggle is presented in a dramatic scene. The short scene is one of the best artistic scenes in the novels, and is narrated by the first person narrator. Though it is a short scene of one and a half pages, it is effective. After the fight between her husband and her father, Ahlam must choose either her father or her husband and child.

(my father)... is threatening if they stop me from going with him, he will take me by force. I'm strongly holding my child and very puzzled. Whom shall I follow? My husband from inside is threatening if I go with my father, I will be divorced and will not see my son again... My mother-in-law is telling me not to believe my father and stay with my husband... A neighbor came to me and said that I should follow my father"²⁸⁸

Dar al-Sultanah, on the other hand, presents the positive and respectful norms of the society during that period, and during the glorious period of Islam in which women were treated properly. When the prince proposes marriage to al-Saidah, she is asked for her consent. The author deliberately emphasizes this, presenting it in two scenes. The old queen has asked her to marry her son, and she is sent to her father's house for more freedom. She is given freedom of choice and is asked her opinion by her father. The social reality of later periods and up to the present, is that girls do not have the freedom of choosing their husbands and many are informed as if as an afterthought. This can be observed in fiction that represents later and recent periods such as *Ahlam... Nabilah and Dahiyet al-Jash'e*. Both novels present the positive and negative viewpoints that give the same message... that is, that a woman has a right to choose her own husband. This positive aspect confirms the message by giving a model from a glorious period in the history of Yemen, and the negative aspect criticizes recent practices and exposes their terrible consequences.

In 2000, Nabilah al-Zubair published her first novel, titled *Enaho Jassadi* [It is My Body], which presents new progress in the development of the novel. *Enaho Jassadi* presents the change in the way of thinking and quality of life of two generations: `Aziza `Abd Allah and Ramziyya's generation and Nabilah al-Zubair's generation. While the first generation is concerned with women's right to education, work, and choice, the new generation is concerned about why and how these rights are attained. The first generation is concerned about women's collective rights; the new generation is concerned about woman's individual rights.

The second generation's novels are influenced by modern trends in writing and feminist attitudes. In *Inho Jassadi*, Nabilah al-Zubair uses a variety of literary techniques: the first-person narrator, stream of consciousness, symbols. In addition, the language of the novel is not a simple narrative language but is more tense, condensed, and

288. `Azizah `Abd Allah, *Ahlam... Nabilah* (Cairo: al-Madani, 1997), 34.

emotionally charged, more like poetic prose justified by making the protagonist – narrator – a poet. *Enaho Jassadi* is entirely a monologue of the protagonist, more like a hallucination of her inner-self because of her interaction with social reality. Through this hallucination, the protagonist – woman poet – is searching for her identity and relationship with society and the universe. The self of the protagonist is utterly in disagreement with known and common social norms. As the story is in the form of stream of consciousness and a kind of hallucination, the basic setting is only seen in the last chapter. The whole novel takes place while Sakina `Omer is in hospital, unconscious after a confrontation with her family. She decides to get divorced and to sell a piece of land she possesses. The protagonist, Sakina `Omer, seems lonely among her own family, even with her husband, and is attracted only occasionally to reality by her daughter.

Unlike the titles of first generation novels, Nabilah al-Zubair's title is daring, untraditional, and indirect. The author, like later women writers²⁸⁹, has chosen the taboo term "Body", which is mentioned frequently in the hallucination of the protagonist. However, the title of the novel is relevant to the feminist trend of the novel. The author – as a way of rejection and opposition – intended to provoke society and this can be seen in her poetic work, too. The body is a main theme for any feminist work. It is the female body on which many other social roles have been founded. As the main story takes place in the inner self of the protagonist, the physical setting – a hospital – is almost absent except for items in the physical environment that are mentioned repeatedly and they are symbolic as part of the protagonist's search for self-identity: the door-step, the plant, and a piece of land in the last chapter. By dedicating the novel to her only daughter and juxtaposing two contrasting symbols of self-identity before her daughter: "a palm tree" that symbolizes an independent woman of high ambitions and "a tame vine-plant" that symbolizes a dependent woman of simple and ordinary ambitions, Nabilah al-Zubair confirms the reality of her novel, as `Azizah `Abd Allah and Ramziyya al-Iryani also did:

To my daughter Aseel
A palm tree
Or a tame vine-plant²⁹⁰

The main theme of *Enaho Jassadi* is the search for self-identity and the quest for self

289. The Algerian woman writer Ahlam Mastaghmani's first novel is called *The Memory of Body*. Critics think that women writers use those taboo terms to attract readers. But the author defended her choice of title at a presentation of her novel at the Literary Union, Sana'a, 12 June 2003. To the question why she changed the title of the novel pre-publication from *No, [It is not Reasonable]*, she answered that the possibility of the novel being judged as unreasonable and imaginative made her change the title. Her vision of the story is drawn from reality.

290. Nabilah al-Zubair, *Inaho Jassadi*.

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fulfillment. Because of the inevitability of the influence of society on the individual's consciousness and the individual's fear of being an outcast if she follows her own conscience, the narrator, who is the protagonist, veils herself and her search in the form of hallucination. The theme of the search for self identity is primarily built on the contrast and discrepancy between "I" and "others." The novel opens with the protagonist lying dead in a grave or alive in a house, conscious or unconscious; neither she nor the reader can figure that out until the last chapter. In that condition – away from any responsibility or blame – Sakinah starts her search for "self". The narrator, by using two different terms for the body, *jassem* [corps, object] and *jassed* [body], distinguishes between the two bodies. The protagonist feels as if the "jassem" – social body – is taken by her family to the hospital but her "jassed" – her own self – is left lying there. Thus, people around her cannot see her. It is clear from the previous quotation, which is the first paragraph of the novel, that the quest begins with her own body. She starts discovering each part of her body: "this is my neck, these are my shoulders." She expresses great joy in touching and discovering the different parts of her body "Wow... wonderful!" The search of her body does not take long, and soon Sakinah announces that she is, "sure of the existence of my body, part by part" and that she is able to move.²⁹¹

As soon as she has completed her discovery of her own body which does not seem difficult, she starts her search for the world around her, a search which lasts the rest of the novel. Through flashbacks to some events in her life, we learn that Sakinah's journey of self-search and struggle already started long before the story begins, and the novel is the last portion of that journey, where she recollects some critical events that have led to her change and the final resolution. Through her search, the narrator depicts several issues and themes that are related to women in general and not just the protagonist.

Both protagonists, Ahlam and Sakinah, go through a search for identity and both characters have to face changes in society. `Aziza `Abd Allah focused on the outer impacts of the changes of the character and her outer relationship with the others, while Nabilah mainly depicted the inner changes of the character. While `Aziz `Abd Allah's protagonist reflects straightforwardly upon the changes of herself, Nabilah al-Zubair uses symbols to reinforce this theme. However, the two generations share the main concern and themes, drawing them from the reality of women in Yemeni society. The theme of marriage has an important place in both generations' work. *Inho Jassadi* depicts some traditional negative aspects of marriage and its impact on women. Sakinah, who apparently agreed to her marriage, was actually forced to accept that marriage because she was friendly with her husband before marriage. In a flashback, the author shows how a woman's consent to marriage is usually asked. She is told that her father is coming to visit her, she murmurs: "... My father

291. Nabilah al-Zubair, *Inho Jassadi*, 12.

comes....Has he heard of what has happened...? How did you know... I think he is going to take me with him even if I do not want....” She touches her body (to see if it is still there), and coldly looks at her father, waiting to hear what he is going to say to her. Strictly, as though he were stating a formal decision in a court, he says: “Though I have heard of you’re going out with Ahmed to follow the *Shari`ah* I have to come and ask your consent.”²⁹² He means he has the right to decide the marriage because of what he has heard but he wants to follow the *Shari`ah* and ask her consent. The father concludes his visit by saying, “God protect you”, which is usually said to women, as marriage is considered a form of protection for women from any social or self harm.²⁹³

Note that Nabilah al-Zubair’s techniques of narration are more fluent and complex than those of the first generation. The novelist uses several progressive and well-planned techniques which serve the main themes of the novel. The novel is consciously divided into three sections, and each section has 12 chapters. The three sections of the novel, indicated by titles, follow the development of the protagonist’s self-search, which follows many a feminist search for identity: I Promise her Not to DO (Rejection), Why the Vine-Plant Grows (Questioning) and I Throw Him Out Of the Window (Action). Though the novel appears at a first reading to be a disorganized monologue, and more like a hallucination with flashbacks of events here and there without time or place being certain, a close study of the novel reveals that the author has given some guidance to the reader. She carefully divides the scenes and generally indicates the time by using punctuation.

The whole story is told from the point of view of a female character in order to have her articulate her own identity. Dr. Yumna al-`Eid introduced the novel as self-expression: “Nabilah al-Zubair’s novel is an expression full of the pain of the experience of a Yemeni woman, who instead of drowning in the flood of her pain, weaves it in words to keep her heart from death.”²⁹⁴ According to Dr. Hatem al-Saker, “there are great similarities between the author and the protagonist for the author is a poet and the reader can find out this through the author’s published poetry.”²⁹⁵ To see the protagonist of *Inaho Jassadi* as a total representation of the author’s life would be going too far, but the novel contains much of Nabilah al-Zubair’s life. The author has depicted some events in her life that represent the general struggle of Yemeni women in society. But unlike the first-generation novelists, she has moved from the private to the public, from the individual to the collective, and from the specific to the general.

292. Ibid., 234.

293. Ibid.

294. Ibid., the front back cover of the novel.

295. Hatem al-Saker, “Women’s Novel in Yemen,” A paper presented at the International Conference on Challenges for women’s studies in the 21st Century (12-14 September 1999), Sana’a, Republic of Yemen.

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CONCLUSION

Women writers have contributed to literature throughout the history of Yemen and have contributed to the development of the three main genres – poetry, the short story, and the novel – but women writers have not taken their proper place in present-day literary history. They are either neglected or marginalized. Even in women's anthologies such as al-Hebeshi's and al-Wajeeli's, there is not enough information about women writers and their work; the writers' biographies are full of information about their male relatives: a father, a brother, or a husband. In poetry, which is a basic part of Arab as well as Yemeni literature, there have been contributions by women writers in all periods except the Renaissance and Post Revolution period. This sterile period needs to be researched again, particularly in private libraries. Though the first short story written by a woman appeared three decades after the first short story written by a male writer, in the thirties, the first story by a woman writer was a story of the same standard in its period. Early women short story writers, employed a realistic mode, which had the characteristics of men's writing at the time. Contemporary women's short stories vary in the use of different techniques of narration, but the vivid and rich Yemeni society continues to be a source for topics and themes. There are three main forms of short story: advance traditional narration, symbolic and poetic narration with abstract concepts, and folk narration. Contemporary short story writers contribute actively to writing and publishing. Folk narration was introduced first by a woman writer. The novel is a comparatively new genre that was introduced in the 20th century to the Arab world. In Yemen, the novel comes after poetry and short the story in production and publishing. About forty novels have been published so far. Despite the fact that there are only three women novelists in the literary history of Yemen, women's contribution is integral to the development of the novel. Like the writers of short stories, novelists have used and emphasized the realistic mode of writing. However, the third woman novelist Nabilah al-Zubair, has introduced new techniques to the novel in her novel *Enaho Jassadi*.

Though women writers have participated actively in the writing and publishing of different forms of literature, there are still social and gender obstacles that stop or delay their work. In the next chapter, I discuss the gender difficulties that hamper and discourage women from writing and publishing. The information was obtained in response to a questionnaire distributed to twenty-eight women writers from different parts of Yemen, and in some of the writers' testimonies.

Chapter 4

Self-Liberation and National Struggle in Early Yemeni Women's Short Stories

In this chapter, I look at some of the works of the first women short story writers in Yemen. The pioneering short story writers, who belonged to the group of newly educated urban women, addressed two main themes in their early production: the liberation of women and the liberation of the nation.²⁹⁶ I examined their treatment of these twin themes of liberation, placing their writing within the context of the histories of the North (The Yemen Arab Republic) and the South (The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen), which were separate countries when these women began writing.

As pointed out in Chapter Three, the first women's short story in Yemen was published in the South in 1960, at the beginning of the decade that was to witness national liberation movements in both the South and the North. In the South, independence was gained from British control in 1967, when the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen was formed. Women from the South began to publish short stories during this decade. In the North, the revolution of 1962 led to the creation of the Yemen Arab Republic, ending the rule of the Imams. But for most of the rest of the decade there was instability as fighting between the republican and the loyalist forces continued. Women from the North started to publish short stories in the 1970s. Since then, Yemeni women have continued to write and publish their stories in newspapers, magazines, and anthologies.

CONTEXTS, CONVENTIONS, AND CONDITIONS; GENDER AND LITERARY PRODUCTION

Before I discuss the early short stories, I will briefly review some important elements in the historical context, some of which were discussed in Chapters One and Three. Yemeni men, from both the South and the North, began to write short stories in the

²⁹⁶ Margot Badran in *Dual Liberation: Feminism and Nationalism in Egypt 1870s-1925*, (*Feminist Issues* 8, 1 [1988], 15-34) discusses the earlier struggle of Egyptian women mounted against the double oppression of gender and nation.

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late 1930s and early 1940s whereas women began two or three decades later; in the 1960s in the South and in the 1970s in the North. This was in part due to the unequal educational opportunities available to men and women. Women were also constricted by social conventions, from which men had more freedom.

In the South, under British rule (which began in 1839 but was more direct from 1937 to 1967), some primary and secondary schools were founded for girls, especially in Aden. The domestic isolation of women, especially that of the elite, was reduced to some extent through social contact with the British. Exposure to alternative social contact with alternative social practices enabled some women, mainly women from `Aden, to take part in literary competition. During the national liberation struggle, women participated with men in political activism.

During the rule of the Imams, most of the North was a highly isolated society. It was also a highly gender-segregated society. Women and men virtually lived in two different worlds. There was no schooling for girls, apart from some opportunities given to a very few elite women to learn the Qur`an and the rudiments of reading and writing Arabic. Girls started going to school in parts of the North only in the 1960s. As late as 1973, the rate of literacy for the entire North was estimated to be only ten percent. Men were freer to get education, and the more fortunate among them were able to pursue higher studies abroad.

Women in both the South and the North were more confined to their regions than men, who were able to move about more freely. Many literary men from the North, such as Mahmud al-Zubairi, Ahamed Nu`man and `Abd Allah Nu`man, traveled between Sana`a and Aden and published in both places. In cooperative ventures between the North and the South, two newspapers were established in `Aden: *Saut al-Yemen* in 1946 and *Al-Fadul* in 1948. The well-known Yemeni journal *Al-Hikmah* was first published in Sana`a in 1938 by `Abd al-Wahab al-Warith and continued for twenty-eight issues. It was started again in Aden in 1971 by `Umar al-Jawi. It is now being published once again in Sana`a.²⁹⁷

The art of telling the short story came naturally to Yemeni women, as they were familiar with oral modes of story-telling. Women used to create stories to tell their children or other women in women's gatherings. The art is still practiced by older women. Thus, when women were equipped with the ability to write, they had another tool for telling stories. The beginnings of Yemeni women's short story writing, or their finding of a public voice, coincided with the national liberation movements in the North and the South. The freedom of women to speak in public, however, did not mean that women were suddenly free to claim a public identity. Indeed, we do not know the real name of the first Yemeni woman short story writer, who published under the pseudonym F. Ahmad. Salamah `Abd al-Qadir Ba-Matraf (born in Shahir,

297. Mohammed `Abd al-Malak al-Mutawakel, *al-Sahafa al-Yamaniyya: Nash`ataha Wa Tatawwaruha*, 45-61.

Hadhramut in 1933) signed the short stories she published in the 1960s with the initials S.`A. B.²⁹⁸ When Nabihah `Abd al-Hamid (born in Aden in 1948) began to publish her short stories, she used the name Fawziyyah `Abd al-Razzaq. Amal al-Shami (born in Sana`a in 1956) used several pseudonyms, including Bint al-Yemen (Daughter of Yemen), Bint Al-Sharq (Daughter of the East), and Amal Kamal. Amat al-Rauf Hussain al-Sharqi (born in Sana`a in 1958) adopted the name Raufah Hassan to hide her true identity as a radio announcer, although she published short stories under her real name.²⁹⁹ The short stories women wrote in the 1960s and 1970s show how the pioneering writers confronted problems of self-emancipation at the same time as those of national liberation. Many of them felt a need to give themselves the protective cover of pseudonyms.

LIBERATING THE SELF THROUGH STORY-TELLING

Early Yemeni women short story writers employed a realistic mode which was characteristic of men's writing at the time. Women writers provided a picture of what was happening in real life inside and outside the home. Their daring creativity brought the private and the taboo into the public domain, where it could be seen, read, and criticized. Dominated by patriarchal rules, women wrote about the oppression of their sex to foster inner liberation. They presented women characters who revolted against traditional thinking and rejected the conventional roles of women. They loved to portray the changes occurring inside families. They advocated such revolutionary ideas as a woman's right to choose her own marriage partner. As a result of the lack of good education, lack of literary models, and lack of women's mobility, women short story writers at this stage used more conventional methods of simple and straightforward narration. Nevertheless, early women's short stories contributed to the development of Yemeni short stories by introducing some untraditional narrative techniques and by enriching narration with a new range of themes and perspectives.

SOUTHERN WRITERS

In 1961, F. Ahmed, about whose life we know nothing, became the first Yemeni woman to publish a short story, "Dhalim ya-Mujtama`a" [Society, You Tyrant]. The

298. She only began to use her name in 1998 after she had become a grandmother, by which time she felt that society had come to respect women, publishing their work in newspapers. I received this information from a relative of hers and a teacher at `al-Ahqaf University in Hadramout, Faiza Bamatrif, to whom I am grateful for information on Hadrami women writers.

299. Al-Sharqi, now widely known as Raufah Hassan, tells the story of how she changed her name in "A Veiled Voice" in *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writers*, Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 376-77. Pseudonyms have been used by Arab as well as Western women writers. Malak Hanifi Nasif used the pseudonym Bahithat al-Badiya [Researcher of the Desert]; Zaynab Fawwaz used several names, including Durrat al-Sharq [the Pearl of the East] to sign her polemical articles; and `Aisha `Abd al-Rahman used the pen name Bint al-Shati [Daughter of the Beach].

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story points to the injustice of a society which condemns a daughter for her mother's transgression. The protagonist of the story is the daughter, Muna, whose mother ran away with her lover because she was forced to marry another man, who became Muna's father. Muna, who looks like her mother, also becomes a victim. Everyone treats Muna as if she were guilty, expecting her to act like her mother. Muna's father frequently beats her for trivial reasons. Her stepmother, Muna's father's second wife, constantly reminds Muna of the "terrible crime" her mother committed. Muna eventually falls in love with `Abd al-Mun`im, the brother of her friend, who wishes to marry her. Her father refuses him and prevents Muna from leaving the house. `Abd al-Mun`im, meanwhile, becomes angry and marries another woman. After several years of domestic incarceration, Muna's life becomes unbearable and she decides to run away. Public reaction is predictable: "She is just like her mother."³⁰⁰

The story deals with the sensitive subject of honor, in Arabic *sharaf* (honor and nobility) and *`ird* (honor associated with both women and land). We come to realize that what happens to the daughter also happened to her mother before her. Muna's father agreed to marry her mother, even though he might have sensed that she was in love with someone else. But as it turns out he was not able to deal with the idea that she was not a virgin. Muna refuses to be oppressed and takes action. Muna's flight symbolizes the persistence of the struggle between women and patriarchal society.

In most of the short stories of this period, by both men and women, the narrative techniques used are simple and conventional. The author uses a third person narrator who tells the story directly and does not mind preaching in the middle of a sentence. For example, the narrator does not hesitate to end a sentence by suggesting that the love relationship between Muna's mother and her cousin "should naturally end marriage."³⁰¹ The story does not include any dialogue or action. Characters are sketchy and mainly drawn to illustrate the theme of the story, and are presented by the third person narrator in one or two conventional sentences. The author uses a less traditional technique in presenting a kind of summary at the beginning of the story that draws the attention of the reader to the main idea of the story, society's fixed prejudice of Muna – who might represent any woman in her society – and her fatal destiny since her birth:

Society had already drawn her image.

It was possible that she would be something different.

But society persists in keeping that image particularly that Muna looks like her mother.³⁰²

300. `Abd-Allah, *Aswat Nisa'iyya*, 24.

301. Ibid., 19.

302. Ibid., 16.

This beginning creates a sense of fatalism and social determinism that is used as a device to justify Muna's decision to break the social code of behavior and run away with a lover. It sheds more light on the theme of the story, a woman's fatal destiny when she dares to break the social norms. Her mother's deed defined not only her destiny but the destiny of her female offspring also. This summary allows the reader to anticipate the end of the story once the mother's story, on the next following page, is read. The reader already knows that, however different Muna's story may be from her mother's, it must end in the same way; especially since Muna looks like her mother. This predictable ending indirectly causes the reader to sympathize with Muna, who is simply a victim of social prejudice.

Nabiha `Abd al-Hamid (born in Aden in 1948) published under the pen name Fawziyya `Abd al-Razzaq. She earned a bachelor's degree in social work in Egypt and later went on to do advanced studies in social science in Moscow. She started publishing in 1963. In 1968, she won second prize in a youth competition.³⁰³

In her 1963 story "Ummi" [My Mother], Nabiha `Abd al-Hamid deals with the social change in Yemeni society which gives pain to a widowed mother.³⁰⁴ Upon the father's death, responsibility for the extended family traditionally falls upon the eldest son, whose mother is expected to live with him even after he marries. The story opens with the protagonist and main narrator of the story, the son, remembering the sacrifices his widowed mother made to raise him and his brothers and sisters by working as a seamstress and, more secretly, as a maid. After graduating from a university abroad, he starts working. Instead of helping his mother, as would be expected of him, he informs her that he is engaged to a girl who refuses to live under the same roof as her mother-in-law because she wants a house of her own. Though his mother is disappointed, she accepts the situation, telling him that his fiancée has the right to make such a request. Later, when a colleague invites him to his son's birthday, he notices that his colleague's mother lives with him. He sees how the married couple respects the woman and that she is happy with them. Suddenly, he decides that he will divorce his wife if she refuses to have his mother live in the same house with them. When he is about to tell his mother of his decision to divorce his wife, she "hugs and kisses me wishing me happiness in my new nest."³⁰⁵

The story is narrated in a simple and conventional form of narration. The events are presented in chronological order using conventional transitional expressions to move from one event to another. The story has mainly a first person narrator, but a third person narrator is used unexpectedly twice without justification. The story presents three kinds of women with three points of view: the self-sacrificing mother, whose goal in life is to ensure the happiness of her children, the son's fiancée who

303. Ibid., 25.

304. It was published in *Al-Ray Al-'Am* in 1963. `Abd-Allah, *Aswat Nisa'iyya*, 25.

305. `Abd-Allah, *Aswat Nisa'iyya*, 31.

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is a woman of the new generation influenced by western ideas of the nuclear family; and the friend's wife, who is a woman of the new generation who is able to assimilate both old and new values. The writer favors the friend's wife, who appears in a positive light, whereas the son's fiancée is not given a chance to defend her point of view. As for the mother, she is portrayed as wise, intelligent, and aware of how difficult her life would be with her daughter-in-law, preferring to live peacefully by herself. We notice, however, that the son can not really understand and comprehend the three women's points of view. It is not easy for him to realize his mother's sufferings and sacrifices. He cannot even understand the point view of his wife and the changes in society.

Whereas F. Ahmed gave names to the two young characters, the protagonist Muna' and her lover `Abd al-Mun`em, in an attempt to individualize these two characters, Nabiha `Abd al-Hamid has not given names to all the characters; they are flat characters mainly, designed to illustrate the writer's ideas and as a device of self-liberation.

NORTHERN WRITERS

Amal al-Shami was born in Sana`a in 1956, into a conservative family of religious judges. In the 1970s, she wrote short stories, plays, songs, and journalistic articles, publishing under a variety of pseudonyms. She published a series of three stories under the title "Al-Mutakabbirun" [The Arrogant Ones] in 1948.³⁰⁶ During this time, she also attended various cultural events in Sana`a. By the late 1980s, however, after unrelenting family and social pressures, disappointments in her personal life, and frustration with the publishing world, she withdrew from public life. She secluded herself at home and seldom published. As a way of rebelling, she did not veil her face, though she wore a velvet *sharshaf* (the traditional black garment that covers the whole body which urban women wear outside the home, which is usually made out of a silky synthetic material).

Her stories take up the themes of education and writing as paths to self-liberation, and deal with the problems girls face with the recent changes in society. In the first story, the heroine, Huda, tries to liberate herself through writing and publishing but encounters family opposition, which stops her. The first scene takes place in a company director's office. The director is reading a magazine while Mohammad, Huda's brother, who is an employee, waits anxiously. The director apologizes, saying that he was so absorbed in an article written by a woman writer in the newspaper that he forgot Mohammed's presence. He asks Mohammad if he thinks educated Yemeni

306. *Ma`in*, nos. 4 and 5 (September-October 1978): 40-41. *Ma`in* is a monthly magazine that was founded in June 1978. Its editor is Hassan al-Luzi, the poet, short story writer, and later Minister of Communication. It calls itself [*The Journal of Contemporary Yemeni Society*]. The last page of some issues is devoted to women's writings.

women have achieved any success in public life. Seemingly disinterested, Mohammed answers that a Yemeni woman is simply a woman. When the director gives him the article to read, Mohammed reads his sister's name and murmurs that he should tear up the newspaper because "her picture is there, and it ruins the reputation of the family. She embarrasses me. I would like to cut up her picture together with the whole newspaper."³⁰⁷ The director then realizes that the author of the article is Mohammed's sister, as he had previously suspected (since they have the same family name). Suddenly, the director says, that he wishes to marry Huda. Her brother thinks that the director is being sarcastic and says: "disgrace (ʿar) has invaded our peace."³⁰⁸

The brother returns home furious and shouts at his sister. As the eldest brother, after the death of their father, Mohammed feels that he has the right to exercise his authority over her. He tells her that she has humiliated the entire family and should stop writing. Huda challenges his authority, saying that he has no right to stop her. As brother and sister they should respect each other. Their mother, however, brought up to be dependent and submissive to patriarchal authority, backs her son and criticizes Huda's defiance. She tells Huda she should surrender to her brother's will because "only men can help her." The brother continues to insult his sister, repeating what is commonly said about women: "She is just a woman – a servant of man in a house full of children." Finally, Huda runs to her room "crying loudly like a child."³⁰⁹ It seems that she has given up. Her crying symbolizes the helplessness of women. A woman's life is like that of a child, in the hands of others.

By the end of the scene we see that the director only pretended to admire the educated, liberal woman writer. Ironically, he becomes upset when his secretary takes the initiative of expressing her love for him. He says to himself, "What are these times coming to? A woman dares to propose to a man! It is impudent of her to declare her love to me."³¹⁰ Such contradictions in the attitudes of Arab men towards women are a frequent theme in many women's writings.

Though both, Huda's brother and the director intellectually seem to believe in women's right of education, they cannot understand that women have grown and that women's education has led to changes in women's personalities. They cannot feel the heavy social oppression from which women are suffering and understand the new, emerging points of view of women. The story portrays the sad end of many ambitious, pioneering women who can not resist intense family and societal pressures. In this short story, Amal al-Shami seems to prefigure the end of her own struggle.

During the same period, Raufah Hassan, born in 1958 into a family of religious judges in Sana'a, earned her bachelor's degree from Cairo University, her master's

307. Ibid., 40.

308. Ibid.

309. Ibid., 41.

310. Ibid.

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degree from the United States, and her Ph.D. from the University of Paris. While still a school girl, she was one of the first Yemeni women to become a radio announcer. She went on to work in television when it first came to Yemen in 1975. In a mini-short story, consisting of just a few lines (a genre that is currently popular in Yemen, where these concise pieces appear in the mainstream press), she deals with women's self-liberation, using a man as the narrator. Told in one brief camera shot by a third person narrator, an educated and cultured man demands freedom, using all the terms for this idea to be found in a dictionary. When he comes to marry, however, he chooses an uneducated girl. He makes his new wife cover her face while he continues talking about justice and brotherhood and sisterhood. When his wife gives birth to a girl, he cannot hide his disappointment and goes into mourning. In this brief but dense story, the author shows how a man is unable to carry his liberal ideas to his private life. By choosing a male character as her protagonist, the writer may be suggesting two things: that a woman is more capable of change or that men's so-called "liberation" in no way guarantees women's progress.³¹¹ Both interpretations are plausible; indeed both interpretations seem to be true at the same time.

TELLING STORIES OF GENDER AND NATIONAL LIBERATION

The term *waten*, plural *awatan* [homeland], was not in common circulation in Yemen until the 1920s, and it was limited to the ancient Arabic and Islamic literature, for example, "love of *waten* is faith," or the Yemeni saying "the house is *waten*." The word originally comes from the verb *twaten* or *waten*, a place, which means simply to settle down in a place. In their struggle against foreign colonization, Yemenis used the known Islamic term *Jihad* that Imams used to urge the tribes to fight against Turkish colonization.³¹² In their struggle against despotic rulers, Yemenis used another religious term, *al-Kherouj* [Rebellion], which is derived from the Zaidi sect, "rebel against the despotic ruler."³¹³

Since the 1920s, the term *waten* has emerged in Yemeni literature in the form of the adjective *wateniyya*, which means nationalism and patriotism, as a result of the national struggle against British, French, and Italian colonization in different Arab countries. The term began to be used in national literature and songs. For example, a well-known song says, "The whole Arab world is my *Awatani*." Yemenis

311. Ghada' al-Samman in her short story "Al-Sa`aton wa al-Ghura" [The Two O'clock and the Crow], in *Rahil al-Marafa' al-Qadimah* (Beirut: al-Samman Publication, 1973), deals with the problem of dual personality. Her story takes place in `Aden, where Fadl is married to a traditional wife and has five children. During the revolution, however, he marries a colleague. Later, he falls in love with yet another woman, a Yemeni journalist who comes to report on the revolution. He wants the three women in one single woman.

312. Sayed Mustafa Salem, *Wathaiq Yamaniyya* [Yemeni Documents] (Cairo: al-Feniyya Publishing, 1985).

313. Ahmed Mohammed, *Al-Zaidiyya* [The Zaid Sect] (Alexandria: Mansh'at al-M'aref, 1980).

started using the expressions *al-Nedal al-Watani* [National Struggle] or *al-Herakah al-Wataniyya* [National Movement] in their struggle against British colonization in the South or against the Imamate Rule in the North.³¹⁴

Before the two revolutions in Yemen, works of literature were devoted to expressing people's wish for freedom from the Imam's rule in the North and from British colonial rule in the South. The experiences of the two parts were different. But national identity was established by emphasizing the common condition of struggle against common oppression. The nationalistic mood is depicted in different forms of Yemeni literature. Short stories contributed to the struggle and to the winning of the two revolutions. They were used as weapons to motivate people to work against both oppressive systems. `Abd-Allah Salim Bawazir, for example, considered his 1968 collection of short stories, *Thaurat al-Burkan* [The Revolution of the Volcano], to be a contribution of the pen to the battle against tyranny.³¹⁵

Some women also used the pen to support the nationalist causes, but their writings, like the militant roles they played during the two revolutions, have been neglected. Their writings probe the double oppression of gender and nation, as I will show. For men writers, oppression and injustice were only in the political sphere, whereas in the minds of women this was linked with oppression and injustice in the social sphere. Ironically, men talked of their inalienable rights as Yemenis but they were unconscious of the inalienable rights of women as equal partners in family and society. The central irony of the stories by women is how men are completely unconscious of the sufferings of women as a result of patriarchal oppression and injustice. They see everything from their own point of view.

SOUTHERN WRITERS

Born in Aden in 1948, Thurayya Manqush graduated from Damascus University and was active in intellectual, political, and cultural life in the South. Along with the poets `Abd al-`Aziz Al-Maqaleh, Mohammed Sa`id Jaradah, and `Abd-Allah al-Baradduni, she won the Arts Medal presented by President Ali Nasir in 1980. She also received the Women's Medal from the Women's Union in 1983 and the Liberation Medal from President `Ali `Abd-Allah Salih in 1997. She now teaches at Aden University.

In "Mata Tuftah al-Abwab?" [When Will the Gates be Opened?], published in 1972, Thurayya Manqush portrays people's hardships and the existence of rampant

314. This can be seen in all books about the revolutions of 26 September and 14 October. Examples are `Adel Rida *Tatawwar Masar al-Herakah al-Waraniyya fi al-Yemen al-Demoqratiyya* [The Development and Path of National Movement in Democratic Yemen] (Cairo: Dar al-Naser, 1971); Ahmed Jaber `Afif, *Al-Herakah al-Wataniyya fil Al-Yemen* [The National Movement in Yemen] (Damascus: Dar al-Faker, 1982); and Sa`id al-Janahy, *Al-Herakah al-Wataniyya al-Yamaniyyamen al-Thawra ala al-Wahadah* [The Yemeni National Movement from the Revolution to the Union] (Damascus: al-kateb al-`Arabi Publishing, 1992).

315. Ibrahim, al-Qissa al-Yamaniyya al-Mu`asara, 53.

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corruption during the colonial administration. Written in the stream of consciousness technique, the whole story takes place in less than an hour. While the male protagonist is about to break the locks of a store, he recalls what has pushed him to become a professional thief. He remembers the corruption of the colonial administration, his wife's sickness, his son's sickness, his responsibility towards his old parents, and his despair in searching for a job. The story is a moving depiction of the ways colonial oppression seeped into the everyday lives of people. He was made to pay the price because he called for independence. Like many other men, he lost his job and remained unemployed. The man's wife sells her jewelry to keep her family alive. While her husband is looking for a job, she takes care of the whole family, including her husband's mother. She is the one who takes their sick son to the hospital. The narrator declares, "to keep them living his wife is paying the price."³¹⁶ She loses her youth, beauty, and health. Finally, she falls sick and is bedridden. When the family loses the woman's support, the man begins to steal for a living. In this case, the woman is shown to suffer from the same conditions that oppress her husband, while she is also portrayed as the bedrock of the family.

"Mata Tuftah al-Abwab?" is a well-structured short story that marks progress in the early writing of Yemeni short stories. The story demonstrates a great deal of artistic maturity. It marks the beginning of the use of the stream of consciousness technique in the Yemeni short story. Thurayya Manqush resorts to the technique of flashback, narrating some events that explain why and what the protagonist is doing. The flashback events show that the protagonist is in the middle of a dilemma between his principles and what he is about to do. He is not an ordinary person but a national hero who contributed effectively in the national struggle for independence; however, strong and unbearable motives have driven him to resolve to rob a store. This technique helps the author to draw a picture of the national struggle and its impact from a special perspective, the effects of the national struggle on a family's daily life. The protagonist is not the only one involved in the national struggle; his wife has also paid the price, indeed double the price. The author not only presents the male protagonist's sufferings, but she throws light on women's unacknowledged contribution to the national struggle. It has been common to record and celebrate only the nation's public and military struggle, which was usually led by men. Thus, women's contribution, which was usually not at these two levels of national struggle, is neglected. The author, being a female, is keen to present the social aspect (private sphere) of the national struggle, in which not only the man but the whole family struggles and suffers. The story shows that it is the wife who pays the price.

The language of the story is classic Arabi, but use of conventional adjectives and conventional transitional expressions such as "once a time, after that", is avoided. The events develop and progress in a smooth flow. Though the language of the story

³¹⁶. Ibid., 74.

is classic Arabic, Thurayya Manqush succeeded in using different layers of Arabic to create a lively dialogue. The narration of the story is infused with some dialogue in the Yemeni dialect, especially the dialogue between the husband and the wife, which breaks the monotony of the narration.

Shafiqah al-Zuqari was born into a cultured family in `Aden in 1942. Her stories were read on the radio in `Aden. She received first prize for "Armalat Shahid" [A Martyr's Wife], published in 1968, in the weekly youth competition in Aden. She published two collections of short stories: *Nabdat Qulub* [Beating Hearts] in the 1960s and *Dhalla Ukhra* [Another Loss] in the 1970s. She has a special interest in children's literature. She is currently the head teacher in a school in `Aden.

In "Armalat Shahid", the story moves between the pre-revolutionary past and the present using a series of flashbacks. The story opens on the wedding anniversary of the protagonist, Laila, who is the narrator. It is also Martyrs' Day, when the country honors the heroic deeds of those who sacrificed their lives for the liberation of their country. When the jasmine seller comes, he triggers off in Laila memories of her martyred husband Jalal and the tender moments they had together. When Laila's daughter `Ahd tells her of the Martyrs' Day processions underway, she recalls the valiant role her husband Jalal played in the national revolutionary struggle against colonial rule. She remembers the night of his death. She then remembers her own participation in the national struggle following her husband's martyrdom. She joined the Women's Union, through which she participated in several activities to support the revolution, for example, distributing food and clothes to the families of martyrs, teaching illiterate women, raising awareness about the national struggle for liberation, and offering first aid to the national heroes. In the second part of the story, the protagonist recalls her feelings towards Jalal's friend Khalid, who helped her after her husband's death. The writer invests Laila with contradictory and confused feelings, which are often revealed symbolically. When Khalid comes to visit them after some time of absence, she feels "a kind of strange inner pain."³¹⁷ The reader feels that the protagonist wishes to express her emotions more directly, but hesitates. The protagonist asserts that she loved her husband and had a happy life with him, but describes her feelings towards her husband's friend in a warmer manner. Her love for her husband is loaded. It is connected with the *`ahd* (marriage contract). Strangely enough, `Ahd is also her daughter's name, which reminds her of her commitments to her husband. The coincidence of the wedding anniversary falling on Martyrs' Day suggests that Laila's marriage was a martyrdom, a performance of a social duty. Following her husband's death, when she participated in the revolution, she felt useful and fulfilled.

Laila and Khalid are cautious about their love. Laila calls him "brother", while he says that he considers her a sister. When Khalid takes her to visit her husband's grave, it seems that they are alone until it becomes apparent that her mother has

³¹⁷. Ibid., 84.

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joined them. By the end of the story Laila is not hesitant about her love for Khalid and indeed is more daring in proclaiming it than he is. She announces that she will not deny her love. The story ends on an ambiguous note. When Khalid goes away, Laila remarks, "Khalid has traveled. I wish him success in his heart's mission. Khalid's will be a martyr."³¹⁸ This quotation may allude again to the unrecognized struggle of women. Laila seems to be complaining that neither of the men whom she loved, her husband and Jalal, can understand her sufferings and needs. Both men have chosen to be martyrs without involving her, though she is also going to pay a heavy price for their decisions. They are the ones who are going to be recognized as national martyrs.

"Armatat Shahid" demonstrates an advanced use of first person narration. Though it is a long short story of about twenty-five pages told by a first person narrator, other characters' perspectives and points of view are presented and respected. Khalid's point of view is depicted through the direct conversation between him and Laila. `Ahed also is presented as an individual, seen in one of the scenes running to Jalal and expressing her feelings towards him. By giving all the characters, except the mother, names, the writer individualizes the perspective of each character. The story also presents the inner psychology and conflicts of a character.

NORTHERN WRITERS

In the North, the national struggle was directed against the rule of the Imams rather than western colonialists. The Revolutionaries, or the Republicans as they were called, worked to end the isolation and ignorance the people suffered under the Imam. A republic was declared in 1962, but fighting continued between republicans and loyalists for the rest of the decade. Following the revolution, schooling began to be provided for women and they gained the necessary tools with which to write.³¹⁹ So far I have found only one short story by a woman from the North which deals with women's struggle in the context of state oppression.

Ramziyya al-Iryani published a powerful short story in 1979 called "Al-Rahinah" [The Hostage]. Born in Iryn in Ibb in 1955, Ramziyya is Yemen's first woman novelist and the first writer from the North to publish a short story collection. She graduated from Sana'a University in 1976, majoring in philosophy. She works in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is currently in the United State completing a master's degree in Arabic literature. She is one of the few early writers who have continued to write and publish. She has published two collections of short stories: *L`alah Y`ud* [He Might come Back] in 1981 and *Al-Qanun `Arus* [The Law is a Bridegroom] and two novels: *Dahit al-Jahs`a* [The Sacrifice of Greed] in 1970 and *Dar al-Sultanah: Riwayya*

³¹⁸. `Abd-Allah, *Aswat Nisa'iyya*, 86.

³¹⁹. In the 1950s the government newspaper *Al-Iman* announced the establishment of a girls' school to be supervised by two Palestinian teachers. Al-Mutawakel, *al-Sahafa al-Yamaniyya*, 223.

Tarikhyya [The Palace of the Sultan: A Historical Novel] in 1998.³²⁰

The story "Al-Rahinah" [The Hostage] opens with a sad woman taking advantage of her son's sleep to cry. She feels lonely and old. She was once a beautiful young girl from a distant village happily engaged to her cousin. When the Sheikh of the village caught sight of her, he forced her to marry him and imprisoned her in his house. Later, when he became angry with her family, he had their house burned. Her parents died of shock and her brother fled the country. She suffered oppression for many years. Although she is one of the Sheikh's wives, she is not treated like the others but like a servant. The sheikh neglects her and ignores their son, whom he does not treat like his other sons. One day, the Sheikh decides to take her son to the Imam's palace to offer him up as a hostage. The previously obedient wife revolts. No longer a passive victim, she now takes a stand against the Sheikh. She tries to run away with her son, but is caught. For the first time she shouts at the sheikh, telling him what a despotic, unjust person he is. She tells him that he has imprisoned her in his house, destroyed her youth, ruined her honor, and robbed her of her family. When the time comes for her son to be taken away as a hostage, she runs out into the street without her veil calling for help. No one offers her assistance because everyone fears the sheikh. His wife must not mix with the mob. The Sheikh orders that she be caught. He then has her taken to a deserted house to be locked up forever. The people are angry with the unjust Sheikh but cannot act. They watch her come to the window every morning to tell her story. Deprived of her son, she becomes a living corpse. Ramziyya al-Iryani's moving short story is a trenchant indictment of tribal patriarchy and the Imam's oppression.

Ramziyya al-Iryani's short story "Al-Rahinah" deals with the Imam's practice of imprisoning in his palace a son of each leading tribal Sheikh to ensure his obedience as well as that of his tribe.³²¹ Ramziyya al-Iryani makes the mother of a hostage her protagonist, showing how she suffers from patriarchal oppression at the hands of her own tribe. The story reveals how patriarchy works through an intricate set of gender oppressions tied to social status. The mother is oppressed by the sheikh and his other wives because she is from a lower class. Her son, in turn, is oppressed and mistreated by his own father. The sheikh is himself oppressed by the Imam, who forces him to give one of his sons as hostage.

Ramziyya al-Iryani is one of Yemen's best short story writers until now. "Al-Rahinah" – like many others of Ramziyya al-Iryani's short stories, represents a mature and advanced development of the Yemeni short story. The structure of "Al-

320. The stories of the collection *L'aleh Y'ud* were previously published separately in newspapers. She has also published a book on pioneering Yemeni women in education and communication.

321. The novelist Zaid Muti'e Dammaj deals with the same theme in his novel *Al-Rahina* [The Hostage] (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1984), which has the same title as al-Iryani's short story. Though many critical works have been written about this novel, nobody has mentioned the possibility that Dammaj may have been influenced by al-Iryani's work.

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Rahinah's" is well organized and planned. The story is told in a third person narration in which the plot of the story is developed chronologically and persuasively. The narration holds the reader's interest, maintains his sympathy, and keeps him in suspense. The patriarchal chain of society and the oppressions of gender, class, and authority from which women suffer is well presented. It is a chain in which the strong hold power and authority over the weak and oppress them.

Though the language of the story is strict classic Arabic, the author introduces in the narrative language some particularly Yemeni terms and words. The meanings of these terms are explained in footnotes which can be found only in some contemporary Yemeni literary works.

CONCLUSION

When women write short stories about women, it is not only a way of revealing what is considered to be *'awra*, or hidden, but a revolutionary act that liberates the writer and ends the imprisonment of "the age of the harem." Yemeni women writers use short stories as a device of self-liberation. The protagonists of all of the stories I examined are women, with only one exception. All the writers show a concern with women's issues that were long absent in print.

In the stories presented in this chapter, liberation is achieved on different levels: the level of the individual (Raufah Hassan and Amal al-Shami), the family (Nabiha Abd al-Hamid), society (F. Ahmed), and the state (Ramziyya al-Iryani, Thurayya Manqush, and Shafiqah al-Zuqari). The individual and the collective interact in the stories. Sometimes the odds are so overwhelming that the protagonist runs away. As the stories I have discussed reveal, ultimately, the liberation of women cannot be achieved without the liberation of the nation.

Most national historians have neglected Yemeni women's contributions to national movements. Thus, women short story writers present women's contributions to reshape the national discourse and to create a new discourse and aspect of the national struggle. In women's national stories, we see not only the public struggle and oppression, but also the neglected struggle of women, who actually suffer double oppression.

All the stories are written from women's point of view. The male characters cannot recognize and understand women's perspectives and sufferings. In *Dhalim ya-Mujtama'a*, for example, society does not try to understand the reason why Mona's mother ran away; neither does it give Mona an opportunity to be different from her mother.

Chapter 5

Gender and the Process of Writing

There is nothing about being a female that naturally binds women
Donna Haraway³²²

INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with gender and Yemeni writers' processes of writing. I will try to describe how gender has affected the lives of Yemeni women writers. Several facts, for example, that Yemeni women writers have been absent or marginalized in most of the available literary history books, that some writers have used pseudonyms, and that some writers' names appeared for a short time and then disappeared, made me assume that gender must have played a role in Yemeni women writers' lives, and also in their writings. Thus, I investigated *how* and *to what extent* gender plays a role in the process of becoming and being a writer, and in the formation of the literary identity that a woman writer chooses for herself. I investigated if gender, as it was defined by Joan Scott in 1985, has affected the lives of the writers and in turn affects their writing at its four levels: the levels of the symbols, norms, the social institutions, and the subjective identity.

To check my assumption, I designed a questionnaire, which I distributed to 28 Yemeni women writers in different cities in Yemen. I conducted interviews with 7 women writers, and wrote down the life story of one of the writers. I distributed the questionnaire and conducted the interviews during 1999-2000, and started collecting material for the life story at the same time. This work was completed in 2003. The samples of the questionnaire and the interviews were chosen randomly, taking care to include writers from the major parts of Yemen. They reflected a balanced distribution in terms of regional affiliation and genre. To reflect individual differences, I

322. Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s." Quoted from Christina Crosby, "Dealing with Differences," Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (eds.), *Feminist Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 138.

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decided to quote the writers' answers. For the life story, I chose a well-known and active contemporary writer who has devoted most of her time to literary writing, trying to find a place in the contemporary literary canon. To compare the results of the questionnaire, focus group interviews were conducted with a group of men writers in 2000.³²³ In the discussion and analysis of the outcome, I used also the testimonies of seven women writers that have been published.³²⁴ See the Appendix to this chapter for an overview of the women writers whose questionnaires, interviews and testimonies are presented in this chapter.

To make it easy for the writers to answer all the questions, the questionnaire was divided into eight parts. In my analysis of the questionnaire, however, I used the information according to the most important themes of the results, aiming to achieve the main objective of the questionnaire: to determine *how* and *to what extent* gender has played a role in the process of becoming and being a writer. The findings of this study are representative because it dealt with the majority of contemporary Yemeni women writers and with the variety of participants in the field.

The first part of the questionnaire dealt with biographical information. Using this part of the questionnaire, I investigated three factors: marital status, education, and professions. The aim was to acquire some biographical information concerning these factors that could support the findings in the subsequent sections. It has been found in different parts of the world that marriage has been an obstacle for women writers: thus, great women writers in Britain during the Elizabethan age were unmarried, divorced, or widowed.³²⁵ As formal education in Yemen before the two revolutions (1960 in the North and 1967 in the South) was not possible for everyone, I investigated the level of education of the contemporary writers to check – supported by other parts of the outcome – if lack of education in Yemen might have been a main obstacle to writing and publishing, and if the provision of public education has enhanced the process of creative writing.

The second part of the questionnaire dealt with genres, and the reasons for writing. It provided background information on the popular genres and the purpose of writing. I investigated whether Yemeni women writers like to write short stories and novels (as is reported about Western women writers), and if so, why,³²⁶ or if they

323. The focus group was chosen randomly from among young male writers. There were five in the group and the meeting was held with the help of Dr. Hatem al-Saker in the premises of the Empirical research and Women's Studies Center.

324. The testimonies were first read publicly by the writers in 1996 and then published in "Mehwer Khas fi Adab al-Mara'a," Yemeni Women Literature, *Al-Hikmah* (July-September, Issue 206-207, 1997): 91-126.

325. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 57-58.

326. *Ibid.*, 56. According to Virginia Woolf, 19th-century writers found it easier to write prose and fiction than poetry or drama because these required less concentration when women were overloaded with work and were continually interrupted during writing.

follow the general trend of Arab literature and write mainly poetry.³²⁷ I considered the genres with which the writers like to identify themselves if they write in more than one genre, and if the literary identity they choose is related to literature as an institution in Yemeni society.

I noticed that there are respectable male poets' names throughout the book of Mohammed Abdo Ghanem about the Sanani songs.³²⁸ But there is no mention of a single female poet. I suspected that the anonymous songs belonged to women, as Virginia Woolf suggested. In his research on folk songs by women, Flagg Miller says that songs that are written by women are usually, and should be, anonymous.³²⁹ When singers present a tape of songs written by a woman, they use her common pseudonym or they mention that the writer prefers not to reveal 'his' true identity. Is this, as Virginia Woolf suggested, because "Anonymity runs in their blood?" In "Explaining Away the Female Subject: The Case of Medieval Lyric," Ria Lemaire presented the findings of some scholars who postulate the existence of a very old tradition of women's love songs which were later taken over by men. She showed how much men's courtly love-poetry was still dependent on the pre-existing tradition of the women's love song.³³⁰ In Yemen, it happens that some women writers who recite their poetry and their texts see their work taken away by men writers who strip it of female authorship, formulate it a bit differently and then sign the works with their own, men's names.³³¹

The third part of the questionnaire dealt with the consciousness of a woman of her literary gender identity. The writers' consciousness of their identity as women writers was tested. Four questions were asked: Do you write mainly about women? Do you consciously write as a woman? When you write about women, is there, what we can call, women's writing? Can you explain that idea? The questions could be answered with yes or no, but a space was given after each question for explanations or comments. The questions of this part were open and deliberately repetitive in that the first question was general and the others referred to the writers' own personal experiences.

The rejection that I have found by Yemeni women writers of a gendered division of literature may come out of their fear that their works would be less valued, as is everything related to women. This rejection of the existence of special characteristics of women's writing is not the only fear of Yemeni women writers. `Ghada al-Samman,

327. `Abd Al-`Aziz al-Maqaleh, *Derassat fi al-Riwayya wa al-Qissa al-Qasseerah* [Studies in Novel and Short Story] (Beirut: al-Mosassa Al-Jam'ayya, 1999), 11.

328. Mohammed `Abdo Ghanem, *Shi'r al-Ghana' a-Sanani* [Sanani Singing] (Beirut: Dar-al`Wda, 1987).

329. Flagg Miller, "Public Words and Body Politics: Reflection on the Strategies of Women Poets in Rural Yemen," *History of Women*, 14, 1 (Spring, 2000): 95-122.

330. Ria Lemaire, "Explaining Away the Female Subject: The Case of Medieval Lyric," *Poetics Today* 7, 4 (1986): 730.

331. Ibid.

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a well-known contemporary Syrian writer, says that the term “women’s writing” arises out of our Eastern way of thinking that considers men to be custodians of women, and so men’s literature is considered the custodian of women’s literature. According to her, the term women’s writing was invented because women writers’ work was all about women’s issues. Yumna al-`Aeed, a Lebanese critic, accepts the particularity of women’s writing, not as a basic and natural difference, but because of women writers’ awareness of the social and political obstacles that women face. Thus, as soon as women overcome those barriers there will be no differences.³³² Rashida ben Mas`ood, who adopted the idea of the particularity of women’s writing, presented in her book *ʔAl-Mara’a wal-Kitabah: Soa’al al-Khasusiyya Balaghet al-el-Ekhtilaf Radmek* [Women’s Writing: the Question of Particularity / The Eloquence of Difference] (1994) the opinions of some writers and critics on the existence of women’s writing, and attempted to defy them. She states that the reasons for the rejection of the idea of women’s writing by critics and woman writers are mostly “the absence of criticism that deconstructs and analyzes the phenomenon from inside and the fear of the women writers that their writings are inferior to those of their colleagues, of men writers.”³³³ Ilham Abu Ghazaleh discussed the same problem with Palestinian writers.³³⁴ She says that most women writers repeat, unconsciously, the stereotypical answer that there is no women’s writing. She believes that women writers actually adopt the critics’ opinion as they know it. She says that some women writers and critics theoretically reject the gendered division of writing, but in practice they ascribe some specific characteristics to women’s writings. In Yemen, well-known male critics reject the gendered division, too.³³⁵ Both believe that there is only one literature and the sex of the writer is not important.

The fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh parts of the questionnaire dealt with the various constraints that hinder women’s creative writing. These parts dealt directly with the main target of the questionnaire, directly requesting the women writers to address the problems and impediments they have faced as women writers. The questions of the fourth part were open and deliberately repetitive in asking the question first in general and then with reference to the writers’ own personal experiences. The questions were formulated in this way for two reasons: First, to cover all the possible difficulties that female writers face. Second, it is not easy for some writers to talk about their own experience, but it is possible for them to talk about the problems of

332. Yumna ʔal-`Eid, “Women’s Contribution in the Production of Literature,” in *Majlet al-Tariq* (Issue 4, 1975): 66.

333. Rashida ben Mas`ood, *ʔal-Mara’ Wal-Kitabah: Soaal al-Khasusyia Balaghet Al-El-Ekhtilaf* [Women’s Writing: The Question of Particularity / The Eloquence of Difference] (Radmek: Eastern Africa, 1994), 82.

334. Ilham Abu `Ghazalah, “Gender and Writing,” a paper presented at the *International Conference on the Challenges Facing the Women’s Studies in the 21st Century* (Sana’a 12-14 September 1999).

335. Short interviews with both critics about women writers in January 1998. I met al-Baradduni at his home and I met Dr. al-Maqaleh at his office in the Yemeni Research Center.

writers in general. The fifth part dealt with the publication of their writings. My aim was to investigate how the writers publish their work and what the easiest genre to publish is, and to check if their choice of genre might be affected by the likelihood of publication or if they face any difficulties in publishing their work. The sixth part dealt with the historic literary background and the early beginnings of the writers. They were asked if they had to use pseudonyms and if so, why. The seventh part dealt with the writers' recent activities. The findings of these four parts assist us in perceiving the impact of gender on the four levels simultaneously.

Family support of a woman in a society that is governed by traditions and social rules, as in Yemen, is very effective. If the family accepts what a daughter does, a number of social constraints can be diminished. The family (parents – the father in particular – brother, and husband) has full authority to stop a writer from writing. This is the case not only with Yemeni writers, but with other Arab women writers as well. `Aisha al-Taimuriyya – a nineteenth-century Egyptian writer – wrote how the support of her father had helped her to get a better education than other contemporary aristocratic women, who were supposed to busy themselves with the craft of embroidery and not with reading and writing. Family support or resistance determine whether or not a woman will be a writer. From the moment of birth, a woman is under the control of the male members of her family. First, she is the daughter of a father, and if he is absent, she is still the sister of a brother, and in the absence of the two, and sometimes even in their presence, other male relatives may exert authority upon the woman's life. In some tribal systems, even if the father tolerates his daughter's choice, relatives may interfere. The state cannot do anything about this because the family has the legal right to decide alone.³³⁶ After marriage, the woman is moved to the authority of her husband, who has full power over her. If he does not want his wife to finish her education, or write fiction or poetry, he is legally and socially justified to forbid her to do so.

Living in a segregated society, woman writers have been deprived of many privileges, which could enable them to make a full contribution to cultural, and literary events. Women writers are deprived of the valuable opportunity of regular learning. This applies not only to Yemeni women writers. In Egypt at the beginning of last century, `Aisha al-Taimuriyya expressed her personal experience, which can be relevant to contemporary Yemeni women writers. She said, "I have suffered in this cave of isolation [the harem]. Compassion for all people [women] who have encountered what I have encountered and who have been struck by the same blows has led me to fashion a tale which would distract them from their care when

336. In 1998 a girl student at the university who was from a tribe, became engaged to a colleague with her father's approval. But her cousins – who wanted her to marry one of them – did not agree and managed prevent this marriage, threatening to kill her and her fiancé. The Government did not or could not do anything. The couple ran away.

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thoughts crowd in and would entertain them drawing them far from the grief they feel... in the exile of solitude which is harder to bear than exile from one's homeland."³³⁷ She continued to explain how she would have learned much, and sympathized with those who "suffered in this cave of isolation."³³⁸ In Yemen, there are two main forms of literary and cultural gatherings. First, there are informal cultural gatherings for men known as the "Maqyel," such as al-Maqaleh's *maqyels* on Sundays and Mondays, in which literary men of different generations gather for literary discussions and readings.³³⁹ Second, there are formal sessions of official cultural associations; such as al-'Afif Cultural Association or the Writers' Union; such gatherings are shorter, are less in-depth, and have less effect. Because of social norms, women writers are totally excluded from the first male cultural source of literary and cultural exchange. In 1997, however, a group of writers, researchers, and artists founded a gathering that was first called *Tefreta Adabiyya*.³⁴⁰ The members of the group aimed to defy the public impression of women's gatherings and to imitate those serious cultural and literary discussions, which until then took place only at the literary *maqyels* of literary men. The group meets twice a month on Thursdays. It is not restricted to Yemeni women, but also includes women from different Arab countries and welcomes guests of different nationalities from around the world. The group aims to establish cultural meetings at which women get together to discuss a subject or a book, or to read literature. The name of the *tefreta* was later changed to the *al-Multaqa al-Thaqafi al-Neswi*, which is called *Louga* (The Feminist Culture Group).³⁴¹

Challenging the social norms even with the support of the family is not always possible. Amnah Yusef – a poet, short story writer, and teacher at the university – always used to publish without problems. Her collections of poems and short stories are sold at different bookstores in Yemen. Her family does not object to her literary activity. But when Amnah published a daring short story in 1999, "Dream",³⁴² that had sexual connotations, a severe attack was raised against her. Some suggested that Amnah should not be a teacher at the university, and even the rector of the university Dr. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Maqaleh was accused of encouraging "disrespectful" literary

337. Badran and Cooke, *Opening the Gates*, 128.

338. *Ibid.*, 128.

339. Several literary critics confirmed that the richest evaluations and criticism of literary works have actually been done in these *maqyels*.

340. *Tefreta* is the term used for a women's gathering, and the term itself conveys wasted time, which is the general impression of women's gathering.

341. The chairwoman of this group is the poet Nabilah al-Zubair who included her experience of establishing this Association in her life story, presented in the next chapter. In 1986, there were attempts at founding literary Salons, for example, that of Mei Ziyada, a famous Palestinian intellectual and novelist who lived most of her life in Egypt where she died in 1994. A salon was founded in 'Aden by E'tidal Deeryia- a short story writer who died in 2003; and one was opened in Sana'a by Dr. Raufa Hassan that lasted for about two years.

342. Amna Yusef "Dream" in *September* (24/6/1999) issues no. (859). *September* is an official paper representing the State, and that could be one of the factors which makes the attack more severe.

works that are against the social norms. This attack against Amnah was not only launched because she had violated the social norms of society but also because she was a woman writer. On the same page of the newspaper, a male writer published a daring poem with some sexual connotations, but he did not invite a stir.

In early 1963, the Syrian critic Tarabishi criticized the commercialization of women's novels at the expense of their artistic aspects. In his view, many novels by women writers were published mainly because they were written by women.³⁴³ The publishing of both excellent and sub-standard literary work indiscriminately simply because it is written by a woman writer makes the excellent work lose its value and validity. Nevertheless, considering the social background, and the difficulty for a woman of revealing her real name, the appearance of many women writers' works along with their real names in the newspapers is a positive occurrence. It will encourage good writers who do not dare to publish. Some writers' families will find it easier to allow their daughters to publish since they have seen the names of many women writers of different families in the newspapers.

Publishing is a problem that women writers in other Arab countries have complained about. Some Arab women writers, such as `Ghada al-Samman, have succeeded in establishing their own publishing houses.³⁴⁴ Lila Ba`labaki, a major Arab woman author born in 1936, complained about the ill treatment of women writers by publishers. The publisher of her first book sold her book to another publisher although she had paid him the printing costs.³⁴⁵ For Yemeni women writers, publishing a book can also be difficult either for financial reasons or because publishers – all men – do not trust the popularity of women's writing.

The last part of the questionnaire was about criticism and bibliographical information. The purpose of this part of the questionnaire was to investigate the writers' views of criticism of women's writings, and whether criticism has influenced their writings positively or negatively. Literary criticism has not matured and taken its proper place in Yemen. Some critical articles have been published in newspapers or journals by famous literary critics such as Dr. al-Maqaleh, al-Baradduni, and Hashem `Ali, but there is no consistent branch of criticism. Even the books of criticism that are published are mainly either published in the form of subjective articles in newspapers or as studies undertaken in order to obtain an academic degree. There is only one Yemeni woman literary critic: Amnah Yusef. – a poet and short story writer – who published a book, *Taqnyat al-Sared* [Techniques of Narration] that was mainly written for her MA degree. She also published some critical articles

343. Joseph T. Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists* (New York: New York State of University Press, 1995), 313.

344. `Ghada al-Samman Publishing House in Beirut. Almost all her books were published by her own publishing house.

345. *Ibid.*, 313. 26For example, Riyad al-Qaresh's book *Al-Naqed al-Yemeni al-M'oaser* [Contemporary Criticism in Yemen], which is basically the result of PhD research.

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recently. There is an attempt at literary criticism by `Aisha al-Saqaf in her book *Abi Al-`Ala'a Wa Al-Nisa'a* [Abi-`Ala'a and Women], but that is also an MA thesis.

In the part dealing with bibliographical information the aim was to get some information from the writers about their work and publication to enable me to complete a bibliography of women writers' works. One of the factors that stop critics and researchers from investigating women's writings is the lack of basic information about these writers. It took a long time and much effort to find out who the writers were and what they did. Even Yemenis regularly ask me, if there are Yemeni women writers at all. For that reason, I decided to include this part, aiming to provide basic bibliographical information on each writer.

EDUCATION AND WORK

Table 1 show that 26 of the 28 women writers (93%) had the chance of a formal education at university level; some (7) have an MA degree, a minority (2) had PhDs, and many (17) had a BA degree. These results may indicate that formal education that is open to everyone has played a major role in bringing forth women who are active in different literary genres. Some writers had the opportunity to receive informal education, belonging to a certain class that allowed their girls to have tutorial study or go abroad. One writer – born and mainly brought up before 1960 – had the opportunity of an informal education, being from a high-class family, the daughter of al-Sheikh. She said, “My father, God bless him, was taking care of my brothers' and male relatives' education by bringing tutors for them... but for us, girls, it was enough to teach us some Qur'an and Hadith. I had a better chance than my sisters; because I was the only living child of my mother, (the sixteenth child of my father), my father allowed me to join my mother who was chosen among his wives to accompany him to a trip to Sana'a. There I had some more education.” After the death of her father she continued self-education with the encouragement of her mother. “My mother encouraged me to continue studying, looking for teachers to help me, and she herself used to correct my reading of Qur'an. I thought that my mother could read and write so I was very careful not to make dictation and reading mistakes in front of her; later, I discovered that she could not read.”³⁴⁶ The second respondent who received such an informal education was the daughter of a *qadi* [judge], who allowed her to have more education in religion and Arabic than ordinary women had. Being born into a family that cared about education and books, she found it easier to educate herself.³⁴⁷

The majority of the sample (Table 1) are not only educated but are engaged in professions in various fields which have helped them in different ways. Their jobs are either in the fields of administration, or education, or in the mass media. Most

346. Questionnaire.

347. Questionnaire.

Table 1 *Background of Respondents (N=28)*

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Level of Education	Informal Education	2	7
	Formal Education	26	93
Marital Status	Single	15	54
	Married	2	7
	Divorced	9	32
	Separated	2	7
Employment	Unemployed	3	11
	Employed:	25	89
	Teaching at University	6	24
	Teaching at School	3	12
	Researching	2	8
	Mass Media	10	40
	Administrative	4	16

Table 2 *The Reasons for Writing (N=28)**

Reason	Number
Self expression and revelation	16
A way to change society	11
Essential self-component	8
Self-fulfilment	4
A way of meditation	2
Part of a job	2
A desire to write	1
Writing is a good psychiatrist	1
Self-search	1
Believing that a creative person is attached to words	1

* Multiple answers were possible to this question

are involved in jobs that require a high proficiency in reading and writing. These jobs helped them to be financially independent. Jobs have also given them more experience and contact with people who share their interests. One of the writers said: "Because no one in my family can read or discuss what I write, going out to work gave me a chance for the first time to discuss and read my work with my colleagues."³⁴⁸ Places of work have become an outlet for writers to get help and exchange experiences.

Only seven percent of the women writers used literature as way to earn a living, though their writing is mainly not for aesthetic pleasure, but a tool for changing society (Table 2). This is because writing in Yemen is economically unrewarding. It is not possible for writers to devote all their time to literary activities, which means that writers, male or female, must have other careers. The major reason for writing literature (Table 2) is self-expression. In literature, they find an alternative to freedom.

348. Questionnaire.

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GENRE AND GENDER

Table 3 presents unexpected results. It shows that the percentage of women writers who write short stories (79%) exceeds the percentage of the writers who write poetry (61%). Those who identified themselves mainly as short story writers were less than half of the sample (43%). Does this phenomenon relate to gender? One wonders.

The outcome of this section is similar to what Sadikka `Arebi wrote about Saudi women writers. She stated that the number of Saudi women short story writers is higher than that of women poets or novelists.³⁴⁹ Several reasons may be behind the preference for writing short stories rather than poetry. One reason, which I came to understand as a result of my discussions with writers, is that writers can express themselves indirectly in short stories, hiding in one of the characters of the story, describing the experiences and feelings of an imaginary character. One writer I met in Taiz said that she mainly writes articles, but that her brothers tried to convince her to write stories instead, because writing articles about controversial subjects like love or politics may have harmful repercussions for her and her family. Another reason for preferring the short story genre to others might be that it is not a new genre for women, who told many stories orally in the past. It is the genre that they have inherited from their mothers. The Arab heritage is full of excellent short stories, such as Sheharzad's stories of *A Thousand and One Nights*.

Out of fear of the social norms that consider singing to be shameful for certain classes, both for males and females, women do not dare to approach this field publicly. A writer who recently married and almost stopped publishing said: "Since I was a young child, I believed that I was not like other women who grow up and get married. I used to love singing and acting and I used to be told that I had a beautiful voice. But when I was twelve, I realized that I could not be famous with those two talents (singing and acting) so writing was the only alternative that I had."³⁵⁰ Although the writing of love songs in which high-class individuals, princes, and kings are mentioned is highly valued for men, it is not accepted and is almost prohibited for women. A woman who writes songs and considers herself mainly a songwriter (Table 3) does not try to identify herself as a songwriter because the cultural context does not respect a woman who writes love songs. The writer mentioned later that a famous singer sings her songs but she has warned him not to mention her name.

LITERARY IDENTITY

Only nine of the twenty-eight writers used pseudonyms at the beginning of their literary careers. When I examined this sample, I found that most of them started writing in the early seventies and eighties. Those writers stopped using pseudonyms

349. Saddika `Arebi, *Women & Words in Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Literary Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 22.

350. Questionnaire.

Table 3 *Practiced Genre, Main Practiced Genre and Literary Identity (N=28)*

Variable		Number	Percentage
Practiced Genre*	Poetry	17	61
	Short story	22	79
	Novel	3	11
	Drama	4	14
	Prose (journalism)	2	7
	Song	1	4
Main Practiced Genre	Poetry	12	43
	Short story	12	43
	Novel	0	0
	Drama	1	4
	Prose	2	7
	Song	1	4
Literary Identity	Poet	12	43
	Short story writer	13	46
	Novelist	1	4
	Dramatist	0	0
	Prose writer	2	7
	Song writer	0	0

* Multiple answers were possible to this question

at some point and started using their real names. When I asked them when they started using their real names, and why, most mentioned an event in their lives that encouraged them, and helped them to get rid of the earlier constraints that had prevented them from writing under their real names. The main reasons for using pseudonyms were either lack of self-confidence, family, or husbands. Here are some of the answers to the question of when and why they freed themselves of their pseudonyms:

When I started writing newspaper articles in the 1980s, it was more acceptable for women to write newspaper articles than to write poetry.³⁵¹

I got tired and bored of my social and psychological fear. Using a pseudonym made me feel that it was not me who was writing. Your name is part of your identity. It is the key to your personality.³⁵²

When I decided to get a divorce, I looked again at my personal identity and I wanted to break down this silly barrier between men and women. I wanted also to feel that what I write is a mirror of my personality.³⁵³

351. Questionnaire.

352. Ibid.

353. Ibid.

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Table 4 *Use of Real Names at Beginning of Writing, and Reasons Why Not (N=28)*

Use of name	Reason why not	Number	Percentage
Yes		19	68
No		9	32
	Respect for parents	1	
	Lack of confidence	2	
	Husband's refusal	1	
	Fear of family's reaction	2	
	Fear of society	1	
	Family name should not be used on radio	1	

I started using my real name when I was in the States. When I came back to Yemen, the newspapers published my return, revealing my true identity. At that time I felt that I had matured as a writer and as a woman. I do not fear any more the objection or the tradition of society. I'm writing as a female and belong to each word I write.³⁵⁴

There is still confusion in my official documentary papers between my real name and the pseudonym that I used at the beginning of my career.³⁵⁵

The common use by contemporary writers of their real names and the replacement of their pseudonyms with their real names may indicate that the popular belief that holds those women's entire beings, body and voice, are (*'awra*) is diminishing. During the last decades, and at present in some parts of Yemen, popular convention held that a woman's voice and her very name were *'awra*, so that they must not be heard in public. Women are called not by their names but by other terms in relation to men: the wife of so-and-so or the mother of so-and-so. In some parts of Ta'iz and Sana'a, women have adopted male names with which they address one another. In some parts of Yemen, even the words woman (*mar'a*) and wife (*zawja*) are considered *'awra*, so that a man may talk about a woman or wife as (in the plural) "those at home" (*Ahl al-Beit, althi fi al-Bit*) or he may refer to his wife as "the goat" (*shufa*). Now that women writers have gained self-confidence, however, they feel no need to use pseudonyms, and that makes them strong enough to fight the popular belief of being *'awra*. I noticed that the more educated a woman, the more confident she is as a writer. One of the writers, who now lives in Sana'a, mentioned that she stopped using a pseudonym as soon as she enrolled at university:

354. Ibid.

355. Ibid.

When I was enrolled at the university, I felt a kind of independence and freedom of expression. I felt that I could express my opinion without being embarrassed. In addition I wanted to find my own identity and any criticism of my writing should be forwarded to me, personally.”³⁵⁶

The focus group of male writers interviewed said that some men writers have used pseudonyms, too, but for reasons different from those of women. In the 1950s, during the revolutionary period, some writers used names other than their own for political reasons.³⁵⁷ They said that some male writers have recently written under female names.³⁵⁸ They do this to attract more readers who like to read daring writings by women. Some men writers use different pseudonyms in order to criticize other writings without embarrassment. So men writers use pseudonyms as well as women writers, but for different reasons. While men writers use female pseudonyms to attain fame when they reveal their names later, women writers hide their true identities mainly because of the objections of their families.

Women writers sometimes contradict themselves in presenting their identity as women writers. Most of the writers proudly said that they were fully conscious of their identity as women. On the other hand, most resisted the idea of the existence of women’s literature that is different from men’s literature. Most of the respondents (19, or 68%) answered yes to the question about whether they consciously write as women; only 6 (21%) answered no. Three women are not satisfied with consciously writing as women. They suffer from this consciousness and consider it a chain around them. They wish that they were able to forget their sex, and their answers reflect a feeling of bitterness:

I almost write consciously as a woman as a result of the social outer or inner chains that are planted inside me. I try not to be conscious of my sex but I can not forget. I write as a woman remaining aware of social norms of what I should write and of what I should not.”³⁵⁹

Yes, I write consciously as a woman but I wish that I could fall into unconsciousness when I hold the pen.³⁶⁰

356. Questionnaire.

357. For example, `Abd al-`Aziz Al-Maqaleh in the North wrote under the name of Ibn al-Shatabi and `Abd al-Fatah Esmā`il in the South wrote under the name of Thiyazen. Poetry was used as an effective tool to fight with during the revolution.

358. One of the male poets gave some examples, such as Sameer al-Yusefi who writes under the name of Seham `Abd Allah. Sameer al-Yusefi, chief editor of *Al-Thaqafiyya* newspaper, and a woman writer – Rashidah Al-Qaili – had a long dispute over who was the writer of *Rahiyinat al-`Ghorbateen*, which was published under a pseudonym. Each claimed that he/she was the writer. Readers are still not certain who the writer was: Sameer or Rashida?

359. Ibid.

360. Ibid.

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Sixteen of the 19 women who consciously write as women are proud to be women and proud to be able to defend women's points of view. They are conscious of writing as women and pleased to do that:

In the last five years, I always write with the feeling of being a woman who has the right to express and write what is on her mind. I enjoy writing as a woman a lot. I'm careful that my writing projects me as a woman and expresses my unseen self.³⁶¹

Yes I consciously write as a woman and it is a consciousness that results from the masculine environment that surrounds women with its concepts.³⁶²

The natural person should be her/him self... I'm conscious and I'm proud that I'm a woman who is able to shape her own self away from the ready forms that serve only men.³⁶³

The category of interviewees who said that they were not conscious of being women when they wrote said that this was mainly because they did not think of their sex when they wrote; they are writing as human beings. One said that she usually wrote without being conscious of being a woman because the moment of creativity is free from any chains, but as the "moment of writing comes to an end and I read what I've written and start my evaluation and criticism of the text, I seldom stop with fear – being a woman – in front of some of the taboos." Another one thinks that "writing with the consciousness of sex is an obstacle that prevents creativity and continuity."

Sex consciousness increases to 75% (21 women) while writing about women's issues. One of the writers who said no in response to the previous question and said yes to this question, said, "Yes in this case. When I write about women's problems, I'm fully conscious of being a woman and I know that my reason for writing is a cry for change. The great social suffering of women in our Arab societies, and in Yemen in particular, confirms and increases my consciousness that, being a woman, I am suffering the same as what other women suffer."³⁶⁴

Though 68% of the Yemeni women writers confirmed that they wrote as women, the same percentage rejected the division of literature into women's literature and men's literature. They confirmed that there is only one literature, and that is human literature; there are different genres, such as children's literature, but the sex of the

361. Ibid.

362. Ibid.

363. Ibid.

364. Ibid.

writer is not important and does not interfere with the structure of writing. One writer, who in the previous question confirmed her consciousness as a woman when she writes, said here that a division of literature into women's literature and men's literature is absurd, and that some male writers portray women characters very well with all specific details of women's psychology, and the same goes for women writers who present male characters.

Note that the answers of the group who said yes when asked if they were conscious of their identity as women when they wrote reveal the knowledge and inclination of feminist literature. They are writers who have read about feminism:

Not all women writers are "feminist" writers who write deeply about their existence and gender and the relationship with the other.³⁶⁵

I answered this question with no before. Reading more in Arabic and Yemeni literature, I realize that there are some differences in women's and men's literature, in form and content.³⁶⁶

Yes, there are Yemeni songs that are only sung by women that express their feelings, happiness, sadness, and separation from their lovers.³⁶⁷

In both the yes and no categories, the respondents were aware of the different feminist literary theory debates, but they had not established their own views on these matters. They did not agree with the idea of women's literature, but they were not against it either. Thus, they were investigating these ideas and were not easily convinced:

Some literary men claim that there is women's literature that is written by women and related to women's social lives. There are literary women who deny the existence of women's literature and claim there is only one literature that men's language has created and men as well women do write it. Both attitudes are correct and I will search for a third attitude.³⁶⁸

The varied answers of this part of the questionnaire reflect the ambiguity of the terms "woman" and "feminist." In the Arabic language, the two terms *Nissai'yya* and *Niswiyya* are used interchangeably for things related to women whether feminist or not.³⁶⁹

365. Questionnaire.

366. Ibid.

367. Ibid.

368. Questionnaire.

369. The term *nisai* was used at the beginning of the women's "feminist" movement in 1923 in Egypt. According to Margot Badran, a historian of Arab feminist movements, "In Arabic *nasai* remains ambiguous and is clarified only by content." xlix In the early 1990s and after the Beijing conference,

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CONSTRAINTS DURING THE PROCESS OF WRITING

The findings discussed below are drawn mainly from the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh parts of the questionnaire. Three main answers arose out of the questionnaire in relation to personal difficulties: first, a group who said that they did not face any kind of difficulties; second, a group who said both yes and no; and third, a group who said that they faced difficulties and gave examples of their own personal experiences.

Table 5 shows that 5 writers (18% of the sample) stated that they themselves did not face social problems. Three of those said that their families supported them and understood their right to write literature, so they did not face any problems. Two authorities which may directly prevent a writer from writing are: first, the family, mainly brother and husband; and second the state, in cases where a writer is a government employee.

When a writer tries to break the taboo (sex, love, and state), she faces problems. If she were submissive to the taboo, she would face fewer problems:

At the beginning, my first poem made my father angry and he wished that I would not write poetry. My mother was not anxious about it. My early writings were mild so I did not have any difficulties. But later, when I presented a political program on the radio station, they stopped me from working and cut my salary. Because I wrote an article about Yemeni migrants who came back after the Gulf War, the Ba`eth party stood against me.”³⁷⁰

The group of 22 women (79%) who said that, yes, they themselves faced difficulties – classified in Table 5 – admitted that they experienced great pressure from several restrictions on the process of writing. The main constraints are the following: family, self-censorship, political censorship, segregation, and problems with publishing.

FAMILY

One of the writers shared her anxiety about the great control of the family when she observed that, “A woman’s family has the authority to decide what a woman should wear and where she can go and what she says and how and for whom her body should grow.” The family usually tries to force her to follow the stereotyped image of a woman. Another writer who used her true name in publishing had to start using a pseudonym because of her brother’s friend, who influenced her brother to use his authority as a male member of the family: “My brother’s colleagues started talking

the word *nisawiyya* began to be used in Egypt as an equivalent word for feminism. In Yemen, the two terms *Nisai’yya* and *Nisawyyia* are still used to connote women except by a small group of intellectuals who studied at the Empirical Research and Women’s Studies Center. Through the courses that are offered there, and a workshop in 1999, an effort was made to distinguish between the two terms and deal with the difficulty of translating the new terms of women’s studies into Arabic.

370. Questionnaire.

Table 5 *Experienced Difficulties and Specific Examples (N=28)*

Writing difficulties?	Area of difficulty	Specific Difficulty*	Number	Percentage (%)
No			5	18
Yes			22	79
	Family		7	
		Husband's objections	1	
		Relatives' objections	1	
		Family's censorship on themes	1	
		Being of well-known family	1	
		Accusation of pornography	1	
		Forcing the writer to lead a stereotypical life	1	
	Social		11	
		Misunderstand of their writing	4	
		Severe criticism as a woman writer	2	
		Relating story events to writer's life	2	
		Inner fear of society	1	
		Influence of family's opinion	1	
		Considering literature as a luxury	1	
	Political		11	
		Threatening and censorship	5	
		Ban on writing	2	
		Lack of honouring and encouragement of creative women	2	
		Using political religion	2	
		Necessity of joining a particular party	1	
	Other		5	
		Publication	3	
		Financial	2	
No answer			1	4

* Multiple answers were possible to this question

sarcastically of reading my name in the newspaper, so I had to stop writing under my real name.”³⁷¹

A family objects to the writing and publishing of literature by a daughter mainly for social reasons. As the writing of literature involves dealing with the emotions of love and passion, which are considered to be absolutely forbidden areas for a woman to indulge in publicly, women writers use pseudonyms. One of the writers said that she used a pseudonym, “for writing a story was a shame.” Another said “Because the family name should not be used on the radio station.”³⁷² Publishing literature is

371. Questionnaire.

372. Ibid.

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particularly not accepted of upper class women. In her testimony, Azhar Fae`e says, "A relative of mine asked me once, do you write poetry and publish under your real name? Don't you know that our society does not respect a woman who writes and publishes poetry? You are the daughter of a high-class family. Write poetry and hide it."³⁷³ Some women writers follow Azhar's friend's advice, and that's why they do not publish their writings. Some women writers use pseudonyms to hide their work from their families: "I have to hide some of my writings from my family. The family prefers that I do not write and that I get married and get busy with a husband and children. They always tell me this, directly and indirectly. I'm trying to adjust myself to social reality. This is at the expense of writing and creativity. Work and writing for women is considered to be luxury."³⁷⁴ Some women writers have faced fierce battles with their fathers that ended with the writer's submission or self-retirement. One such poet is Fatemah al-Eshabi, who because she is a woman and the daughter of a known father, faced death. She told her tragic story about when she started to write poetry:³⁷⁵

When my father discovered that I wrote a love folk-poem, he got alarmed and started reading everything I wrote even torn or burned papers. Then at the age of twelve he forced me to marry an illiterate man whom I did not love and who was three times older than me. I ran away to my father's house several times but I was severely beaten. When I saw the grave that was dug for me at the basement of our house, I lost consciousness and went in a coma for about eight months. When I regained my senses, I was in Saudi Arabia with the husband whom I didn't love. When I got my release and got divorced, I was already weak with a broken heart. My father changed after some time and I have been writing again since 1986 but I have already lost a lot of my intelligence, curiosity, and interest in learning. However, as I was inwardly related to poetry, I started writing it and my writing is improving.

She explained in the interview why her father had changed. She said, "Once my father had a problem with some other tribes and I wrote a poem that saved my father and the whole tribe from an inevitable war. Since then my father encouraged me."³⁷⁶

A husband controls his wife's life as if she were his possession. He has a conventional right, which is accepted by society, to stop a writer from publishing directly or indirectly. During my field research, a pioneer writer panicked when I requested an appointment with her. Later, I learned that she had married recently and her

373. *Al-Hikmah*, 129.

374. Questionnaire.

375. *AL-Hikmah*, 92-93. I held an in-depth interview with the poet on 31st/ 8/ 1999 in her house.

376. An interview at her home on 31/9/1999.

husband prohibited her from publishing or having any connection to her early published work. Another writer said that objection is not necessarily a directive to stop, but it leads to a writer's reluctance to write or stopping: "My husband has started objecting indirectly to my writing lately, saying that it is no use writing, and trying to break my spirit so I won't write to have a name or a meaningful existence in life." In an interview I held with a writer who had recently divorced, she explained the reasons for her divorce by saying, "I got divorced mainly because my husband – influenced by other people – started being bothered by everything I wrote." Though her husband is an educated man working in a cultural association which has a prominent role in organizing culture activities for women as well as for men, she said: "I have to hide my papers and readings whenever my husband returns; otherwise I'm accused of being too intellectual to be a woman." This shows that men might be liberal and encourage women's freedom, but when it comes to their personal lives, they are totally against it.

Marriage is often a constraint for women writers although it can be source of a support for men writers. The rate of divorce among women writers is 28% (see Table 1). Only two of the women writers are married. This shows that marriage is a hindrance to their creative impulse and being a writer. A woman writer in Yemen also finds it difficult to combine her literary work and her duties as a wife and a mother. Housework and children are the responsibility of a woman in addition to her work outside the home and her writing. To do all the work along with creative writing is almost impossible. Arwa `Othman in her testimony says, "The creative woman writer has to be a wife, a mother and an employee. These jobs take most of the time. One woman does the work of five to nine women at a time. A creative woman practices her creativity as if it were an illegal theft. Practicing creativity for women in our country is a torture. Even if a woman succeeds it is at the expense of her physical health."³⁷⁷

Two of the writers mentioned that marriage responsibilities are not the only factors that hinder their creative writing, but also their husband's refusal to accept the idea that their wives are busy with something other than family and home.

Family constraints are not as severe for Yemeni men writers as for Yemeni women writers. For them, family constraints are not the factor that would stop them from writing. When I asked men writers what difficulties they faced, they mentioned market difficulties and other issues outside the family arena. They referred to economic and cultural constraints such as poverty and illiteracy that prevent a writer from having a wide circulation of his work and lead to the absence of cultural associations such as cinemas and theatres. When I asked women writers the same question, they were more direct and less philosophical, starting first with the family constraints, which are still a priority for women. On the other hand, men writers

³⁷⁷. *Al-Hikmah*, 110.

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receive great support from their families, particularly their wives. One of the men writers I interviewed said that his being a poet was one of the reasons behind his wife's decision to marry him. Another writer explained how his family was proud of him being a writer: "My mother is happy when she hears from other women that I have become known. My wife understands my career well. When I want to write at night, I give her a book to read until she sleeps." When I asked them if it was possible for a woman writer to behave in the same way with her husband, all of them doubted the possibility of this, admitting that it must be more difficult for women writers to deal with a husband or keep him busy with a book. According to them, this is due to the patriarchal social norms.

SELF-CENSORSHIP

Society's values may interfere with the life of a writer. A writer is never free to express what she wants. Sometimes, the censorship is from outside and sometimes it is internal, which might be more dangerous. The writer is usually totally conscious of this censorship, which must hinder her creativity. The domination of society and its social traditions and norms does not stop at the family level, but extends to build a prison inside a woman writer from which it is difficult, if not impossible, to find release. The suffering of this inner prison is illustrated by a quotation in an answer to the question of whether the writer writes consciously as a woman: "I write consciously as a woman but I wish that I could fall into unconsciousness when I hold a pen."³⁷⁸

Out of a psychological fear of social criticism, some writers substitute words, expressions, and sentences instead of using those they wrote first and which they would prefer to use if they were free: "In one of my stories in which the heroine expresses her love saying, 'Now I can embrace you', I replaced the word 'embrace' which is stronger and better, with 'move toward.' I do not know why, I just felt embarrassed." In another story, in which she presents a man looking to a grown-up girl whom he had known as a child, she felt like stating, "When has this predominant feminine revolution exploded? When has it grown and awakened?" but she changed the expression to this: "She has become taller than I have seen her years ago." She believed that the first expression was deeper and stronger, and not embarrassing, but she was afraid of criticism. Women writers have to double check each word, expression, or idea they write, sometimes even before it is written down on the paper: "Writing is considered to prevail over the family, and social and family laws. Literary writing by a woman is a shame especially when I reveal some of the private sentiments that enrage our social tradition," "for society, I should always respect my name and remember that I'm from a respectable family."³⁷⁹ Because of the social taboo, a woman writer said that she had never dealt with love themes and that she even had difficulty in expressing

378. Questionnaire.

379. Ibid.

emotions of love in her personal life. Another writer said that she overcame her fear of treating the theme of love through expressing love between a female genie and a man. In this way, she found herself more able to express love and sexual emotions.

A writer who thought that she had succeeded in overcoming social and family obstacles expressed bitterly how social norms and rules had become part of her and could not be ignored: “No, because the balance which I talked about earlier is not new. It is part of my personality as a writer. Thus, my text is interpreted as a sad text mixed with noble revelation in a polite language that bows to God, fate and man. So the wound and *the dreams are portrayed with rules [internal] that I do not create but become part of me.*”³⁸⁰

POLITICAL CENSORSHIP

When a woman writer exercises her pen on political themes, the oppression that she must face is tripled in comparison with what a man writer may face. For a man, imprisonment for a political issue is an honour that is added as a good point to his CV, but for a woman it is a shame that will remain forever on her and her family.³⁸¹ In her testimony Fatemah Mohammed ben Mohammed, who considers politics an essential part of her writing, expressed a woman writer’s difficulties in dealing with political themes.³⁸² She said, “What does it mean to be a woman? An educated woman? A creative educated woman? A political, educated creative woman? A political, educated, creative woman who belongs to an opposition party?”³⁸³ She explained how a woman in the Arab world is expected only to write in the women’s corner about cooking, sewing, perfumes. Fatemah said, “When I stop writing about politics, I feel lost and neglected. I put a question to the readers, why can a woman not write on politics? And in return I put a question to myself, why can’t I write on politics? I discovered that in our big Arab country there is common consent that if a woman is infected with the madness of writing, she should write in the family corner about fashions, recipes, sewing, cooking, and perfumes.” Fatemah, being a woman, is not accepted by any political party, liberal or conservative, left or right. The left and the right parties concur on women’s issues. “My problem is more complicated. I’m not only rejected by the social, masculine patriarchy but by the patriarchal masculine state.” “I was accused by a Marxist leader... because he can’t accept a woman telling him that he is a liar... In the name of Islam I was accused against my honour... This is how the two masculine opposites can meet when a woman says the truth.”³⁸⁴

When a woman writer deals with politics, she might be criticized or not taken

380. Questionnaire.

381. Several researches on Yemeni Women’s Prisons show that many women who go to prison are rejected by society as well as by their families.

382. *Al-Hikmah*, 116.

383. *Ibid.*

384. *Al-Hikmah*, 116-117.

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seriously. Editors do not take women's political writings seriously. One of the writers that I interviewed in Taiz explained that even editors prefer women writers to deal with "soft, feminine" issues such as love and family: "The editor of the newspaper asked me to keep dealing with what he called soft feminine themes and not to busy my mind with political themes."³⁸⁵ Azhar Faye` said: "When I sent a newspaper a symbolic story of Islamic Jihad, they refused to publish it, asking me for the historical reference, feeling that it is too serious for a woman to write on such a subject."³⁸⁶

When a woman's political writing is taken seriously, then the State authority may take an action against her. "As I started writing about politics, they [State] started to hatch intriguing conspiracies one after the other until my personal life was totally destroyed, accusing me with crimes of honour."³⁸⁷ She told me how a dirty game was once played against her by the State. A man called her to sell her a car she was looking for. When she was there, he drugged her. When she woke up she found herself naked in a room. Since she is a woman, reporting such an occurrence would hurt her and her family, so she was advised to be silent.

Another way that the State may use its power against a writer is to prevent her from working: "When I performed a political program on the radio station, they stopped me from work and cut my salary. Because I wrote an article about Yemeni migrants who came back after the Gulf War, the Ba`eth party stood against me."³⁸⁸ Another woman writer said,

Most of society does not have a good view of the writer. In politics there is always heavy censorship. As a woman I hesitate and fear to deal with political themes; all relatives as well as non-relatives have advised me to stop at a certain line in dealing with political themes.³⁸⁹

SEGREGATION

The answers to the questionnaire show that local official cultural and literary associations present an outlet for women writers to present their work, meet people from the same field, and exchange cultural views and experiences. All women writers said they did not dare to join the *Maqyel*, for it is socially prohibited, though they wished they could. One writer said that she tried once, but she would never do it again. Sixty-eight percent of the women writers surveyed occasionally attend meetings of the formal cultural associations (Tables 6 and 7). However, less than half (43%) of the writers are committed to these associations as members.

Some writers participate in international events. Of the writers who responded to

³⁸⁵. Interview.

³⁸⁶. *Al-Hikmah*, 129.

³⁸⁷. An in-depth interview with a writer who preferred not to mention her name.

³⁸⁸. Questionnaire.

³⁸⁹. Questionnaire.

Table 6 *Membership of Literary Associations (N=28)*

Association*	Number	Percentage (%)
No	14	50
In the past	2	7
Yes	12	43
Yemeni Literary Union	9	
Yemeni Literary Club	3	
Literary Taferta (literary gathering for women)	5	
Yemeni International Cultural Association	1	
Al-'Afif Cultural Association	1	
Journalism Union	2	
Arab Literary Union	2	

* Multiple answers were possible to this question

Table 7 *Attendance of Meetings of Literary Associations (N=28)*

Association*	Number	Percentage (%)
No	9	32
Yes	19	68
Local	19	
Literary Union	6	
University	3	
Literary Tefreta	7	
Literary Saloon	2	
Al-'Afif's	4	
Yemeni Literary Club	2	
Yemeni Studies Centre	1	
International meeting	3	

* Multiple answers were possible to this question

the questionnaire, only four have had their trips paid for by the government, because these writers held positions in government offices. They had the opportunity to participate because of their offices. One independent writer complained that she was invited to "Merbid" Arab Literary Gathering in Iraq, but could not afford to attend. Recently, with the development of NGOs, the number of opportunities to participate has increased. In addition to financial reasons, some women writers do not participate in international literary gatherings because they are not allowed by their families to travel abroad. One writer said that she was allowed to participate in any local gathering but she had to be home at 7:00 p.m.

It is pertinent to mention that the constraint that prevents or delays women's participation in mixed literary gatherings is the lack of a respectful and cordial relationship between male and female writers. A woman writer, as well as her writing, is taken as a sexual, feminised object even by her literary colleagues: "The most terrible con-

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straint a woman writer faces is being treated as a feminine object. Most men writers cannot treat a woman writer as a fellow writer. They always look for something else. If a woman writer is strict with them, they accuse her of becoming mannish. If she is polite and respectful to others, she is misunderstood and meets with serious difficulties.”³⁹⁰

PUBLISHING

Publishing is a problem for men writers as well as for women writers, but women writers have particular difficulties with publishing. All women writers (Table 8) use newspapers and journals as the main media to publish their literary works, and only 25% published their works in book form.³⁹¹ Out of the fifty women writers presented in the bibliography, only 15 writers have published books.³⁹² Most of those writers published one book financed by themselves or with the help of the government, which has played a great part in encouraging women writers to publish. This help by the government, however, is also available for men. Out of the 20 books published in 1999 by the Public Books Authority (a government association), two books were by women writers: a collection of poetry, *Mahyia*, by Nabilah al-Zubair and a collection of short stories, *'Aresh Al-Banat* by Afrah al-Sadeeq. In 1997-1998, out of 16 books published by the same association, there was only one book by a woman writer: a collection of poetry, *Shatha' al-Jamer* [The Perfume of Embers] by Ibtisam al-Mutawakel.³⁹³ Neither male nor female writers are happy with the publication assistance from the government publishing house because it does not pay them any money and obtains the copyright of the book. It gives the writer about fifty copies of their work. Writers feel that this is exploitation of a writer and not really encouragement.

A reader of Yemeni newspapers will notice that the literature pages in various newspapers – government and non-government owned – contain the names of many women writers. Some writers complain about this in the questionnaire. They feel that publishers should distinguish between good work and bad work. They think that the mass media is too enthusiastic to present a writer at a very early stage only because she is woman, regardless of the literary value of her work: “Presenting her quickly before she is matured mainly because she is female murders her talent.

Another problem that writers mentioned in this part was the difficulty of getting

390. Questionnaire.

391. This was until 2002. In 2003, the Ministry of Culture and the Literary Union, for the preparations of Sana'a as the capital of Culture, helped in publishing many books by women as well as by men writers.

392. In 2003, and during the Celebration of Sana'a as the Capital City of Arab Culture for 2004, the publication of more books by women as well as by men writers was funded by the government (Ministry of Culture, Public Book Association, Literary Union).

393. *Al-Thawra: al-Mulhiq al-Thaqafi* (Issue 122773, 1st Nov. 1999): 5. By the approach of 1904 and because of the choice of Sana'a as the Arab Cultural Capital, the Ministry of Culture published several books by women writers.

Table 8 *Publication Media*

Medium	Way of publishing	Number	Percentage
Newspapers and journals		28	100
	Fax	5	
	Mail	4	
	With help of colleagues	8	
	With help of relatives	10	
Collections		7	25
	Personally financed	3	
	Government financed	4	
Personal distribution		4	14
TV & Radio		2	7
Internet		1	4

their financial rights from publishers, both owing to being new to public life and to gender traditions that define a woman as self-sacrificing. One of the early writers said that she stopped publishing because she felt she was being used by publishers. She published her works through various media, like T.V., radio, and newspapers, but all of them deceived her financially. A new writer said that she does not ask for her financial rights because she cannot go personally to the publishing house and usually faxes her writings. A third writer said that she did not have any difficulty in publishing in newspapers and journals, mainly because she did not request her financial rights.

LITERARY CRITICISM

Women writers complained that the available criticism is biased, too. They think that it is, "Blind encouragement without any objective." One writer described it as merely "a lie, a compliment, and hypocrisy." Critics do not seriously criticize women's writing: "I notice that critics deal with women's writing in a merely impressionistic, personal way that expresses personal attitude and not objective criticism." They think that contemporary criticism encourages women in the wrong way, by praising both the excellent and the weak literary works: "A woman writer needs serious criticism more than hypocritical praise and applause."³⁹⁴ Some writers respond sarcastically to criticism, showing the ways in which criticism is not that serious and mature. Another writer described how critics criticize her work sarcastically with "good intention." One said that critics are not serious, stating that the work is done "[Superficially] as if they were evaluating an unopened watermelon." Yet another writer said that the critics, "Whisper to each writer that she is the best."

394. Questionnaire.

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CONCLUSION

The results of the questionnaire confirm my hypothesis that gender has a great impact on Yemeni writers' processes of writing at each of its four levels: the levels of the symbol, norms, the social institutions and subjective identity.

Though women have overcome the constraint of education, and many have already obtained a decent level of education, they still face other difficulties. Contrary to the general expectation that there should be more poets than prose writers because poetry has a prominent place in Arabic literature, the number of women short story writers exceeds that of women poets. The explanation for this is that Yemeni women writers find more possibilities for self-expression in prose, as they can hide behind a character to escape social criticism. Narrative prose requires less competence in language than poetry – particularly traditional classic poetry. For this reason, many contemporary women poets choose to write narrative verse rather than classic traditional verse. Being females, women writers are not allowed to write in all literary genres and on all themes. Women writers avoid writing songs, in particular love songs, and if they do, they do not reveal their names.

Yemeni women writers face constraints from different institutions: family, marriage, state, and press. The constraints created by their own families limit their daily lives and future plans. As we have seen, a woman writer is rarely in control of her mind and time. She is always the daughter, wife, sister, or relative of a male. While marriage can sometimes be a source of support for Yemeni men writers, it is a great constraint for women writers. To be truly productive, women writers cannot deal with the heavy duties of marriage, which in Yemen requires complete self-sacrifice and submission. Thus, most are either single or divorced. This applies not only to contemporary writers. Zaineb al-Shahariyya – who wrote in the 12th century AH – was divorced three times. A critic explained this by saying that she was not “an obedient and suppressed wife” like others, but was “too proud to be a partner to her husbands.”³⁹⁵

Political authorities, the state or the opposition, conservatives or liberals, do not accept women's political writings, and women writers have to consider the consequences of their participation in the political arena, for – unlike men – they have to face lasting social criticism. Social norms evaluate highly men's political struggle, considering imprisonment an honour for men, but for a woman imprisonment is a shame that can never be eradicated. Women's political writings are not taken seriously and women are requested by various cultural organizations to limit their participation to women's and family subjects.

Yemeni women face the same problems in publishing and criticism: the lack of seriousness and blind encouragement in dealing with their works. Publishers have started using women's work for its commercial value, either to attract readers or to exaggerate changes in the attitudes of society. Thus, many literary works are published

395. al-Wajeeh, *Zainb al-Shahariyya*, 26-27.

regardless of their quality. In the long term, this has a negative impact on women's writing because it will lead to the production of weak literature. As one writer said, "it would murder the writer's talent before it is matured." The immaturity of literary criticism thus becomes a constraint for both female and male writers. Nevertheless, considering all the social norms that stop women from writing and publishing under their own names, publishing a wide range of women writers in newspapers may be beneficial as it encourages good writers who have not dared to publish. The lack of seriousness toward women's work is reflected not only in the publishing of their work but also in giving them their financial rights. In addition to the fact that women's income in the family is considered a supplement, their lack of self-confidence and their female modesty, valued social norms have prevented some writers from requesting their financial rights even if they need the income.

Yemeni social norms regarding women are in the cause of all the constraints confronting Yemeni women writers. With some changes in the social norms accompanying the development of society, many writers have started to publish under their real names. But it seems that the impact of social norms is felt not only from outside; they became part of the women writers' identities, emerging as a strict self-censorship that deeply affects their writing. To overcome this self-censorship, great courage and sacrifice is needed. This can be seen in Nabilah al-Zubair's latest work, published in 2003.

Yemeni women writers face many gendered difficulties that are created by the community, their families, and state and patriarchal criticism, which may be similar to difficulties faced by women writers all around the world. From a comparison between the constraints experienced by the Yemeni women writers discussed in this chapter and those imposed on the British 19th-century women writers discussed by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of Ones' Own*, and the various illustrations of constraint of women writers in contemporary times presented by Joanna Russ in *How to Suppress a Woman*, it is clear that there is a basic similarity in the gendered constraints and difficulties women writers face on the institutional level as well as the individual level in Yemen, Europe, and the United States. All writers have faced constraints of education, patriarchal socially biased concepts of women and their writings, family restrictions, self-censorship, and press and literary criticism.

In *A Room of Ones' Own*, Virginia Woolf showed how women's artistic contribution in the 19th century was increased as their context changed. The same can be seen among the Yemeni women writers whose number and contribution have increased in the last twenty years with the changes in the legal customs and manners of Yemeni society following the Revolutions of September and October, and since they have attained a better level of education. According to Virginia Woolf and Joanna Russ, "there is no absolute prohibition of women's writing," but there are "less obvious forms" of discouragement which effectively influence women's writings, and this is applicable to what Yemeni women writers undergo, as can be concluded

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from the findings of the field research. For example, Virginia Woolf emphasized the psychological impact of the patriarchal society, which created an internal self-censorship that influenced the gender identity of women writers and their creative writing; she herself found it difficult to write about her body. Yemeni women writers have expressed the same difficulty; one of the Yemeni writers wishes she could forget that she is a woman while she is writing to get rid of these internal constraints. Anonymity, as Virginia Woolf says, “runs in their [women writers’] blood.” Some Elizabethan women writers, and some Yemeni women writers, had to use pseudonyms at the early stages of their writing, and they revealed their true identities only when they attained more self-confidence. Some complaints of restrictions made by 19th and 20th century and contemporary Yemeni, British, and American women writers are identical; many complained of lacking time for any creative writing owing to the heavy load of family tasks.

To answer the question to what extent gender has affected women writers’ processes of writing, it is necessary to consider the Yemeni historical background. In the short period since Yemeni women writers have started receiving education and publishing their literary works, just four decades they have achieved great progress. In less than two decades, they started publishing their own collections of poetry, short stories, and novels as well as their own newspapers.

Regardless of all the restrictions resulting from family, societal, cultural, community, and patriarchal criticism and authority, Yemeni women writers insist on breathing and living through their writings. They all perceive that freedom is a prerequisite for writing, but they manage to compromise their social constraints with freedom of expression, some by hiding their identity, others by delaying publication of some of their works. The examples of self-censorship show that these writers have knowledge of their society’s expectations but have not internalised them, since they do not apply them automatically or freely but only after consciously deciding to, and against their will if necessary.

Their awareness and consciousness of family, social, and political constraints represent a step towards what other women writers had the chance to start much earlier. They have not stopped at the first stage of a feminist movement.³⁹⁶ Changes and improvements have taken place. In a relatively short time, some of the writers have started to feel that their difficulties are becoming fewer and fewer. As a result, the voices of the women writers do not contain despair or pessimism but much daring determination to continue and be proud of their identities. Their courage and insistence on continuing their writing in spite of all difficulties and impediments is illustrated in Nabilah al-Zubair’s poem “Still.” The sentiments expressed in this

396. In the introduction to *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Writing*, Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke define three stages of Arab Feminism (consciousness, activism, and rejection). They argue that Arab women writers adopted feminism without using the term.

poem are similar to those of the last sentence of Virginia Woolf's *A room of One's Own*:

Whenever my head shattered a wall
I said: "I still have a head"
Whenever a wall shattered my head
I said: "There is still a wall in front of me"³⁹⁷

Nabilah al-Zubair
Sana'a, 1997

But I maintain that she would come if we worked for her and that so to work,
even in poverty and obscurity, is worth while".³⁹⁸

Virginia Woolf
London, 1929

The next chapter contains an in-depth interview with a writer – Nabilah al-Zubair – in the form of a life story. This story is meant to allow us hear the voice of a woman writer narrating her own story without interference.

397. Nabilah al-Zubair, *Thamet Baher Y'awedeni* [There's a Sea Returning to Me]. (Damascus: Dar Al-Faker, 1997), 47.

398. *Ibid.*, 94.

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APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 5*Names of the participants*

Number	Name of writer	Questionnaire	Interview	Testimony
1	Arwa `Abdo `Othman	+	-	+
2	Huda'a al-`Atas	+	+	-
3	Shefa'a Munaser	+	-	-
4	Amat al-Rauf al-Sharqi	+	-	-
5	Nadwa Yunis	+	-	-
6	Najala`Ahmed al-`Omeri	+	+	-
7	Entisar al-Hareth	+	+	-
8	'Afaf al-Basheri	+	-	-
9	Naderah `Abd al-Qadus	+	-	-
10	Nahelah `Abd Allah	+	-	-
11	Nabilah al-Kebesi	+	-	-
12	`Etedal Deiyya Kherri	+	-	-
13	Salwa al-Qadasi	+	-	-
14	Arwa `Ali Hajer	+	-	-
15	Nadiyah Mer`i	+	-	-
16	Nabilah al-Zubair	+	In-depth interview	+
17	Hanan al-Wada`i	+	-	-
18	Salwa al-Sarhi	+	-	-
19	Arwa al-Thahebi	+	-	-
20	Amnah Yusef	+	+	-
21	Najeebah Hadad	+	-	-
22	Huda'a Ablan	+	-	+
23	Mahasen al-Hawati	+	-	-
24	Nadiyah al-Kawkabani	+	-	-
25	Azhar lufef Faya`e	+	-	+
26	Amal al-Shami	+	-	-
28	Ibtisam al-Mutawakil	+	-	+
29	Azizah Abu-Lahum	-	+	-
30	Fatemah al-`Eshbi	-	In-depth interview	+
31	Fatemah Mohmmmed	-	-	+

(+ = completed, - = not completed)

Chapter 6

A Woman Writer's Life Story: Nabilah al-Zubair

This chapter presents the life story of a Yemeni woman writer, Nabilah al-Zubair, who I interviewed in depth in the field research. She was in her early forties at the time of writing. Feminist theories have emphasized the importance of women's personal narratives as "essential primary documents for feminist research... for they present and interpret the impact of gender roles on women's lives; they are especially suitable documents for illuminating several aspects of gender relations."³⁹⁹ There are two main approaches to personal narratives: one approach is aimed at to understanding the gender system from the "hermeneutic," "psychological," and "micro-economic" point of view of the individual; the other approach focuses on the context in which social actions can be depicted. Both approaches are important to understand the dynamics of gender.⁴⁰⁰

By presenting the life story of Nabilah al-Zubair in this chapter, I aimed to give an assessment of the analyses and findings of the field research presented in the preceding chapter. Through the life story of Nabilah al-Zubair, we can understand some of the gender constraints which women writers talked about in the previous chapter, within the social context and in the writer's own voice.

I decided to present the life story of Nabilah al-Zubair because she can be considered the first pioneer contemporary woman poet, and she continued writing and publishing from the 1980s to the present; she has published five collections of poetry, a novel, and a collection of short stories. In addition to my earlier meetings, I was able to hold further interviews with her in 2003 to obtain more details about her life. She has kindly given me permission to write about her life in my thesis. Nabilah al-Zubair was born in a traditional and typical Yemeni family, which moved from a rural area to settle in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen. As a woman, Nabilah al-Zubair was

399. Personal Narrative Group (eds.) *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 4-5.

400. *Ibid.*, 5.

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brought up as a typical, traditional Yemeni girl, but she rejected and challenged the traditional and social norms for a woman.

NABILAH AL-ZUBAIR AS A CHILD AND A YOUNG WIFE

If you are looking for the number zero [the very beginning] in my life you will not find it; I do not know when I was born for my date of birth was not documented, and I do not know when exactly I started writing poems and which poem came first. I'm number 6 among the girls of my family, three of whom died, so I became number 3. A boy was born after me and he was the last child, but he died so I became the last.

I found myself living in a very big house like a castle in *al-Hejra* my home town in *Haraz*. Four women lived there: my mother, my two sisters, and I; they (my mother and my two sisters) were close to each other, because my father was an emigrant who had to work abroad to sustain his family. The three women (my mother and my two sisters) played a role in earning a living for the family; they sewed belts for *janbias* (a traditional knife that Yemeni men wear on their waist as part of the traditional costume) and when my father came back he used to sell them. The life of my mother and my sisters was good; they lived an intimate life, sharing the house work and the paid work.

In our culture, when a girl reaches twelve years old she becomes a woman in the eyes of society. A gap of five decisive years separated me and my two older sisters; they were considered mature "women," and I was looked upon as a little girl. They worked and I played and they would stop talking together if I suddenly entered the room. They were "women" by all standards and I was a little girl. They didn't allow me to work with them or to participate in finding solutions to the household problems. In short, I was lonely, but it was a pleasant loneliness. Still, I had many questions which nobody answered because I didn't have the right to raise them. My questions seemed to them odd or sinful: they were about God, life, or the Holy Qur'an. There isn't a particular question that I remember now, but I still remember that everybody around me was reserved, so I didn't ask any one of them. Even when I played outside the house they used to say to me: "Don't play with that boy," or "Don't play in that place." The ruling classes in the house were my sisters; both of them issued a list of rules. The predominant thing that I remember from my childhood was loneliness. I remember my life with rocks; I looked for places to be by myself in *Al-Hejra*, which was a rocky place; even the houses were rocky and built on rocks. *Al-Hejra* is a closed place; the town is closed upon the people who live in it; closed with all the connotations of this word: its relations, its problems, and its gate, which was like that of a big fort that closed every day at sunset. If anybody came from Sana'a, he had to wait outside for the guard to open it in the morning. There were not many people in *al-Hejra*, but the village was like a big prison. Nobody was allowed to go outside or come inside the village through its gates after sunset. On the other sides of the village there were lofty mountains where anyone who tried to enter or leave the village would face

death. You needed to go to a neighboring village to see another environment. For example, *al-Ba'a*, which was a village beneath the mountain, was considered to be different.

This is all I remember about my childhood. I don't believe that I had a good childhood; I have this feeling. I was a lonely little girl who walked a long distance daily to bring water from outside the village. The colours of the rocks still remain in my memory, and I clearly remember *al Kuttab* (the small class to teach the children the Holy Qur'an). I studied reading and writing there, in addition to reading the Holy Qur'an.

I was less than 6 years old when we left for Sana'a. We lived on 26 September Street, in al-Jahdary's house. My father wanted to imprison me so that I would not play outside in the street, thus he decided to teach me the Qur'an in his store every afternoon. So the second *Kuttab* for me was my father's store. Therein, I read the Holy Qur'an from the time he started chewing qat till he finished at sunset; only then was I allowed to go home. When I recited the Holy Qur'an in front of my father, he just said "mm" when he heard a mistake, and when I heard this sound I knew that I had made a mistake. He was strict and nervous, like all people who chew qat; just hearing his voice could have killed me. Therefore, I did not understand the Holy Qur'an, I just learnt it by heart. I recited it without mistakes, and that was my first exercise in language. I don't know whether I loved studying or not, but I did not hate it.

After that I enrolled in the school. Obviously, I was clever in my studies after all that practice in the holy Qur'an. I read very well at school. My older sister attended the school as well, but because I had studied at *al-Kuttab* and at my father's store, I was better than she was, which caused her to be jealous. I studied at Khaled bin al-Waleed, which was first called Al-Thawra and was finally called Kuwait school in Al `Adl Street. It was a new school, so we were the first class to graduate, but on my fourth-grade certificate it was called *Al-Thawra*. In fact, studying with my father and spending time at his store was not intended to give me a better education, for the aim of education for my father and my family was only reading the Qur'an. Thus, when I finished the 6th grade at school, my father ordered me to quit studying and to stay at home. I then decided to fight a "battle" with my father; he was convinced that every girl should learn the Holy Qur'an and stay at home. My sisters supported me, and I started to use the language of the educated. Besides, I had an unusual way of convincing people. I told him that it was my right to pursue my education, especially as it would not hurt anybody. I asked him what I would do at home. Should I wait for a husband? What if he did not come? My two elder sisters got married at that time, so my father decided that I could pursue my studies till a suitable husband came. I was fourteen. When I enrolled in the school I was two years, or more, older than the rest of my classmates. There was a ready suitor, but he was deformed, lame, and handicapped. I continued studying but during all that period my father threatened me with that ready suitor.

The second period in my life was that of adolescence. That silence which was inside me started to erupt in the form of words that I did not know how to use well.

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When I was in the fourth and fifth grades, I had a boy classmate, because it was a mixed school. We had a pleasant spirit of competition. We studied together. My boy classmate and I were neighbours; the two of us studied together either at my home or at his home. My father did not mind, because relations in earlier times were simpler than they are these days. Today a question would be raised: "Why should she?" Especially the fact that he had many brothers would be a problem. Or people would say today, "Look at that girl who is mixing with boys." My boy classmate and I thought of writing a long story. We wrote and wrote, thinking together about the characters. The result was a heap of useless papers. We had different interests. Both of us were preoccupied by the obsession of social and political changes, but each was preoccupied by a major figure; I was obsessed by al-Hamdi, the new national president of Yemen, and he was obsessed by Yasser 'Arafat, the Palestinian leader. Our final examination started, however, and we became occupied by this. So our story ended up open. Then it was all over because I grew up and became a "woman." We went to different schools. I went to Arwa School and he went to `Abdul Nasser School. Neither neighbourly relations nor the old friendship would have allowed the childhood relationship to be continued.

After primary school I found a job. My father agreed because, as I said, I knew how to convince him. He agreed that I could have a temporary job until a suitor came. To get a job I had to be sixteen, but a friend of mine helped me get an Identification Card with two years added to my real age. By getting this job I entered a new world.

A suitor came when I was in my first preparatory [7th] class. Three years before this suitor came, my father had divorced my mother and he was thinking of marrying again. He didn't want anybody at home. My mother went to stay with my sister in Sana'a. She stayed there for a while and got married again. When all that happened I felt as if the Earth had collapsed in front of my eyes, because my parents were an example of happy marriage, not only for us, but for all the people who knew them. As for the suitor, it wasn't the first time that he sought my hand; he had proposed to me three years earlier when I was still a little girl playing on the street. At that time everybody laughed at him and my father simply said no, because he was already married with children. But after my father's divorce from my mother, and when I was three years older, things were different. My father wanted to marry me off so that he could bring his new wife to a house with nobody in it. Besides, they had convinced me that the suitor would allow me to pursue my education and to keep my job; especially as he himself was educated and had divorced his first wife. My mother convinced me and promised to stay with me, not with my sisters. Very soon, she herself got married and had to leave for her new husband's place.

My marriage did not last for more than five months, because all the conditions on which the marriage was built were forgotten. I insisted on pursuing my studies, but he refused. He treated me as if I were a grown woman, not a teenager of 15 years. He did not have many defects, but because I was a teenager I found that he was not

exactly like the image I had in my mind of a man. I rejected him totally. He actually had good morals that could have sufficed in the face of small flaws. He could have allowed me to continue my studies until I got tired of them. It seems that there really is something called Destiny. He treated me with rashness even in love; he assumed that I was a mature woman and that I would understand him. His behaviour with me was not intelligible to me; for example, when he saw me washing he would put dirt in the detergent. When I left his house I was not really angry, because we had quarrelled over a silly matter. I cried a lot and took a walk before I went to my family's house. He didn't come to pick me up from my family's house. After two days he re-married his first wife, but after some time he sent her to me to convince me to go back to him. She said she was ready to ensure suitable conditions for me to study and work. He also began coming to my house and spent his nights in his open car for three months. I insisted on getting a divorce because I had many demands. I didn't want to go back to have children and to spend my life that way. Though my family didn't believe me at the beginning, my father became convinced that my husband's behaviour was not normal, because he used to come to tell me to join him and would then simply leave. My father told me that he [the husband] wanted to take revenge on me. In fact, my ex-husband was an artist, and was not disciplined like other people. He was kind, helpful, passionate, chaotic, and frivolous. He needed a mature woman, who would have understood his sharp tempers, and who would be able to deal with him as a child. He didn't need me because I was a child myself.

NABILAH AL-ZUBAIR, THE YOUNG POET

It took me a long time to start publishing poetry, in 1981, for two main reasons. The first was my feeling that my poetry was not really metrical. I once wrote some lines of poetry and showed it to my sister. She laughed at my writing because she found that it did not rhyme and wondered if that was poetry. The second was that I was not convinced about its merit. I still don't know whether the decision not to publish my poems was my good luck. I started writing some poems, however, and reading them for the people around me. I did not write for publication.

Going back to my job after my divorce helped me get to know more friends and colleagues, to whom I started to read my poems, and I was treated as a poet by them. I worked in two banks: the Central Bank and the Yemeni Bank, where many people came and went. I met famous and culturally active people. For instance, I met Mahmoud al-Haj and his friend Ahmed Fathi there. Those people were famous, so I could introduce them to my family. I had aspirations, so I went to Saba News Agency, and I met the chief editor al-Zurqa there. He read some of my writings and found an ambitious child in them. I worked at *Al-Thawra* newspaper, and formed new relationships there. I worked there from 1980 to 1982, writing a column called "By the Blue Pen." I worked in the investigations section, where I was trained. Many people welcomed my work in the newspaper, because, though my topics were not serious, I had

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a fine style. One of the things that my father respected a lot was that the director of the paper himself used to take me to work and drive me home. The director told my father that he himself was a father of girls. There wasn't anything that caused my father to worry, so he decided to have confidence in me at a time everybody else was watching my behaviour without my noticing. I was, and still am, restricting myself with rules. I did my best in this field because my father had a preconceived notion that the field of communication was not really "clean"; i.e., the Ministry of Media and Culture in his opinion meant "daring girls." I kept narrowing the distance between my father and my field, explaining to him that not all communication centers or journals could be bad. My family kept watching my topics in the journal. A person, who still works as the photographer of the President, used to come to our house to tell my father that I wrote some very good pieces. Such things bridged the gaps.

My early poems were about the blackness and absurdity of life. The encouragement of others made me continue on the theme of absurdity. I remained confused, until 1983, when I met Fathiyya al-Jirafi, a pioneer Yemeni social leader and the wife of the famous Yemeni blind poet and critic `Abd-Allah al-Baradduni. She assured me that I was writing good poetry. She wanted to take it to `Abd-Allah al-Baradduni. I was scared by that idea; I told her that my writings were still not good enough and that they shouldn't be shown to a prominent poet. I don't know why I did this. Was it because I had a previous experience of repression? I didn't have the confidence; besides, I wasn't in a hurry to have anyone read my poetry. I didn't want anyone to introduce me to major figures. Or perhaps it was the opposite; maybe there was something I was hiding and trying to protect. I don't know. I did not publish; I just read my poetry to others. I remained like this till the summer of 1984, when I met Dr. Raufah Hassan, who read my column in the newspaper and had heard about me by chance. She was convinced of my literary talents, and she was enthusiastic to organize an evening for me so that I would meet other persons of letters and recite some of my poems. The summer of 1984 was the first meeting at which I read to the public; the meeting was in The Officers' Club, and I was introduced to other literary men. The poems that I recited were full of a loud feminine feeling. I was very much influenced by Nizar Qabbani. My poems were passionate poems on the topics of sex and politics. I'm still proud of that first meeting with the public, because they received me very well. I started to publish, and the person in charge of the cultural section in *Al-Thawrah* newspaper started to come to my place to take my poems. I published at least two poems every month. I was then offered a job supervising the women's health section in *Al-Mithaq* newspaper. Women writers were rare, and though I was young, my writing was good. I refused that job, however, because that journal was not independent but belonged to a political party. In addition, I believed that women should not have a special and separate page as if they were children; they should be in the mainstream. However, they took some of my subjects from *Al-Thawrah* newspaper and republished them in *Al-Mithaq*.

In September 1984, I recited three poems in a public celebration of the September Revolution anniversary. There were prominent poets there like `Ali Sabrah and `Abd al-samad al-Qalisi. I recited two daring poems and they were broadcast on TV. It was very daring of me to recite those poems in front of all those people. In front of the audience was the minister of Media and Culture, Hassan al-Lawzi, sitting with a strange smile on his face; it definitely wasn't a smile of admiration. I read some odd rhymes like these, and I also read a poem on Sana'a, a poem that was published in *Mutawaliyat al-Kethbah al-Raya'* [Successions of a wonderful lie], my first volume. The other two poems that I recited were about Jerusalem; I remember one which started,

No body
The black night
No body
And the woman of the temple
The night's body is revealing
No body in the black night

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH MALE COLLEAGUES

I was very strict in my relationships with my male colleagues and friends. Since my high school days, I had male friends at the university, where I used to go and recite my poems. My ideas were pleasant and my behaviour was very respectful. My relations with them could not have gone further than friendship. They liked my way and I kept convincing myself that I had a lover somewhere in this life who had not shown up yet. I used to discuss things with them; we sat together or drove around in a car for fun. If any one of them tried to go a step further, I stopped him. Any such attempts by friends were useless, because I already had a model character for my social surroundings. I didn't have emotional adventures; my adventures were mental adventures through which I discovered kinds of morals, behaviours, and human relations; all these increased my restrictions by my own free choice. I definitely loved some of these men, but I didn't admit that, because I had already had complex problems in my earlier marriage. That ill view of marriage made me pity those who got married, because I thought that they were doing wrong to themselves. I believed that any wife was just a servant to her husband.

NABILAH AL-ZUBAIR AS A WELL-KNOWN POET AND THE CURRENT LITERARY ENVIRONMENT

Between 1985 and 1986, I became known in the cultural field, but as usual I didn't mix much with other persons of letters, and I didn't participate much in cultural activities either. In 1989, I collected some poems for publication – I was then a student at Sana'a University – and presented them to Dr. al-Maqaleh, the Rector of the university and a critic and a poet. He told me that I was a real and a talented poet. He told me also that he would find me a place as a poet. He told me that some writers such as

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Huda Ablan, who had her brother to support her, were able to publish their writings, and he would support and help me through the Yemeni Studies Center, which used to prepare collections of works for writers and publish two books free for them. Like a child, I enthusiastically started to collect my writings, and to type them neatly and make an elegant cover for them. I went to Dr. al-Maqaleh to show him my volume. It was the time of the Book Fair; but unexpectedly, and in a way that I cannot understand even now, he browsed through my volume and threw it on the sofa. He threw it in my face and the visit was over. He said that I could go to the Book Fair and to show it to any publisher. I left without understanding his attitude. While I was leaving, I met by chance Dr. Yumna al-`Eid, who was a visiting professor at Sana'a University, entering al-Maqaleh's office. I said to her, "Are you Dr. Yumna al-`Eid?" She said yes. I decided to wait and meet her. When she came out, I introduced myself to her and gave her my volume, which was still in my hand. After that meeting, I was desperate to meet her again. That was late 1989 and early 1990. At that time, I found myself a job, so I was busy between my job, the university, and taking care of my little girl from my second marriage [about which she talks later]. After a time, I received a call from al-Maqaleh's office, and his secretary told me that there was a letter for me; it was my manuscript which I had given to Yumna al-`Eid. When I opened it, I found my collection of poems with some remarks written very neatly in pencil. She respected my writing, because she found that it was a ripe work ready to be published. There were some lines under some words and some exclamation marks in all the poems except one poem. I started working on those poems, because I understood the messages of the remarks and the signs of Yumna al-`Eid, which was the biggest critical lesson that I've ever had. Those few remarks were more valuable to me than reading three or four books on criticism. We women writers had a pressing need for critical remarks; we were deprived of critical guidance and advice. We needed a critical movement. The two main critics who used to introduce young writers at that time were al-Baradduni and al-Maqaleh. I did not visit al-Baradduni. As for al-Maqaleh, I had two negative experiences. The first time, when he promised to support me in publishing my work and then let me down. The second time, he chose a poor poem of mine to be published in the anthology *Wahej al-Fajr* (Radiance of the Dawn), which contained the writings of a number of poets with a long introduction by al-Maqaleh. In his introduction he said that I did not choose a good poem to be presented for the anthology. Such words upset me, and others in cultural field as well, because I had become a known writer by then. Some writers wrote about al-Maqaleh's introduction, and criticized his favouring some poets over others; they thought that he shouldn't have ignored me. He certainly could have advised me and chosen a better poem for the anthology, which was meant to be a documentation of contemporary writers' work. It was an unpleasant experience for me. Al-Maqaleh told me that he meant to teach me a hard lesson, but that wasn't a lesson, it was a punishment.

After the Union of the South and North of Yemen in 1990, there were major

changes in cultural life. Political polarization was introduced after the Union. A month after Unity, Yemen witnessed the Arabic-Spanish Poetry Conference. It was one of the beautiful events through which we were introduced to many new domains. There I met national and international poets for the first time. I met Adonis, and he was introduced to my poetry. I also met my colleague, the woman poet Huda Ablan, for the first time there.

NABILAH AL-ZUBAIR'S SECOND MARRIAGE

I do not like to talk about my second marriage, and I deliberately did not talk about it in our last meeting; it is still a painful and unresolved issue for me. The person I married had been my friend for four years and had been asking me to marry him for two years. At that time, I was still horrified by the idea of marriage. At that period I had experienced more than one emotional affair – of course, all these relationships were not known to my family – which my husband, as a friend, knew about. But those affairs were for short periods, for I used to wonder where such relationships would end. Marriage!! I knew I would not be able to become a traditional wife again. I had become a known and an independent person. For example, one of the men who proposed to marry me was the son of a sheikh. Accepting such a proposal means becoming a traditional sheikh's wife, who bakes bread, stays home, and becomes just one of the women in the house. Such a negative view of traditional marriage was an advantage in favour of the proposal of my second husband, who was not Yemeni, but Lebanese. Being a non-Yemeni, he succeeded in convincing me that marriage did not always mean a crisis; I gradually changed my view of marriage and started to think of it as a relationship between two persons. I thought that my non-Yemeni husband would not impose on me the duties and restrictions imposed on a Yemeni wife. I got married on 9 October 1986.

What happened! I got a double shock, because I had known by practical experience that marriage is not only a decision by a man and a woman, rather, it is a social reality. Soon after our marriage, my husband started saying that I had chosen to marry him because I wanted to use him to get more freedom, and that people were laughing at him. He became stricter. He started to interfere in the way I dressed, in my job, in my relationships with my colleagues, and even in the kinds of poems I was writing. He believed that he was an agent for more freedom, though this was not true. Before our marriage, I had been able to impose on my family my personal freedom and rights. I knew my rights and I got them. I went out whenever I wanted and it was not necessary for me to meet men in the presence of my father, as other Yemeni women should do. I had male friends and even emotional affairs, and he knew about all these things. I did not expect such problems in my marriage. In marrying a non-Yemeni, I had to face other kinds of problems. I did not get the social respect and protection of a woman married to a Yemeni. Society continued to look at me as an outcast woman who is married to a foreigner, and so might have suspicious

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norms. For example, I was once accused of arranging “Red Nights’ Parties.” This social suspicion of my life lasted for a period, and I had to prove the opposite and that my family was just like any other Yemeni family. I faced another problem concerning his nationality and visa, as I had to go to the police station several times, which irritated my family. I was asked to get a divorce, for no “respectable” or “*Qabili*” [tribal] woman went to the police station, but I refused. This marriage was a failure in every way. After I gave birth to my daughter (1989), I discovered that he was married and had children in his own country, and that his marriage was still alive for he kept sending them money though he did not spend any money on us in Yemen. We have been married for seventeen years, and I can divide these years into periods: one year of real love, three years of a serious relationship of commitment, two years of negotiation for getting a divorce, and the remaining years of dead marriage. From 1994 to 1996, I insisted on getting a divorce but my family, who did not easily accept my marriage to a foreigner, objected to the idea of divorce as if they were punishing me for my own choice. I am the one who imposed on them a foreign husband so I have to pay for my mistake. I decided to leave his house and rent another house. Since 1996, I have been living with my daughter Aseel and he comes as a guest. After that, I stopped asking for a divorce. We came to a kind of agreement that he would have nothing to do with me or my decisions, and in this way the reasons for divorce were eliminated. I do not plan to marry again for I do not want my daughter to endure the difficult experience I had, living with a step-mother or a step-father. In 1994, I asked for divorce because it was a daily psychological pressure, and I could not bear staying with my husband in the same house. His presence had affected my writing and my life. I felt strongly the restrictions of marriage inside me until I almost got rid of the inner restrictions in 1996 when I decided to get a psychological divorce.

The problem that I face now is how to get Yemeni nationality for my daughter Aseel, who, until now, has not been able to comprehend the problem. According to the amendments of the nationality law, Aseel can get Yemeni nationality after I get divorced. A friend of mine who heard of the new amendment called and congratulated me! But I do not want her to get her nationality because I am a divorced woman; I want her to feel that she is Yemeni from two Yemeni parents. I have found that this law does not respect my humanity and my rights, because to get my rights requires my divorce and my going to the court to announce publicly that my husband is a bad person and that he does not support the family. But he is the father of my daughter. He means something to me, and everything I say about him should improve his image in the eyes of his daughter. This law of nationality is extremely unfair. Any Yemeni man can take a foreign woman from the street and give her all the privileges and rights that a Yemeni woman has, whereas my husband, who belongs to a noble family in his country, has been to prison several times because of his visa problem.

NABILAH AL-ZUBAIR AND POLITICS, CULTURAL LIFE AND GENDER

The Gulf War took place during the period after unity (1990). The Gulf War ruined relations among Arab countries and even among us as individuals at the university and Literary Union. Every issue had two faces. I wondered why we always had two faces for everything. Multiplicity in politics is a good thing, but suddenly we found that a number of our colleagues had entered different political parties. Faces and attitudes had changed; the war had divided the people and made them argue about everything. I was against the invasion of Kuwait, but some of my colleagues agreed with the invasion. They believed that fortunes should be re-distributed. You see, the principle is incorrect; you can't share my fortune with me by force, or enter my place without my approval. There will be a lasting enmity between us. The question was raised of how a country could be invaded with any plausible excuse. If you approve it then you approve of the Israelis invading Palestine to take their fortunes. People started to struggle with the new events. After Iraq withdrew, all those who supported the invasion changed their attitudes. I was at home most of the time during this period. My life was already limited. I was married for the second time, and being a university student as well as a wife and a new mother, I did not leave the house often. I used to write wherever I was, however, whether I was visiting or even in a minibus. In those times I wrote about the influence of the changes on the country and on the people. I also wrote about my colleagues and how they had changed. I re-produced people in different forms; those who didn't join a political party leaned on the state, which had become for many a cow to be milked, and the majority, therefore, pretended to be members of the state's security just for that purpose.

This new situation had an impact on cultural life. In 1994, two months before the war [civil war between the Yemeni Social Party in the South and the Yemeni General People's Party in the North], there were elections in the Writers' Union. I had a membership card, because in 1987 the Union received me very well, gave me a medal, and called upon me to participate in their activities. So when I went there at the time of elections, my colleagues insisted that I should stand as a candidate. I did, and I had a fine victory, but I was astonished to find out that there were cards of recommendation from the higher authorities. The people who organized the elections were given a list of the names of those who should win. I was shocked to find that some of my dear colleagues were distributing those lists. Everything was organized so that a close friend would antagonize his friends for a political purpose. One may not like all the people on the list, so how could one approve it? The answer was that it was an organizational matter. I asked that question after I came across the list by chance; it was supposed to be distributed secretly and wasn't supposed to fall into my hands. After my victory I didn't ask why my name wasn't in the list, or why the name of this or that person was included. My first meeting in the Union in 1994 was another important event. I met colleagues whose major interest was me as a person. They used to inform me about their political parties, and they would ask me

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about my party, saying, "What about you?" I would answer, "I am Nabilah al-Zubair." It was a tense period, when one had to belong to a political party. I remained independent. I was not convinced that I needed to belong to a political party to participate in a cultural activity.

I wanted to be the cultural director, not the administrative director, but I was told that if I became the cultural director it would mean that I would have to sit in the Qat sessions of men to direct the literary discussions. I said O.K., and I really embarrassed them twice. But they convinced me "by logic" that it wasn't easy for me to run after persons of letters and organize seminars. They usually had their meetings at the table for only half an hour; then they would go back to their places to chew Qat. I agreed to make that change, to make them chew *qat* at the table. They wanted to embarrass me, so they asked me, "You chew *qat*, why don't you chew with us?" [Part of the traditional custom of chewing *qat* is to sit on arranged mattresses on the floor. Women never chew *qat* with men except with husbands or close relatives.]

When I started my work as the administrative director after the war [Civil War], I noticed wrong and suspicious things happening in the Union. Suddenly, the Union had money in its accounts and bought a building. I knew that our account was too small. I asked the people in charge of accounts, "Why did you add all these zeros to our account? How much is this building?" They answered that it cost eight million. How, in such conditions, were they able to get that amount of money? They answered that the money was in the bank. I asked why it didn't appear in the administrative and the financial reports. I saw one of them with a new 1990-model car; he was one of the respected members of the Union. Actually I came to the Union in a difficult period, and I don't know whether this was good or bad for me. There were big changes, so there was a sorting out of some people. I couldn't accept this, but I couldn't do anything to stop it. The majority decided to continue working, and I wasn't with them. Whether I was right or wrong, I decided to get away from them, and quit. I realized that things were not democratic or correct, and that there were no real elections, and that the real voice of the people was not heard.

NABILAH AL-ZUBAIR'S WRITINGS

All these happenings in my life definitely affected my writing of poetry. I remained at home during that period, because I felt that I didn't have to do what others liked. I had neither the ambition to be rich, nor the desire to achieve power. It was difficult to find a balance between my daily life and my self-esteem if I did like the others. I thought only of how to spend my days peacefully and how to keep my self-respect. When the war broke out, all the people were muzzled. My second published volume *al-Baher* [The Sea] was a record of all those years; I excluded some poems that were written between 1991 and 1994. *Al-Baher* is about my friends and the changes; it is written in a condensed and suppressed language. One feels in it a dreadful silence. I felt suppression inside me; I couldn't say directly that I was scared. There was

neither a friend nor helping thoughts. I couldn't say it aloud because of my pride. I could not justify a problem at this time, but there was a fire burning inside me. I am the sort of person who doesn't express himself directly and immediately; but inside me the problem would interact slowly, and would get outside in the shape of writing. All those past years are written out in *al-Baher*, and later in my novel. I excluded some poems, which were too direct, which alluded to the 1994 War. Of course I did not exclude these out of fear, but out of a literary and an artistic belief; I felt that they were shouting too directly. I wrote "People of the Furrow." I created an image of the battle, and compared the image of the civil war to the Qur'anic story of the people of the furrow, where all people were false witnesses. So the poem was an uncontrolled cry. There was another poem, which was more daring; it was able to stand as an independent text, and to speak for any time and for any place without alluding to a specific war. In my poem "Lill'ah Thamat Baher" [There is a Sea for God], I went back to the condensed and suppressed language.

This period left inside me an impression or an image that was reflected in my novel *Inho Jassadi* [It is my Body] in which I render much of my personal record. The novel is about my life as well as the lives of other women; so it isn't an autobiography but it does contain some of my sufferings and my personal diary. I tried to make the characters represent all of us, including Sakina `Omer, the protagonist, who may or may not be a real character. All of us had suffered from the Civil War, and the sufferings were carried by Sakina, who had burdened her children with those sufferings; her children in their turn would burden the coming generations with the same sufferings. That was a real image that deserved to be presented, in which I thought very much about myself; it is a long journey with a number of women, charged with many questions about freedom, existence, being, and loyalty. This novel is a journey of questions inside me. I answered many of the questions. When I wrote this novel I started to reveal many of my inner thoughts, and to say the things which I didn't talk about in *al-Baher*, which was written during a critical period. At the time of this novel I wrote in an open narrative language. But at the same time there was a social and a political problem, because I was writing about things that were still happening; people were still living the events. I wasn't able to name things and to judge them. As a woman, I didn't have the right to do so. So, to write about the status quo, one should write in the form of allusions. After that novel, instead of thinking of messages either direct or indirect, I was able to write artistically. I started to write art. I felt some relief.

After finishing my novel *Inaho Jassadi* in 1999, it was my destiny to meet Dr. Yumna al-`Eid again. I met her when I was in the early stages of writing poetry, and again in the early stages of writing my first novel. She was in Yemen as a visiting professor at the Empirical Research and Women's Studies Center. She came to my house to join our women's gatherings. While a friend of mine was introducing me to her I was thinking about the happy coincidence, and when it was time for me to

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talk I told her that I had known her before and asked if she still remembered. She didn't recognize me. I told her about my novel *Inaho Jassadi*. She said, "Of course you are not going to read your novel now." I answered that I wouldn't, but I would read a short story to her. I read one of the short stories; and she liked it very much. I told her that I wasn't sure about my novel. She asked me whether I was a poet; I said yes. And she asked whether I wrote short stories; and I said yes. So she said that I was a novelist. I asked her if she would read it, because I valued her opinion as a critic; she said that she would do so after publication. That meeting with Dr. al-'Eid was a big step forward for me because she is an academic person, experienced in this field. As for us, we encourage each other and praise each other's writings, but we are limited in our critical experience. I was lucky to meet Dr. al-'Eid again.

She took my novel with her, and published it. I read the news of its publication in *Al-Sada'a* [The Echo]. It was a big surprise for me, because that periodical publishes only the major writers. There was an introduction to my novel; she introduced my novel modestly. As I told you, the cold, the hot and the freeze come all at one time; therefore, you must have a strong personality and an ability to stand all those contradictions and not be shaken easily, and you must be able to find a balance between contradictory matters. I have twenty years' experience, so I'm not supposed to be surprised or shocked by things that happen either in the social reality or in the cultural field. What made me think of this was the attitude of Dr. al-Maqaleh, who was ready to push me into an abyss, i.e., to introduce me to the public by publishing my works in a poor form. I expected a word from him to show me the weak sides of my writing. He didn't! This lady came from a far-off place, and told me that it was her mission to say whether a text was fine or not. Some people in this world have wide horizons, and are broad-minded; they can be useful to others. We don't have them here in Yemen; still, this is not only a personal problem.

My writing has grown more feminist recently. I have started to focus more on the status of the cultural milieu, which is full of contradictions; therefore, balance must be found. *Tanween al-Gha'eb* [The Second Person Pronoun] was occupied with these ideas. I wrote about things women were prohibited to approach. For example, I made a woman a subject, a doer. Such a thing has always been the right of men only. So, I employed the feminine subject to make a strong feminine "I." This feminist style caused much reaction in cultural circles, but I knew what I was doing, and I expected such reactions. I'm a woman writer, so why should I not make the presence of a woman powerful in my writings? I imagined the power and the boldness that was inside the woman of *Tanween al-Gha'eb*. It was a genuine power, capable of language. It was clear that this was the social depiction:

This is your scent... (Ecstatically)
 And this is your scent... (I agree)
 And... this is...

Your scent...!! (Painfully)
 She feels the pain.
 Oh my God! How lonely you are!

My volume was misinterpreted by male critics. In the provocative reading of a man, it is interpreted as a strong feminist poem that tries to reject and remove totally the other [man]. This is the reading of man, and it will remain so for a long time. It is not easy to make men read your text as you wish; a woman writer must have a powerful will to face such attitudes. So, to recognize your importance, or to think of yourself as a pioneer and a struggler in this field, will endanger you; you might get a "reckless bullet" from a reading which insists on interpreting the text in its way even if it breaks [falsifies] it. No one can go into the text to interpret it in any way s/he wants. This is man; he reads the text in the way he wants, and women should do what he wants. He [a male critic] defends his presence in a text, so he is provoked by the powerful presence of this woman. It is exactly like our [women's] provocation when women are absent in a text. Criticism is called a second text; thus I do not accept male critics' interpretation. I refuse such measurements of feminism; I believe that it is the right of a human being to be strong whether the person is a woman or a man. So I expressed this opinion in my writing; this does not mean at all that a man should be weak. My poems in this volume gather both: the man and the woman facing the "other", i.e., society and all its changes. But the narrator was a woman. I worked on this idea, of a harmonious couple, throughout the volume. Both were struggling with society, which had been causing them a lot of suffering. I worked on the same idea in my novel, where one of them was in danger of falling, but both struggled to be united in the face of the difficult circumstances. Many readers get from the text only what they want; they want to project on the text their own old theories about feminism. What they say or what they write is their own text. My intention is to express the idea of the couple facing the "other." It is not to show a female versus a male. Both are facing the socio-political context, and the challenges of the status quo.

NABILAH AL-ZUBAIR AND LITERARY WOMEN'S GATHERING (LOUQA)

Literary Women's Gathering started in 1998 as a gathering of a number of women writers and cultured women who felt that they needed to talk with each other regardless of the results of the discussions. That gathering has developed to be a commitment with names and appointments. We meet every two weeks to read works of literature, books, or research. A number of women researchers, critics and journalists have joined us. My house has been meeting place on most occasions. The cultural society has welcomed the idea of *Louqa*, which was considered a competitive literary institution even before it was registered.

The main reason for establishing *Louqa* was not a reaction against men's gatherings (*Maqyel*). We as women have suffered from the seclusion which actually exists in

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men's minds. Personally, I have suffered from seclusion in my job experience; many of the official meetings used to be held in *maqayel* that I could not attend. Thus we have thought of allowing the other to attend our meetings. As we can not receive men at home, we arranged some gatherings in public places such as the Literary Union. However, *Louqa* has given us what we were deprived of in *maqayel*. We were able to meet with women critics such as Yumna al-`Eid, but it is a pity that we could not invite male critics to our home gatherings when they came to Yemen on short visits during which we could not arrange a public meeting.

Louqa was registered officially at the Ministry of Culture. I now feel that this was a mistake because it has turned our gatherings into official meetings that need a monthly budget and an office. I thought that turning our gatherings into an official institution would allow all members to carry out their own projects, and that each member would be responsible for her project without even my supervision. As an old woman told me, "a boy needs upbringing and careful supervising, while a girl has a lot of people to warn her if she makes a mistake." This idea did not work, and I found out that being a chairperson means that I expose myself to the pressures of the government or the donors, and such things contradict my principles of freedom as a writer. I realised that we should go back to our early informal gatherings.

Chapter 7

Conclusions and Implications

This concluding chapter is intended to summarize, highlight, and interpret the points raised in the previous chapters of this study. Before making my concluding remarks, I would like to say, however, that as I critically reflect on my own work, I realize that if I had had the time needed for this purpose, I would have liked to go to all those houses which are likely to have preserved the unpublished manuscripts of our known or unknown women writers, particularly of writers during the pre-Islamic, Islamic, and Renaissance, or Revolutionary periods in Yemen. I fervently hope and wish that some future researcher(s) would take up the important task of exploring this possibility. I am convinced, nevertheless, that on the basis of the data that I managed to collect from interviews, newspapers, magazines, and books, I can legitimately reiterate the following observations:

Yemen, like other countries, produced few women writers, but even that small number has been marginalized or totally ignored by literary historians. To discuss why women have been absent from, or were marginalized in, the main canon of Yemeni literary history, I traced, in the light of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, the constricting influences of gender on Yemeni women writers. Despite the constricting influences of a rigid patriarchal society, women writers have made a mark as writers, though in a very small number. My aim was to identify these women writers in Yemen.

The findings of this study largely confirm that most of what Virginia Woolf said a century ago and what contemporary Eastern and Western feminist and non-feminist researches have shown in terms of generality are true with regard to the Yemeni context as well. The findings confirm that gender has played a severely constricting role in shaping the lives and creativity of women writers. My work, in other words, is yet more evidence of the great similarity of the gender-based constraints and restrictions that women writers face globally. Gender, as shown in Chapter Five, denies women the basic requirements to be able to write, requirements which Virginia Woolf metaphorically calls "a room of one's own." In Yemen, the impact of gender can be

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seen not only in the lives of women writers but also in the lives of women in general.

The main factor that has hindered the full growth of women's creative faculties in Yemen is the lack of education. The female literacy rate in Yemen has always been extremely low, and even now about 73% of women are illiterate. The neglect of women's education in Yemen, as in many different parts of the world, is the result of the patriarchal ideology that the situation of women is inferior and that women's role in life is not intellectual: rather, it is to bear children and to take care of household tasks. Thus, boys' education is given priority by society as well as by the family. Statistics show that the progress of women's education is still very slow. In addition, the rate of dropouts among girls is very high compared to the rate among boys.

Another causative factor related to the lack of education is poverty. Several researches and reports show that poverty in Yemen between 1992 and 1998 has doubled and the number of households below the poverty line has rose from 19% to 33%. This poverty severely hinders the progress of women's education.

Among the various obstacles to women's education, gender-bias has been the most pernicious. Even where fathers were rich enough to afford proper education to their daughters, they denied it to them. Women in Yemen, as in most other parts of the world, are born to be mothers and wives. Nabilah al-Zubair's struggle to get an education, described in some detail in Chapter Six, is a typical example. The daughter of a shop-keeper, she had to "fight a battle" with her father, who was convinced that "every girl should learn the holy Qur'an and stay at home." With her gift of what she calls, "her unusual way of convincing," she persuaded her father to let her continue her education by telling him that she would study just until she got married. Another Yemeni writer says that her father "was taking care of my brothers and male relatives' education by bringing tutors for them... but for us, girls, it was enough to study some Qur'an and Hadith."⁴⁰¹ The Egyptian writer Nawal el-Saadawi has aptly pointed out that "women remain wavering between two things: their intellectual faculties and their femaleness, because they have been brought up to believe that their role in life is marriage and bearing children and not intellectual creativity."⁴⁰² This observation by el-Saadawi, though made about women in general, is out and out true about women in Yemen.

As pointed out in an earlier chapter, Virginia Woolf's brothers went to college whereas she had private tutors at home. Joanna Russ, too, has presented numerous contemporary examples of discouragement of women's education.⁴⁰³ What happened in some European countries in the nineteenth century still happens in Yemen today.

In this study, I examined the other constraints that Virginia Woolf and Joanna Russ summed up in the statement that the "the absence of formal prohibitions

⁴⁰¹. Questionnaire.

⁴⁰². Joseph Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists: the Formative Years and Beyond*, 232.

⁴⁰³. Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress a Woman*, 6.

against committing art does not preclude the presence of powerful, informal ones.”⁴⁰⁴ Though in Yemen there are still some biased laws against women, such as the nationality law and their inferior status in the family, these formal laws do not have a powerful impact on women’s writing. What directly and strongly hinders women’s writing is some of the *`urf* and the traditions which have passed orally from one generation to another, and which sometimes contradict *Shari`ah* laws and the constitution of the country. The major common informal forms of discouragement discussed in Chapters Two and Five are in the institutions of family, marriage, critical encouragement, publication, and gender-biased literary history, and they all stem from the biased roles assigned to women in the traditional patriarchal society. The psychological impact of the social constraints that lead to internal self-censorship needs to be highlighted for it directly and effectively influences women’s processes of writing.

Family, particularly the husband, disapproves of a woman expressing herself or her experiences, even indirectly, in words for the eyes of others. As shown in Chapter Five, many Yemeni women writers stop writing after marriage. A woman writer said in her interview that she hides her paper and books as soon as her husband comes home because she should not be seen to be busy with something intellectual. As in life, so in stories, women are stopped by a male member of the family from writing and publishing, and even the mother supports that obstructive male decision. The support of the family plays an important role in encouraging a woman to become a writer, and this support can defeat the variety of challenges of traditions and social norms in Yemeni society. Most of the Yemeni women writers who succeed and continue writing have the support of their families, or at least a member of the family. It may be pointed out that, unlike in the West, where poverty and lack of leisure have been deterrents, as Virginia Woolf and Joanna Russ confirm, in Yemen women writers are not at present hampered directly by financial problems because they are not expected to add to the family income.

Though women writers all around the world have faced strikingly similar gender constraints, particular constraints that result from the specific social and cultural contexts in Yemen need to be specially considered. Today, Yemeni women or women writers are not altogether prevented from joining official or public cultural organizations such as universities or clubs, as 19th-century British women writers were. But the social and cultural norms being what they are, women writers are not supposed to take part in a *maqyel* (men’s qat-chewing session). These qat-chewing sessions are a venue for all kinds of informal, intellectual discussions and are, therefore, a valuable source of knowledge, and they also function as a venue where all kinds of important decisions are taken informally before they are formalized. Nabilah al-Zubair explains how she was not able to be the head of the cultural department at the Literary Union

404. Ibid.

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for such a position required joining *maqqel*. Because of the lack of political freedom of expression in Yemen, as in some other Arab countries, women writers avoid writing about politics, and a number of writers have had to face fierce punishment, like imprisonment and sexual harassment. Men may also face the same punishment but the social norms regard a man's political involvement differently and sympathize with him for being a victim of the State, and his imprisonment is added to his deeds of honor, whereas a woman's going to prison is considered a criminal act that brings a bad name to her community and her family's *honor*, leading to her possible abandonment.

The revision of the major Yemeni literary history books mentioned in Chapter Three, confirms the assumption that gender has been a key factor in women writers' absence, neglect, and marginalization. Social norms have prevented many writers from publishing their works. The works of most Yemeni women writers throughout history have remained in the drawers of desks and private libraries because of the social ideology that considers women's voice to be *'awra*. The documenting of Yemeni literature separately from general Arab history started only after 1962, and the early attempts at documenting history lack objectivity and accuracy. Since 1990s, however, women writers have been given more space in newspapers, journals, and anthologies, but women writers have not yet acquired an adequate position in the professional literary canon.

Adopting the yardstick of Arab literary historians, Yemeni historians have not considered women's poetry worthy of inclusion in the main canon of poetry. Both in its classical and modern forms, poetry has been dominated by men who defined and fixed the aesthetic rules and wrote on issues arising primarily out of men's experiences. Because of the low and inferior status of women in al-Jahiliyya, i.e., in the Pre-Islamic Period, historians "were reluctant to record women's poetry from the pre-Islamic period."⁴⁰⁵ Al-Baradduni announced that no Arab pre-Islamic women's poetry deserves serious and in-depth analysis, and even al-Khensa'a, whose poetry is considered great by some historians, is considered "more famous for her wisdom rather than poetry."⁴⁰⁶

During the Renaissance, i.e., the period between the 1930s and the 1960s, there was a great attitudinal change in Arab countries like Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon in the sense that women writers were given a great deal of recognition in those countries. It would be naive to say that there were no women writers in Yemen during that period, but no Yemeni historian, nor any historian outside Yemen, has made even casual mention of women writers of that period. Different interrelated reasons may be behind this total absence: lack of education, domination of the social norm of women's voice as *'awra* among educated women, the substitution of the short story in the South of Yemen, and lack of mobility. Women's literature of this

405. Joseph Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists*, 41-42.

406. 'Abd Allah al-Baradduni, *Rihela fi al-shi'r al-Yemeni* 1972: 29.

period must have been lost and it needs to be recovered. A further search in private libraries might result in the finding of more names of women poets during this period. A number of anthologies such as al-Hebeshi's and al-Wajeeh's do mention women poets during the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic periods, but the mention of the male relatives of the women writers during these periods turns out to be more prominent than the mention of these women writers.

The only worthwhile anthology of women's short stories, *Aswat Nisa'iyya fi al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya* [Women's Voices in Yemeni Short Stories] (1992) by Nahlah `Abd Allah, marks the beginning of interest in women's writings. There is a great need to include women's writings in the main professional canons and national anthologies.

Yemeni women writers' texts in the three genres – poetry, the short story and the novel – reviewed in Chapter Three and the short stories separately discussed in detail in Chapter Four are associated with Yemeni contexts and with how Yemeni society dealt with womankind. The themes and concepts dealt with reflect women's concerns and new perspectives and points of view which find an outlet through literature, which women have mainly used for self-expression and self-assertion.

The realistic approach which places great importance on the social dimension of literature has been the central approach in women's short stories and novels, and some of their poems. Writing then becomes the center of criticism of social reality and the vision for a better world. For women, writing itself constitutes an act of defiance. Writers do not try to dissociate themselves from their life histories, and their writings are interrelated and are difficult to untangle. In her life story, Nabilah, for example, discusses how her novel *Inho Jassadi* and the collection of poetry *Tanween al-Gha'eb* represent stages of her life and progress of self-awareness. `Aziza `Abd Allah and Ramziyya al-Iryani confirm that their novels are realistic representations of actual events. Even in poetry, which takes a largely symbolic form and which deals with the real more than the actual, the focus is on social realities, like making a complaint, or describing real events, as in Arabic traditional poems and folk poetry. This can be seen in contemporary poems, such as Ibtisam al-Mutawakel's poem "How to Learn English in Five Days," or in Fatmah al-`Eshbi's "A Man Made of Paper." Sheherzad used literature to save her life. This practical use of literature as self-expression and defiance is not new. It is part of the general Arab ethos in which literature has been used as a tool of practical needs. Contemporary women's literature in Yemen has, therefore, a pronounced sociological thrust.

It will be most interesting for anyone outside Yemen that veiling, which has been a controversial issue in Yemeni society and was particularly so in the 1960s and 1970s, has not been an important theme in women's writings. In the 1960s and during the national movement against the rule of the Imam and British colonization, some women revolted against it. For example, the poet and the short story writer Amal al-Shami refused to cover her face, and women in a demonstration in `Aden threw away their *sheithar*. Veiling is the main theme for the Yemeni male poet

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Mohammed al-sharafi, who devotes a whole collection of poems to this topic: *Damou` al-sharashf* [Tears of *Sharashf*] attacks the practice of veiling. With the exception of some indications in some early stories, such as in Ramziyya al-Iryanni's short story "Imagination after the Qat" (1981), women writers have been silent on the issue of veiling. This is something that cannot be explained easily, and is contrary to normal expectations. It cannot be explained by saying that women avoid such a sensitive topic, nor can it be presumed that the veil represents the status of inequality for all women. As some women are forced to wear it, there are many who voluntarily put it on, finding it convenient to be the seers and not the seen. Some women wear it when in Yemen but take it off when they go abroad. Some women – who support the conservative interpretation of Islam regarding veiling – wear it for religious reasons. Women writers probably do not consider veiling an important issue or a constraint that needs to be dealt with. It does not restrict process of writing or mobility. There is a feeling that this topic is a greater interest to people in the West, and there are more important topics that stem from the real needs of Yemeni women.

Yemeni women writers, on the other hand, have added new perspectives which are conspicuous by their absence in literature produced by men. They have dealt intensively with the some of those private spheres of a woman's life that have remained hidden until recently. Most of the themes delineated by them concern women's lives, and the protagonists of their stories and novels are mostly women. Four novels out of the five published so far have women protagonists. In their presentation of the stories, they have emphasized women's perceptions, and socially-constructed gender constraints, and are conscious of more than one point of view. For example, in dealing with national topics, women writers examine the double oppression of gender and nation. Men writers focus on the oppression and injustice in the political sphere alone, but women writers have extended their view to underline the implications of how this political practice has effectively hurt families and women's lives. Comparing Ramziyya's short story *Al-Rahinah* with Zaid Muti` Damaj's story that deals with the same topic, we find that Ramziyya al-Iryani explores the whole chain of entwined oppressions of class, gender, and state, whereas Damaj focuses only on the State's corruption represented by the Imam. This comparison highlights excellently the difference in the responses of women writers and male writers to political themes.

A striking feature of Yemeni women writers is that they do not see or present individual men as oppressors; they rather attack outside forces such as social norms and traditions that restrain both men and women, and make both their victims. True, these social norms and traditions are patriarchal in character and they are old and deep-rooted, but sensitive men feel as helpless as sensitive women as they, too, feel oppressed by them. For example, Zahera Rahmet Allah's short story "Seized Love" deals with the restriction imposed on love for men as well as for women. Both women and men are, for example, victims of arranged marriage. Similarly, the first Yemeni short story, "Society, You Tyrant", written by F., Ahmed blames the whole

society for oppressing women. Nabilah al-Zubair – in her life story – expresses her irritation that some critics have interpreted her poems in *Tanween al-Gha'eb* as a way of negating the other (man). This was far from her intention.

Women writers' texts, particularly contemporary texts, in the three genres show their tendency to use modern and innovative forms, thus breaking new ground in the conventional literary canon. In poetry, almost all writers have chosen the new types of poetry, "free verse" and "prose verse," which are modified forms of the traditional structure of the old Arab *qasidah*. In this free style of verse, they have found their identities. The aesthetic form of this form of poetry is not fixed, and is capable of change and progress. Women poets feel that they have a share in creating the aesthetics of this kind of poetry, unlike in the traditional one, whose standards and aesthetics were mainly set by men poets and critics. It is worth mentioning here that Nazek al-Mala'ekeh – a famous Iraqi poet – is one of the pioneers who introduced this form to Arab poetry. So, referring back to Virginia Woolf's idea of the need of women's models, Yemeni women poets have chosen free verse, for they find a model in the verses of a grandmother. However, a contemporary poet such as Nabilah al-Zubair, playing with language, attempts to contribute her own new touches to this form. Women writers also use innovative styles in short stories. For example, Arwa 'Othman uses colloquial language in her stories. And Nabilah al-Zubair uses modern techniques in her novel *Inho Jassadi*.

The answer to the second question posed in this study, to what extent gender has influenced women writers' lives and writings, is that it certainly has influenced their processes of writing and it has influenced their writing, but to a limited extent in the sense that it neither prevented them from writing nor limited the scope of their writing. Women writers' awareness and consciousness of the constraints and restrictions to encountered did not cause them to despair. They managed to challenge some restrictions while striking a compromise with others. A great change is coming among Yemeni women as a result of formal education, the media, and the Internet, and in the next ten years more and more young women writers are expected to be introduced to the literary field. This year, a girl of 16 years surprised Yemeni society by publishing two novels.⁴⁰⁷

The Department of English at Sana'a University organized a poetry competition in Cultural Week (May 8, 9, & 11) 2004. A large number of students participated. It has recently published an anthology of selected poems written in English by some promising students of the Department.⁴⁰⁸ The women students included in this

407. She is Hend Hussien Haythem. Her father is a well-known poet and was recently made Chairman of the Yemeni Writers Literary Union. She said that her father encouraged her to read and write since she was a child.

408. *Poems by Undergraduate Students in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts* (Sana'a: University of Sana'a, 2004). Afrah Aynna's poems appear on pages 2 & 3 and Ghalia Qassim's poem appears on page 17.

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anthology show a new kind of boldness in the expression of their feelings. Below are poems by two promising students, who write and will hopefully continue to write poems in the future.

For You, O God!

I'm tired: my eyes are fed up with tears they've shed
 I'm tired: my heart is sick with hoping for hope
 I'm tired: my feet are stoned on the road of pain
 I'm tired: my soul is estranged my relatives and friends.
 Boredom, confusion, despair, and disturbance
 Are writ large on my brow.
 Life has taught me to long for nobody,
 My longing is only...
 For You, O God!

*Author: Afrah Aynna
 Level: Sophomore (2nd Year)*

I Don't Know

I don't know why I take a pen
 For that's not what I write with.
 Don't I write with my wounded days?
 Don't I write with the beats of the heart?
 Don't I with the body's scream?
 I'm a girl who thought of life as joy but
 It has turned into fire and smoke
 The air suffocates me, and the heat burns me.

*Afrah Aynna
 Level: Sophomore (2nd Year)*

If You Made Me Your Dairy

I wonder how beautiful my life would be
 If you made me your diary!
 And put down all your heart and mind
 And Lock me with your golden key
 You'd take me wherever you go
 You'd write on my pages nice and slow
 I'd know what's inside of you
 I'd know what you hide
 I'd know what you like and what you love
 I'd see that beautiful side
 I'd know who your best friends are
 I'd know your dreams that touch the stars
 I'd know if you think of me a lot

I'd know how much you care for me a lot
 I'd know if you love me or not
 I'd know the feelings you hide from me
 On my pages you'd never tell a lie
 And I'd know about every single laugh
 And I'd know about every tear you cry.
 Now you know how beautiful my life would be
 If you just made me your diary.

Ghalia Qassim
Level: Junior (3rd Year)

The first two poems express the genuine agony of young Yemeni girls oppressed by restrictions which do not allow them to bloom into confident women. The third poem expresses, as the writer herself says, the “generalized emotion” of all young girls, instead of giving vent to her individual feeling, which her relatives and friends would not like. By being a diary in the hand of her lover, the speaker would not, as it may seem, become an object, a doll; it is a way to know her man thoroughly. Ghalia writes more particularized love poems too, and has written several. Her parents do not mind her publishing them abroad or on the Internet, but they would be embarrassed, even a little ashamed, if she read them out in public. Even the other girls in her class, most of them her friends, discouraged her from submitting a love poem for the competition, even if it did not express her own feelings but the feelings of a cousin, she told me with a smile. Several other students expressed their feelings very indirectly. It is appropriate to add that Afrah Aynna got a certificate of merit whereas Ghalia Qassim won the first prize. Three senior male professors, all of them in their late sixties, were the judges.

There seems to be, however, a ray of hope in the innermost depths of the dark clouds. Women writers as a class of writers have started making their presence felt. The beginning of formal education of girls and the social awareness of the importance of women's education, in Yemen as in other parts of the world, has been the main factor leading to women's creative writing. For this reason, the number of women writers has multiplied. Virginia Woolf showed that when Elizabethan women started to receive some education, there was a rise in the number of women novelists. In England and in some Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, people have started “realizing the necessity to include them [women] in the pursuit of knowledge;”⁴⁰⁹ women's education was encouraged in the late 19th century, with the result that a greater number of women writers were introduced to the literary field, and that period marked the introduction of women novelists.⁴¹⁰ The factors which operated in England and in the above-mentioned Arab countries in the nineteenth

409. Virginia Woolf, *A room of One's Own*, 5.

410. Joseph Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelsits*, 23-44.

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century operate in Yemen even now. History seems to be repeating itself in this part of the world. In Yemen since the 1960s, when women's college education started, their contribution to literature has increased noticeably. For example, the first short story by a woman writer was published in 1960 and the first novel by a woman writer in 1970.

Changes in the right direction have started taking place in Yemen. College education, which has expanded several-fold in the last few years, is co-educational in Yemen. Not only does the number of girls in the colleges located in towns far exceeds that of boys, but they are also doing better than or at least as well as the boys. The statistical findings of a data-oriented study concluded this year show, for example, that among the students of the English language and literature in the Faculties of Arts and Languages in the University of Sana'a, girls have proved themselves slightly better than or at least as proficient in English as the boys. Boys have also started showing greater respect for girls, their persons as well as their talent, than they showed earlier. In the colleges in the small townships, the number of girls is comparatively small because they are expected to work at home, and also because the parents are conservative. With the support of some donors, the Yemeni government started giving stipends to girls to encourage them to get college education, but unfortunately this has been stopped. The number of girl students has once again fallen because the financial help has stopped. With the full development of their potential, one may hope that conditions will improve for women trying to write and express themselves.

Chatting with a young student writer, like Ghalia Qassim, one gets the feeling that women writers will gain greater self-confidence and will overcome one day the gender restrictions which stand in the way of their self expression and the publication of their works. Their relatives, and country will, hopefully, be proud of their self-reliant, intelligent voice, ONE DAY.

Appendix 1

Bibliography and Biographical Sketches of Yemeni Women Writers

When I started the research for this dissertation in 1997, I discovered that even basic information about Yemeni women writers was not available. There was no information on who they are, how many they are, and what they wrote. Therefore, I add this bibliography to this dissertation to provide basic data for future researchers. However, this is only a first attempt and further research, particularly in manuscripts and private libraries, is needed.

The bibliography consists of two parts. The first part lists the earlier writers, from the Pre-Islamic Period to the 1940s. The information about them is mainly gathered from general Yemeni history books, such as Ahmed Zabara's, Nasher al-'Uref, Al-Shawkani, Al-Bader Tal'e; 'Abd-Allah- al-Hebeshi's, Mu`jem al-Nesa'a Al-Yemeniyyat and 'Abd al-Salam al-Wajeeli's unpublished (and unfinished) project of an anthology of early Yemeni women writers. These references do not provide enough bibliographical information about the writers or their works, mainly because early historians neglected documenting women's poetry.

The second part lists contemporary writers and includes all women writers born after 1940. Information about them was collected with the cooperation of the writers themselves, and from a search in newspapers and in the anthology of some early women short-story writers Aswat Nisa'iyya fi al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya, [Women's Voices in Yemeni Short Stories]. This part includes four categories of women writers: i) pioneer writers, some of whom have continued to write whereas others have stopped; ii) writers who have published books; iii) writers who have published many pieces of literature but have not yet published a book; iv) writers who have published only one piece or two and about whom no further biographical information is available.

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PART 1: EARLY WRITERS

`Amerah bent Zaid ben al-Hareth

`Amerah bent al-Hareth was a poet from Khawlan. In the documented few lines of a poem by her she praised her people describing them as honorable, generous, fair and strong people. (Mu`jem al-Nesa'a.)

Alazdiyah

Alazdiyah was a poet. Two lines of an elegy only are documented for her. (Mu`jem Al-Nesa'a, quoted from Lesaan al-`Arab)

Al-Marhabiyya

Al-Mahabiyya – as she is known related to her tribe Marhabah – was from Hashed. In the documented lines of an elegy, she describes the positive characteristics of the man she wrote the elegy for. (Rihelah fi al-shi'r al-Yemeni)

Shames al-Hour bent al-Hadi ben `Ali ben al-Murtada'a al-Wazeer (806-894 AH)

Shames al-Wazeer was born 806 AH in Sa`dah. She was famous for being a good reader and for writing letters. Only an elegy for the death of her nephew is left of her poems. (Al-Wajeeh's and Mu`jem al-Nesa'a)

`Afera'a bent `Emarah ben Alasak al-Hamadaniyya al-Yemeniyya

`Afra'a al-Hamadaniyya al-Yemeniyya is known for her love story with her cousin and her poems for him. Nothing of her poems was documented.

Dahma'a bent Yahya ben al-Murtada'a

Dahma'a al-Murtada'a, who belonged to one of the Immamet's families, was well-known as a scholar. She published several books in Religion Science. In the lines of a documented poem, she praises her brother's book describing it as a medicine that can heal people's inner self. Dahma'a was also a teacher and her grave is still known in Tehla'a. (Mu`jem al-Nesa'a and al-Bader al-Tal'e , Vol.1)

Fatemah bent Mohammed ben Ahmed ben al-Hassan

Fatemah bent al-Hassan was a poet whose son was the wali [governor] of Al`odeen in the southern part of Yemen. Documented for her is a poem that was written to the Imam al-Mutawakel, complaining about an employee who did not support her to get the heritage of her mother. Being a descendant of Prophet Mohammed as the Imam is, and having the same name as the daughter of the Prophet Mohammed, she has cleverly used this to evoke the sympathy of the Imam. (Mu`jem al-Nesa'a, Nasheral-`Uref)

Fatemah bent al-Qadi Kamal alddin Mahmmoud ben Shirez al-Henfi (855-?)

Fatemah al-Henfi – known as Sutita – was born in Egypt. Though her name suggests that she was not a Yemeni, al-Shawkani in *Al-Bader al-Tal'e* included her as a Yemeni poet. Her reputation rests on the poems of praising people in authority for she was married to one of the royal family in Cairo, `Ali ben Mohammed Beberas. (*Al-Bader al-Tal'e* Vol. 2)

Ghazala Ahmed `Alwan (Ghazalah al-Maqdashiyya)

Ghazala `Alwan known as Ghazala al-Maqdashiyya, born in the first half of the 19th century, was one of the well-known poets of this period and she has been recorded by several contemporary historians of folk poetry. Like almost all rural folk poets, she did not have any official education and could not read or write. She practiced two kinds of folk poetry: al-Zamel and al-Bala- tribal oral poetry. Ghazala al-Maqdashiyya was not only famous for her poetry but also for the role of her poetry in the politics of her tribe and of her strong and daring personality. She used to be a representative of her tribe as a negotiator to solve critical problems with other tribes. One of the stories that is narrated about her courage as well as about her natural skill of spontaneous zamel was when her tribe of `Ans was facing a critical situation that might have led to a war with another strong tribe, al-Hada'a, because a person of her tribe stole a sheep from the other tribe. The Sheikh of the other tribe went to Ghazala's village reciting a poem addressing her as a representative of the tribe. She in return answered in a poem using the same rhyme of the Sheikh's poem trying to lessen the anger of the Sheikh and giving a solution to the problem by welcoming and apologizing to the Sheikh and promising to give two sheep instead of the stolen one.

She wrote excellent poems in the form of al-Bala. One of her famous Bala was an attack on an official person who came to evaluate the taxes the village should pay and he proposed for her hand in marriage. She criticized him because he said she had to accept his proposal or he would increase the tax. Then addressing men she threatened him saying that she should not be blamed if she slapped him on his head or tied him with the shawl of his `Emameh (a Yemeni traditional scarf that men wear). (Mu`jem al-Nesa'a al-Yemeniyat, *Rihelah fi al-shi'r al-Yemeni*, *Shi'r al `Amiyya fi al-Yemen*, al-Wajeeh's Research).

Hifa'a bent Sabeeh al-Quda`yah

Hifa'a al-Quda`yah was a Yemeni pre-Islamic poet. Of her poems, only two lines of an elegy are documented. They present a skilful poet using language competently. (Mu`jem al-Nesa'a, quoted from Dar al-Manthour and `Alam al-Nesa'a)

Kabeshah bent Ma`ed Yakerub al-Zabidi

Kabesha al-Zabidi from Sa`edah (northern part of Yemen) was a poet who lived during the period of Prophet Mohammed. She wrote different kinds of poems. In one of her

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documented poems, that was written before she became a Muslim, she encourages her brother to take revenge for her other brother's death and not discarding the idea of getting the Diah (money that is given for killing someone by mistake) instead. (Mu`jem al-Nesa'a and al-Wajeeh's research)

Om al-Sareeh al-Kendiyya

Om Sareeh al-Kendiyya was a poet from Hadramout who wrote an elegy about her sons who were killed in a battle. She described – as it was common during her period – the courage and bravery of her sons who refused to run away and found honor in a brave death.

`Osimah bent Zaid al-Nahdiyya

`Osimah al-Hindiyya was a poet who is known for poems in which she expressed her hatred for her husband and her readiness to give up her dowry for her divorce. `Osimah was just one of many early poets who did not hesitate to express publicly her emotions. (Mu`jem al-Nesa'a, quoted from `Alam al-Nesa'a)

Om Hamdah al-Hamdaniyya

Om Hamadah al-Hamdaniyya, from Hamdan as her last name suggests, wrote about the power of love which passes by every one but when it passes by her it stops. Then she presents her topic "love's power" in a dramatic situation imagining that she is complaining about love to a female friend who thinks that she is exaggerating the power of love. She describes how Love's power controls the whole body of a person so that even a person's bones will be shaken by the strength of love. (Mu`jem al-Nesa'a, quoted from Al-Zaherah)

Lila bent Hani ben al-Aswad al-Kendiyya

Lila al-Kendiyya was a poet. Al-Hebeshi recorded three lines of a poem she wrote on the wedding of her daughter. (Mu`jem al-Nesa'a, quoted from `Alam al-Nesa'a and Tareekh Damascus)

Janub al-Nahdiyyah

All that is documented about her is that she was a skillful poet, and one line of a poem in which she is sending a message to her friend, Hatheel, about `Amer who descends from a good family but is wolf-like. (Mu`jem al-Nesa'a.)

Safiyah bent al-Murtada

Safiyah bent al-Murtada was a scholar and a poet. She was so famous for being strong and knowledgeable that an other scholar recommended her to be a perfect Imam if she were a male (Zaidi Sect limits this position to males). She is known for writing literary letters. One of her famous letters was written to her daughter. She published

several books on the Science of Religion. (Mu`jem al-Nesa'a and Nasher al-Uref)

Shames al-Nahar bent Ahmed ben Saba'a ben Abi al-Sa`ood

In the few documented lines of a poem, Shames al-Nahar bent Abi al-Sa`ood expresses her disappointment in her lover who deserts her and leaves his city, Taiz, for Aden. She admonishes him for abandoning her, wondering how he enjoys staying away from his home and how a lover can desert his beloved. The lover stays in Aden replacing the "hooking" of the antelopes of Taiz by the hooking of the beautiful girls of the fishers and shippers of the mountain of "Seera" instead of the mountain of "Saber" that has been the "sultan" throughout the history of Yemen. (Mu`jem al-Nesa'a)

Su`da'a bent al-Shamrdel al-Juhiniyya

Su`da'a bent al-Shamrdel was a pre-Islamic poet. Historians are not certain of her name, finding another name of her as Salma'a bent Makhda'h al-Juhinyia. Only one line of a poem is documented for her, and it is not clear if it is part of an elegy or an eulogy. (Mu`jem al-Nesa'a Al-Yemeniyyat , quoted from Lisan Al-Arab)

Suda Bent `Amara ben al-Asak al-Hamdaniyya al-Yemeniyya

Suda al-Hamdaniyya al-Yemeniyya, who supported `Ali ben AubTaleb against M`wiyya during the battle for Khelapha, visited M`wiyya Ben Abi Sufyan after he became the kheleepha in delegation of her people for a request of removing one of the Khelapha's despotic employees in Yemen. When M`wiyya – the Kheleepha – reminded her with her famous lines in which she encouraged her brother against him (M`wiyya) whom she thought did not deserve the Khelapha, she was not afraid. She frankly told him that `Ali was a just ruler, and she recited two lines of a poem praising Abutilon's justice. In praising her own people, which was common, especially during wars, `Amera bent Zaid ben al-Hareth from Khawlan wrote a poem praising her people to be the best people in their region – "Guda`a" – in different situations. They were of noble origin, the descendents of kings. When they ruled they were just and in war they were strong like lions. In peace they helped their neighbors and were never dictatorial even with their enemies. (Mu`jem Al-Nesa'a quoted from Tareekh Damascus and the unpublished research of al-Wajeeh)

Su`da'a bent al-Shamrdel al-Jahaniyya

Su`da'a or Sama'a al-Jahaniyya, as it is suspected her name to be, was a poet. One line of a poem by her is documented, in which she praises a man, describing him as an influential and effective person. (Mu`jem al-Nesa'a al-Yemeniyyat, quoted from Lisan Al-Arab)

Zakiyya bent Yehiya al-Huthi

Zakiyya bent al-Huthi lived in the 12th Century AH. She was a known scholar and a

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poet. Nothing of her work is documented. (Nasher al-`Uref)

Zaineb bent Mohammed al-Shahariyya

Zaineb al-Shahariyya who lived during the 11th century AH (18th century AD), belonged to the royal family, so she had the opportunity to get a higher education, in a scholarly and political environment, as her grandfather (her mother's father) al-Moyaid Mohammed ben al-Qasem ruled Yemen at that period. Though she was a scholar in the sciences of religion and chemistry, she was well known as a poet. Her work was documented by several general history books that considered her one of the prominent poets of her period. Zaineb was different from the common women of her period and even from women of her class. According to historians, her personality as well as her poetry was the main reason for her failure three times in marriage. She was not "an obedient and oppressed wife" as others were, and she was "too proud" to try to be a partner to her husbands." To her first husband, a prince poet `Ali al-Mutawakel, she wrote her best love poems. In a letter to him she joined beautiful pieces of poems and prose requesting him to forgive her mistakes.

Zaineb al-Shahariyya wrote different kinds of poems: love poems, elegies, muwashah and humaini. In a very well written elegy, she lamented the death of her nephew describing – as was usual – the characteristics of the dead. The elegy ends by reflecting upon death.

Zaineb al-Surdedi

Zaineb al-Surdedi was a poet from Tahamah. She used to write the Humaini poetry in the praise of kings. Al-Hebeshi narrates a story of her visit to one of the sheikhs of Tahama along with other Yemeni poets. The only two documented lines of her poem present a strong Humaini poem.

PART 2: CONTEMPORARY WRITERS

`Azizah `Abd Allah Abu lahum (`Azizh `Abd Allah) (1945-)

`Azizah `Abd Allah Abu Lahum – known as `Azizah A`bd Allah is the second Yemeni novelist after Ramziyya al-Irayni. She was born in Nahem into an open-minded sheikh's family (Abu lahum). On purpose she does not add her well known last name to her books in order to, as she said, "establish her independent fame." Being the wife of a diplomat – Muhsen al-`Ainee – she had the opportunity to visit and live in many Arab and Western countries. Although she did not receive a formal education, she was brought up in a knowledgeable environment. `Azizah `Abd Allah is one of the pioneer women who contributed to the development of the Yemeni women's movement. She participated in establishing the Yemeni Woman Association in the 1970s, and played a prominent role in the Arab Women Council in the United States. Just recently, `Aziza published a novel called `Ures al-Waled [My Father's Wedding]

which narrates the novelist's miserable memories of her father's second marriage.

`Abd Allah, `Azizah (1997) Ahlam...Nabilah. Cairo: al-Madni printer.

- (1998). Taif Walaiyya [Walaiyya's Image]. Sana'a: Dar al-Tawjeeh al-M'anwi.
- (1998). Arkenha Al-Faqeeh [Rely on a Priest] Cairo: al-`Alamiyya.
- (2004). `Ures al-Waled [My Father's wedding] Beirut: Dar al-Nahar.

Amal al-Shami (1956-2001)

Amal al-Shami was born in Sana'a in 1956 into a conservative family of religious judges. In the 1970s, she wrote short stories, plays, songs and journalistic articles, publishing under a variety of pseudonyms. She published a series of three stories under the title "Al-Mutakabbirun" [The Arrogant Ones] in 1984. During this time she also attended various cultural events in Sana'a. However, by the late 1980s after unrelenting family and social pressure, disappointments in her personal life, and frustration with publishing, she burned her library and withdrew from public life. She secluded herself at home and seldom published any more. As a way of rebelling, she wore a velvet sharshaf (the traditional black covering urban women wear outside the home, which is usually made out of a silky synthetic material) but did not veil her face. In 1974 she won the second prize of Sawt Al-Shareq magazine for short stories. Amal's collection of poems has disappeared from the National library and Yemeni Studies Center Library. In my interview with her, she blamed anonymous enemies for the disappearance of her work. She died in 2001 quietly in her fifth floor flat in Sana'a.

Al-Shami, Amal. Bra'ah [Innocence]. Reviewed by Ganawi, Sayd (May 1980) "Dewan Jadeded... Wa Da`wah lelhub." Al-Thawrah. Issue 4076: 5. (A collection of poems).

Some of Amal's published works in Newspaper & magazines:

Al-Shami, Amal. (1977). "Men al'Amaq" [From the Bottom]. Al-Thawrah Issue 3013: 5. (A poem)

- (1977). "Hubana Sagh Younyou" [Our Love Made June]. Al-Thawrah Issue 3026: 5. (A poem under the name of Bent al-shareq)
- (1979). "Al-Lathi Uhabehm" [Those Whom I love]. Al-Thawrah Issue 3758: 5. (A poem)
- (1980). "Laou Ana" [If It Is]. Al-Thawrah Issue 4042: 5. (A poem)
- (1981). "Jareb Hawa Ana" [It is Me]. Sung by Thulathi al-Kawakbani on Kuwait TV.
- (1980). Al-Hulem [The Dream]. A T.V. Drama, Sana'a T.V. Station.

Amnah Yousef (1966-)

Amnah Yousef is a poet and a short-story writer who was born in Saudi Arabia in 1966. She received an Arabic language license from the University of King `Abdu Al-`Aziz in Jeddah in 1990. She now lives in Sana'a, working as a lecturer at Sana'a University. She received a Master's degree in Arabic Literature for her thesis entitled

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“The Technique of Narration in the Yemeni Contemporary Novel”. She is a member of the Yemeni Writers Union and of the Union of Arab Writers in Jordan. Her first creative work was a poem called “Al-Matar” [The Rain]. Interested in criticism, she has published several articles in newspapers which are republished in a book.

- Yusef, Amnah. (1997). Qasa’ed Khawf [Poems of Fear]. lathiqiyya: al-Yemamah.
- (1997). Taqniyat al-Sared fi al-Nadhriyya wa al-Tatbeeq, [Techniques of Narration: Theory and Practice]. Lathiqiyya: Dar-al-Hewar.
 - (2003). Shi’riyyet al-Qissah al-Qaseerah [The Poetic Short-Story in Yemen]. Sana’a: Markez `Obadi and Yemeni Writers Union.

Amat al-`Aleem al-Saosawa (1958-)

Amat al-`Aleem al-Saosawa is one of the four poets who were introduced by Dr. al-Maqaleh in 1973 as the future women poets. But Amat al-`Aleem – who is a pioneer social activist – directed her activities towards media and politics. She was appointed in different government positions, was announcer at Taiz Radio Station, deputy of the Ministry of Media, chairperson of National Women’s Association, ambassador in Netherlands, and minister of Human Rights. Thus literature, or at least publishing literature, has no more place in her busy life. Amat al-`Aleem published several studies about women, such as Women in Numbers, Women and Media. She published a book in English about Democracy entitled “Yemen and the Democracy Experience”.

Al-Saosawa, Amat al-`Aleem. (1973). “Baled al-Tafulah wa al-Batoulah” [The Country of Childhood and Heroism]. Majlet Al-Mustaqbel Issue.3: 121.

Afrah al-Sadiq (1965-)

Afrah Sadiq is a short-story writer who was born in Sana’a. She works at the Yemeni Research and Studies Center. Though Afrah has not finished her university education, she did a lot of self-study. She published a collection of short stories.

Sadiq, Afrah. (1999). `Aresh al-Banat [The Girls’ Throne]. Sana’a: Public Book Authority.

`Afaf `Abd Allah Hussein al-Basheri (1976-)

`Afaf al-Basheri, born in Sana’a in 1976, is a short-story writer who has started writing and publishing in 1994 with her first story “Milad Huriyyah” [Birth of Freedom]. She earned her bachelor degree from Sana’a University in Journalism. She won the second position in `Ali Ahmed Bakatheer’s Festival. `Afaf has published many good stories that have attracted the attention of the literary critics but she has not yet published a book. Since her marriage in 2002, she almost stopped publishing.

Al-Basheeri, `Afaf. (December 1994). "Milad Huriyya" [Birth of Freedom]. September Issue 629-630-631.

- (1996). "Asab`ei" [My Fingers].
- (March 1998). "Eqsoaat" [Mini Short-Stories]. Al-Zaman Al-Londoniyya Issue 31.
- (November 1998). "Qassit Wajeh" [A Story of a Face]. Al-Jamhuriyya Al-Thaqafiyya Issue 10694.
- (May 1997). "Tafel Najla'a" [Najla'a Child]. Mulaheq Al-Thawrah Issue 11874: 8.

`Afaf Saleh al-Hajeri (?)

`Afaf al-Hajeri is a pioneer poet from Hadramout, which is a conservative region compared with other regions in the south. There is no biographical information about her available.

Al-Hajeri, `Afaf. (September 1975). "Thakerayat men al-Madi" [Memroes from the Past]. Al-Shararah Newspaper Issue 171.

Ahlam al-Qabili (?)

Ahlam al-Qabil – born in Taiz – is a poet and a journalist who started lately publishing (2004) articles in newspapers and suddenly published a collection of poems, which presents an interest in national and international political themes. She attacks the corrupted situation in Yemeni government. She also assaults the American and International biased policy against Palestinians.

Al-Qabili, Ahlam. (2003). Kalaam Qabili [Tribal Discourse. Sana'a: Markez `Obadi.]

Amal Saleh ba Dwilan (?)

Amal Saleh ba Dwilan is a pioneer short-story writer from Hadramout. There is not any biographical information about her.

Ba Dwilan, Amal. (January 1979). "Al-Waaled al-Kareem" [The Generous Father]. Al-Sharah Newspaper Issue 210: 6.

Amel al-Laozi (?)

Amel al-Lawzi – born in Sana'a – was a well known poet and journalist in the 1980s. She was very active in social and public life in the 1980s. She was a member of the Women's Association. On the delivery of her first child, she fell sick and died.

Al-Lawzi, Amel. (June 980). "Rabah" [O' God]. Al-Thawrah Issue 4099:5.

`Aliya `Ali Yahiya Fada'el (1973-)

`Aliya Fada'el (born in Sana'a) is a journalist and a short-story writer and has some

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attempts in writing poetry. She is a high school teacher. In 1998 she won the second position of the Literary Club. She has published several short stories and poems in Newspapers but not yet a book.

Fada'el, `Aliya. (August 1998). "Ameerat al-Duma'a" [Princess of Dolls]. Al-Jumhyriyya Al-Thaqafiyya: 6. (A Story)

- November 1998). "Hulem' [Dream] & 'Lahadhat" [Moments]. Mulhaq Al-Thawrah Issue 12413: 6. (Two Stories)
- (December 1998). "Ru'e" [Fear]. Al-Heq Issue 378. (A Story)
- (June 1998). "Nezar" [Nezar]. Al-Jumhuriyya Al-Thaqafiyya Issue 15534: 7. (A Poem)
- (October 1998). "Najmi" [My Star]. Al-Thawrah : 7.

Arwa `Abdo `Othman (1965-)

Arwa `Abdo `Othman is short-story writer who was born in Taiz. Deeply interested in heritage, Arwa is the first Yemeni writer who intensively uses heritage and Yemeni dialect in her stories. She holds a license in Philosophy from Sana'a University. She is a researcher at the Yemeni Research and Studies Center. Her first collection MA Yehdeth fi Belad al-Namis [It Happens in Tanka'a, the Country of Mosquitoes] won the first prize of Al-Shareqah Prize for Creativity 2001.

`Othman, Arwa. (2003). MA Yehdeth fi Belad al-Namis [It Happens in Tanka'a, the Country of Mosquitoes]. Sana'a: Markez `Obadi.

Arwa `Ali (?)

Arwa `Ali is one of the poets who were introduced in the Special File of women's poets in Al-Hikmah but there is no bibliographical information about her.

`Ali, Arwa. (July-September 1997). "Al-Janah" [The Heaven]. Al-Hikmah Issue 206-207: 146.

Arwa Ahmed al-Thahebi (1973-)

Arwa Ahmed al-Thahebi is a poet who was born in Sana'a. She has a BA in Arabic Literature (1994). She works as a teacher in a school. Though Arwa wrote many poems, she has just published some in newspapers and does not yet have a collection.

Al-Thahebi, Arwa. (July-September 1997). "Mujared Thartherah" [Just Talkativeness]. Al-Hikmah Issue 206-207: 177-179. (A poem)

- (1998). "Abeth Anta" [You're Useless]. Al-Wahdawi. Issue 351: 10.

Azhar Mohammed Lutef Fa`e (1971-)

Azhar Fa`e is mainly a poet and has made some attempts in writing short stories. She was born in Sana'a where she still lives and teaches in Sana'a University, Faculty of Languages. She has a license in Arabic Language from Sana'a University, and now she is studying for a MA in Arabic Grammar. Though Azhar has published a great number of poems in several newspapers, she has not yet published a book.

Some of Azhar's Published Work:

- Fa`e, Azhar. (December 1991). "Milad" [Birth]. Al-Balagh Issue 24: 3.
- (December 1993). "La" [No]. Saut Al-Haqiqah Issue 35: 6. (A poem)
 - (November 1996). "Le Sana'a Raeh al-Turab al-Nadi" [For Sana'a the -Wind of Wet Soil]. Al-Soura Issue 256. (A poem)
 - (September 1997). "Qasidataan" [Two Poems]. Al-Thawrah Issue 364: 6. (A poem)
 - (November 1996). "Sanamedi Ya Qal`at al-Tareekh" [Castle of History: We are Going On]. Majalet al-Nour Issue 67: 36-37.
 - (September-October 1997). "Baba Anta Wahesh" [Father: You're a Monster]. Al-Mara'a Issue 22: 11.

Bushra'a al-Maqtari (1978-)

Bushra'a al-Maqtari who was born and lives in Taiz is a short-story writer and journalist and has made some attempts at writing poetry. She has a license in Media and is going to join Ta'iz University as a Teaching Assistant. She has always published in newspapers, and with the choice of Sana'a as the Arab Cultural Capital, she was able to publish a collection of stories with the support of the Yemeni Writers' Union.

Al-Maqtari, Bushra'a. (2003). "Aqasi al-Waj`e" [The Extremist Point of Pain]. Sana'a: Yemeni Writers' Union & Markez `Obadi.

Entisar al-Hareth (1975-)

Entisar al-Hareth is a journalist, a short-story writer and has made some attempts at writing poetry. She lives in Ta'iz where she was born. She has got a license in Sociology from Taiz University. In addition to her work as a journalist, she is a researcher at the Public Water Resources Authority. Though Entisar has published many short-stories and literary thoughts in newspapers, she has not yet published a collection of her stories. Some of Entisar's Works are:

- Al-Hareth, Entisar. (July 1998). "Leqa'a Qaseer ma` `Emlaq" [A Short Meeting with a Giant]. Mulhag Al-Jamuhariyya Al-Thaqafiyya Issue 10453: 15.
- (August 1998). "Astorat al-Qamer al-Hazeen" [The Legend of the Sad Moon]. Mulhag Al-Jamuhariyya Al-Thaqafiyya Issue 10596: 16.
 - (August 1998) "Waghab Kul Shay'I" [Everything Disappears]. Mulhag Al-

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- Jamuhariyya Al-Thaqafiyya Issue 10610: 16.
 – (August 1998). “Hawajes Zawjah Thaniyya” [Thoughts of a Second Wife]. Mulhag Al-Jamuhariyya Al-Thaqafiyya Issue 10589: 15.

`Etidal Deriyya Kheri Mohammed (1948-2003)

`Etidal Deriyya is a short-story writer and a poet who has written several anonymous songs. Some of her work was published under the name of Aminah. She was born in `Aden and lived there. She had a BA in English Literature from `Aden University. She was one of the pioneer women's activists who participated in several activities that enhance women's progress. In the 1980's she founded her own literary Saloon that continued for some time and then stopped. After the Union she worked as a representative of the International Women's Organization in `Aden.

Deriyya, `Etidal. (1992). “Saut men al-Madi” [A Voice from the Past] in Nahlah `Abd-Allah (Ed). (1992). Aswat Nisa'iyya fi al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya [Women's Voices in Yemeni Short Stories]. Sana'a: Dar al-Mufdel: 93-96.

Eftikhar `Abd al-Malek al-Ghasani (1975-)

Eftikhar al-Gasani, born in Sana'a, is a poet. She has a BA in Biology from Sana'a University. She writes modern prose-poems. She worked as a teacher of Sana'a University for three years (1997-1999).

Al-Ghasani, Eftikhar. (2003). Wa Gharateni al-Amani [I was Disillusioned by Wishes]. Sana'a: Markez `Obadi.

Eza Mohammed (?)

Eza Mohammed is one of the four poets who were introduced by Dr. al-Maqaleh in 1973 as the future women poets. But Eza and her other friends did not fulfill expectations. Eza is probably not her real name, for Eza is not a Yemeni name. Moreover, her last name was not given. It is therefore difficult to know her identity.

Mohammed, Eza. (1973). “Fi Taref al-Madinah al-Akher” [At the Other End of the City]. Majlet Al-Mustaqbel Issue.3: 117.

F. Ahmed

F. Ahmed, about whose life we know nothing, is the first Yemeni woman to publish a short story, “Dhalim ya- Mujtama`a.” [Society, You Tyrant] in Saut al-Janub. In the same year she published another story “ Hel Abt`ed `Aneh” [Shall I Leave Him].

Ahmed, F. (1961) “Dhalim ya- Mujtama`a.” [Society, You Tyrant] in Nahlah `Abd-Allah (Ed). (1992). Aswat Nisa'iyya fi al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya [Women's Voices in

Yemeni Short Stories]. Sana'a: Dar al-Mufdhel: 15-31.

Fatemah Saleh al-Shahari (1350 HA-)

Fatemah Saleh al-Shahariyya – was introduced with her collection of poems by Hussein Saleh al-`Ulafi – is a folk-poet writing Humaini poetry. She was born in Shaharah where she got some informal education. When she and her mother came to Sana'a in 1364 AH, she joined a formal school "Al-`Ulafi, to continue her study that she started in her own town but "as a result of the bad schooling because not having enough teachers, she dropped out to do self-study." She worked at sewing, embroidery and teaching young girls. Her Book Bent al-Yemen al-Sa`idah [Happy Daughter of Yemen] is considered the first collection of poetry in the North Yemen after the Revolution of September 1962.

Al-Shahari, Fatemah. (1972). Bent al-Yemen al-Sa`idah [Happy Daughter of Yemen]. Sana'a: no publisher

Fatemah `Ali Fateh al`Eshbi

Fatemah al-`Eshbi, born in Hufash, is one of the early contemporary poets. Being al-Sheikh's daughter (as she announced in her published testimony) Fatemah had to face great difficulties until she convinced her father to let her write poetry. She did not have an opportunity of formal education but she did a lot of self-education. Though she mainly writes folk Humaini poems, she has also made some attempts at writing classic poems.

Al-`Eshbi, Fatemah. (2000). Enha Fatemah [It is Fatemah]. Baghdad: Maktabet Mada'a.

Fatemah al-Taiyb (1955-)

Fatemah al-Taiyb is a poet who was born in a village called Tho'aab, al-Hujariyya. She published a book entitled Etlelet Bent al-Taib [The Emersion of the Daughter of al-Taiyb] that includes some of her poems The short introduction on the cover of he collection says that she has "many children stories and distinguished poems under print.

Al-Taiyb, Fatemah. Etlelet Bent al-Taib [The Emersion of the Daughter of al-Taib]. No Publication Information.

Fatemah Mohammed ben Mohammed (1962-)

Fatemah Mohammed, born in `Aden, is a poet, a journalist and a politician who is one of only two woman members of the Consultative Council, that includes one hundred eleven member. She has a License in Arabic Literature from `Aden University. Moving to live in Sana'a after the Union, she is more involved in politics and almost

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stopped publishing poems in newspapers. She says that she stops publishing poems for she gets more afraid of criticism. Fatemah is one of the early members of the Yemeni Literary Writers Union. In her testimony, published in the Al-Hikmah, Fatemah focused in the difficulties of writing about politics as a woman.

Mohammed, Fatemah (July-September 1997). "Shahadaat" [Testimonies]. Al-Hikmah Issue 206-207: 116-120.

Faten Mohammed (?)

Faten Mohammed is one of the four poets who were introduced by Dr. al-Maqaleh in 1973 as the future women poets. But Faten and her other friends did not fulfill expectations. She did write her last name; thus, it is difficult to know her identity.

Mohammed, Faten. (1973). "Wa Akheeren... Alef Nabtah" [At Last a Thousand of Shoots]. Majlet Al-Mustaqbel Issue 3: 117.

Huda'a al-'Attas (1970-)

She is a short-story writer who was born in Hadramout, Dau'en, and now lives in 'Aden. She won several prizes for her short stories, e.g., Al-'Afeef Cultural Prize in 1997. She works in The Cultural Office and participates in many cultural activities. Huda'a has published numerous social articles in several Yemeni newspapers and has been active in promoting women's issues in Yemen. In 2001, she won a seat, along with Ibtisam al-Mutawakel, at the highest committee of the Yemeni Writers' Union.

Al-'Atas, Huda'a. (1995). Hajes al-Raoh wa Hajes al-Jassed [The Obsession of Soul and Body]. 'Aden: Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

– (2001). La Anha'a [Because She Is]. Sana'a: Moasaset al-'Afif.

Huda'a Ali 'Abdo Ablan (1971-)

Born in Ibb in 1971, Huda'a Ablan graduated from the Faculty of Political Science, Sana'a University in 1993. She lives now in Sana'a where she works as the Head of the Communication Department at the Republic's Presidential Office. She is a member of the Arab Literary Union and the Administrative Director of the Yemeni Literary Writers' Union and also a member of the Yemeni and International Cultural Association and an honorable member at the Cultural and Social Iraqi Literary Union. In 1998 she won the third prize of the Arab Girls' Clubs for Arab Women's Creativity. Huda'a is known for writing prose-poems. She has published four collections of poems.

Abla'an, Huda'a (1997) Neseef Enhana'h [A Half Bow]. Damascus: Dar 'Akrameh.

– (1989) Wurood Shakiet al-Malameh [Miserable-Feature Roses]. Damascus: Dar al-Kateb al-'Arabi.

– (1999) Mohawalet Tathker Mahadeth [Trying to Remember What has Happened].

- Cairo: al-Shreqah Girls' Club.
- (2000) *Ishtimasat [Getting Sunlight]*. al-Daoha: Azmenah.

Hend Hussein Haithem (1987-)

Hend Haiythem is the youngest Yemeni novelist and short-story writer. She is a student in High school. Supported and encouraged by her father, who is a well-known poet and the Chairperson of Yemeni Writers' Union, Hend was able to publish a well-written collection of stories and two novels.

Haiythem, Hend. (2002). *Asheerat al-'Al'ali [The High Mountain Tribe]*. Sana'a: Markez 'Obadi. (A collection of short stories)

- (2003). *Maluk Lesma'a al-Ahlam wa al-Amani [Kings for the Sky of Dreams and Wishes]*. Sana'a: Yemeni Writers' Union & Markez 'Obadi.
- (2004). *Hareb al-Khasheb [The War of Wood]*. Sana'a: Yemeni Writers' Union & Markez 'Obadi

Ibtisam Hussein al-Mutawakel (1970-)

Ibtisam al-Mutawakel is a poet who was born in 1970 in Sana'a. She also published some literary critical articles. She has an Arabic language license. She works as a Teaching Assistant in Sana'a University. She received her M.A. in Arabic Literature from Sana'a University in 2000. She is now in Morocco for her Ph.D. She is a member of the Yemeni Writers' Union and one of the founders of Cultural Women's Gathering (Louqa). In the 2001 Yemeni Writers' Union election, she won a seat at the highest Committee of the Union, which women joined for the first time.

Al-Mutawakel, Ibtisam (1998) *Shatha'a al-Jamer [The Perfume of Embers]*. Sana'a: Public Book Authority.

- (2002). *Yashbeh Moutaha [Similar to Her Death]*. Cairo: Dar Taot.

Mahasen al-Hawati (1969-)

Mahasen al-Hawati is a short-story writer and a journalist who was born in Sudan where her family used to live. She has a High Diploma in Women's Studies from the Empirical Research and Women's Studies Center, Sana'a University. She works at the Ministry of Immigration. She is the chief editor of Al-Waten magazine.

Al-Hawati, Mahasen. (2001). *Al-Hukem 'Ala Zaineb [The Sentence on Zaineb]*. Sana'a: The Short-Story Club and Markez'Obadi.

Maha Naji Yhiya Salaah (1978-)

Maha Naji Salaah (born in 1978 in Sana'a) is a short-story writer who started writing and publishing in 1996. She has also made some attempts at writing poetry. She

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graduated from Sana'a University, Faculty of Commerce, where she was the chief editor of its Newsletter Ebhar. After graduation she found an NGO "Ebhar" that cares about developing Child's Creativity. She is a founding member of the Short-Story Club AL-Maqa.

Salaah, Maha. (September 1997). "Al-Raheel" [The Departure]. *Mulhaq Al-Thawrah: Literature and Art Page*.

- (September 1998). *Emra'ah Behajem Al-Raoh [A Woman in the Size of a Soul]*. Al-Wahdah, Al-Mulhaq Al-Thaqafi.
- (December 1998). "Al-Lauha" [The Painting]. September 26 Issue 834: *Readings in Literature & Art*.
- (July-September 1998). "Al-`Dalah" [Justice]. *Al-Hikmah Issue 211: 145*.
- (July-September 1998). "Tahul" [Transformation]. *Al-Hikmah Issue 211: 145*.

Masek Mohammed Ahemd al-Junaid (1972-)

Masek al-Junaid, born in Taiz where she was raised and lives now, is a poet and a journalist and a human right activist. While she was studying Chemistry and Physics at the University of Taiz, she started publishing a regular column entitled "Afkar Bela Zamen" [Ideas with No Period] at Al-Eslah Newspaper under the pseudonym "Amat al-Salaam." This column includes her early literary attempts. After her graduation in 1994, she started publishing in several Newspapers such as Al-Jamhurriya, Al-Sahwah, Al-Thawrah and Al-Nour Magazine. From 1996-1998 Masek was committed in writing into two regular columns at Al-Thaqfiyyah entitled "Etlalet Shames" [The Rise of a Sun] and "Hames al-Mater" [The Whisper of Rain] in which she has published several poems and literary letters and political and social articles.

Miymona Abo Baker (1948-)

Born in `Aden in 1948 Miymona Abo Baker is the first Yemeni poet who has published a collection of poems in South Yemen. She has a Diploma in Social Sciences and another Diploma in English Language. She has taken special courses on TV direction in Egypt. Now she works as a TV director. She wrote many songs that have been sung by some singers. She has a manuscript collection of poems called "Ahdhan Al-Mwaheb" [Laps of Talents].

Abo Bakr, Mimona (nd.) *Khyout Al-Shafaq [The strings of Afterglow]*. `Aden: Dar Al-Taliyy`a.

Monirah al-Dailami

She is a poet and a journalist in Al-Mar'ah [The Woman] Newspaper. The collection, which has no date, is introduced by two well-known poets `Abd Allah al-Baradunni and `Abd al-`Aziz al-Maqaleh.

Al-Dailami, Moneirah (n.d.) *Tranim Wajed Yemeniyya* [Yemeni Love Music]. Sana'a: Dar-al-Tawajeeh al-Ma'anwi.

Mimonah al-Ahdel (?)

Mimonah al-Ahdel is a poet whose published poem shows competency and good skill in writing poetry, but I could not find any further bibliographical information or works by her.

Al-Ahdel, Mimonah. (September 1997). "Raghwah Mouhesha" [A Gloomy Foam]. *Al-Methaq*, 13.

Nabilah Muhsen al-Zubair

Nabilah al-Zubair is known as a poet. Lately, she has published a successful novel and collection of short-stories. Born in Al-Hejrah village, she now lives in Sana'a. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology. She started to publish poems from the middle 1980s under pseudonyms (A. Z). In 1998 she became a member of the Union of Arabian writers. With some of her fellows who are interested in literature and culture she has established a Cultural Meeting that is held every second Thursday. She has chosen her house to be the place of the meetings. Her first novel "Enaho Jasadi [It is my Body] (2000) won the Najeeb Mahfood's Prize for Novel in 2001. Recently she edits a Newspaper column entitled "Tamasaat" [Tangents] in *Al-Thaqafiyya* Newspaper.

Al-Zubair, Nabilah (1991) *Motowalyat al-Kitheba Al Ra'ey'a* [Succession of the Great Lie]. Damascus: Dar al-Mustaqbel. (Collection of Poems)

- (1997) *Thamet Baher Yawedeni* [There's Sea Returning to Me]. Damascus: Dar Al-Faker. (Collection of Poems)
- (1999) *Mahayia* [Obliteration]. Sana'a: Book Public Authority. (Collection of Poems)
- (2000) *Enho Jasadi* [It's My Body]. Cairo: Qusoor al-Thaqafa Public Association. (Novel)
- (2001) *Tanween al-Gha'eb* [The Third Person Pronoun]. Sana'a: al-Afaq Publishing House. (Collection of Poems)
- (2003) *Raqasat fi al-Sakher* [I Danced in Rock]. Sana'a: Yemeni Literary Writers' Union. (Collection of Poems)
- (2003) *Su'ood ela Fardet Kabreet* [Ascending a Single Matchstick]. Sana'a: Yemeni Literary Writers' Union. (Collection of Short-Story)

Nabilah Hassan Mohammed al-Kebesi (1969-)

Nabilah al-Kebesi, born in Shahrarah in 1969, is a short-story writer, poet and journalist. She has a License in Arabic Literature from Sana'a University. She worked as an

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editor of Al-Mara'a [The Woman] for four years and then published a newspaper called Adam Wa Hawa'a [Adam and Eve] (1999). Nabilah al-Kebesi has published many well-written short stories and poems that have been recommended by different critics, but until now she has refused to publish a book.

Some of Nabilah's works published in newspapers are:

- Al-Kebesi, Nabilah. (July 1996). "Saraabb" [Mirage]. Al-Methaq Issue 703. (A poem)
- (November 1996). "Qalbi Al-Faten" [My Charming Heart]. Al-Mara'a Issue 24.
- (January 1997). "Habibet Sadiqi" [My Friend's Lover]. Al-Thawrah Issue 11742: 7. (A story)
- (December 1997). "Dakhel Al-Dae`rah" [In the Circle]. Al-Wahedah Issue 374. (A poem)
- (December 1997). "Khethalan" [Letting Down]. Al-Wahedah Issue 378: 9. (A short-story)
- (March 1998). "Janhaat Qaleb Mouwood" [Wings of a Buried Heart]. Mulaheq Al-Thawrah Issue 12168. (A short-story)
- (July 1998). "Khamaret Al-Hulem" [The Wine of the Dream]. Mulaheq Al-Jamhuriyya Al-Thaqafiyya Issue 10582: 7. (A poem)
- (July 1998). "Kem Ana Amerah" [How Much I am a Woman]. Mulaheq Al-Jamhuriyya Al-Thaqafiyya Issue 10588: 6. (A poem)
- (August 1998). "Thubabah Bela Anyab" [A Fly without Canine Tooth]. Al-Zaman Issue 90. (A short-story)
- (October 2000). "Makent Aderak" [I Did not Realize]. Mulaheq Al-Thawrah Issue 13116 :7. (A poem)
- (February 2003). "Lus Bajanabi" [A thief Next to Me]. Al-Thawrah Al-Thaqafi Issue 13984:12.

Nabiha `Abd al-Hamid (1948-)

Nabiha `Abd al-Hamid (born in Aden in 1948) published under the pen name Fawziyya `Abd al-Razzaq. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Social Work in Egypt and later went on to do advanced study in Social Science in Moscow. She started publishing in 1963. In 1968 she won the second prize in a youth competition.

`Abd al-Hamid, Nabiha.(1963). "Ummi" [My Mother] in Nahlah `Abd-Allah (Ed). (1992). *Aswat Nisa'iyya fi al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya* [Women's Voices in Yemeni Short Stories]. Sana'a: Dar al-Mufdel: 25-31.

Najeebah Mahmoud `Ali Hadad (1950-)

Najeebah al-Hadad, a children's short-story writer, was born in `Aden, where she lived most of her life, and came to Sana'a after the Union in 1990. She has devoted her creative work and activities to children, winning several prizes such as a prize

from National Child Center in Egypt and Arab Creative Prize. She is chosen as a member out of five in the Arab University Childhood Supporters Committee. Najeebah worked as a manager for children in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in `Aden and then in Sana'a and is now Deputy Minister. She is a member of the Union of Yemeni Literary Writers' Union. Her story "Sareq al-`Asel" [The Thief of Honey] has been translated into four languages. She was the chief editor of Al-Tafoulah [Childhood] Newspaper in 1993. Najeebah has also made some attempts in writing short stories for adults such as her story "Nahayet al-Ahlam [End of Dreams] published in Aswat Nisa'iyya fi al-Qissah al-Yemeniyy [Women's Voices in Yemeni Short Stories].

- Al-Hadad, Najeebah. (1979). Lawen [Color for children]. `Aden: Dar Al Hamdani.
- (1980). Lu`bati [My Doll] `Aden : Dar-al-Hamadani.
 - (1983). Risalet Wadah a-Yemen [Wadah al-Yemen's Message] `Aden: Dar al-Hamadani.
 - (1985). Sareq al-`Asel [The Thief of Honey]. `Aden: Dar al-Hamadani.
 - (1983). Al-`Asfour al-Jareeh [The Injured Bird]. `Aden: Dar al-Hamadani.
 - (1992). "Nahayet al-Ahlam" [The End of Dreams] in Nahlah `Abd-Allah (Ed). (1992). Aswat Nisa'iyya fi al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya [Women's Voices in Yemeni Short Stories].Sana'a: Dar al-Mufdhel: 151-162.

Nadiyah Yahiya Hussein al-Kawkabani (1968-)

Nadiyah al-Kawkabani is a short story-writer who is originally from Kawkaban. She is a teacher at the Faculty of Engineering, Sana'a University. She has an MA in Architecture from Sana'a University and is now going to Egypt for her Ph.D. She is a member of the Women's Culture and Civilizations Dialogue Foundation (Louqa), of the Short-Story Club, and of the Literary Writers' Union. She won the second position in Sua`ad al-Sabah's prize for Literary and Thought Creativity in 2000 and the Yemeni President Prize for Youth in 2001.

Kawkabani, Nadiyah. (2002). Daherjat [Rollings]. Sana'a: Women's Culture and Civilizations Dialogue Foundation (Louqa).

- (2003). Zaferat Yesmin [A Jasmine Sigh]. Sana'a: Public Book Authority.
- (2003). Taqasher Ghim [The Exfoliation of a Fog]. Sana'a: Literary Writers' Union and Markez `Aobadi.

Najla'a Ahmed Mohammed al-`Omari (1974-)

Najla'a al-`Omari (born and living in Taiz) is a journalist, a short story writer and has also made some attempts at writing poetry. She has a BA in Psychology. She started publishing in 1995. In 2002 she won the Cultural Prize of Al-`Afif for her story entitled "Thakerah La Tasheekh" [A Memory Which Never Gets Old] that has been published in a book. In 1995 she used to write a regular column in Al-Jamhurriyya Al-Thaqafiyya entitled "Ana Aufker" [I'm Thinking] in which she published many of

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her works. In 2004, Najla'a – who married two years ago – told me that she almost stopped writing literature and feels that she has to do something more practical. Thus, she joined a training program in English, computer and human rights at the Girls World Communication Center.

Al-`Omari, Najla'a. (September 1995). "Thawarat al-Akhdam" [The Revolution of the Al-Akhdam]. *Jamhurriyya Al-Thaqafiyya* Issue 9557: 2.

- (2001). *Oja'e Benakahet al-Limoun* [Pains with a Lemon Taste]. Sana'a: Markez `Obadi. (A collection of Short-Stories).
- (2002). "Thakerah La Tasheekh" [A Memory which Never Gets Old] in *Al`Afif* Collection of Winning Literary Works]. Sana'a: Al-`Afif.

Naseem Mohammed al-Sarhi (1975-)

Naseem al-Sarhi – a short-story writer – was born and raised in Sana'a into a large middle class family of nine daughters who by the support of their parents gained good education and work in different fields. She is the sister of the short-story writer Salwa al-Sarhi. She has a BA in History from the Faculty of Education, Sana'a University. She has published a collection of short stories *Al-Funjan al-Maqloub* [The Overturned Cup] and is about to publish the second one. Naseem has published numerous social articles in several Yemeni newspapers and has been active in promoting women issues in Yemen.

Al-Sarhi, Naseem. (2002). *Al-Funjan al-Maqloub* [The Overturned Cup]. Sana'a: Al-Maqah Short-Story Club & Markez `Obadi.

Nadera Ahmed al-Salahiyya (1940s-)

Nadera Ahmed al-Salahiyya, born in Yafe` in the early 1940s, is a folk poet. As common women of her generation, she did not have the opportunity of formal education. She learnt how to write and read from her father. Despite of her difficult life of being a widow for two times and have to take care of six children, Nadera accomplished a good position in writing poetry.

Noura Zaile` (?)

There is no bibliographical information. She published a collection of short stories.

Zaile`, Noura. (2001). *Habat Alelola'a* [The Beads of Pearls]. Sana'a: Public Book Authority.

Om Thiyzen Ahmed al-`Aokabi (?)

Om Thiyzen is a short-story writer. She used her son's name.

Al-`Aokabi, Om Thiyzen. (September 1984). "Surah men al-Madi" [A Picture from Past]. Issue 115: 75-85.

Ramziyya al-Iryani (1967-)

Ramziyya al-Iryani was born in Iryan, a district of the governorate of Ibb. She has a license in Philosophy and a Master's degree in Arabic Literature. She is the first novelist in Yemen and the first short-story writer in the North of Yemen. She published a collection of short stories called La'alho Ya'awood [He might come back]. She has participated a great deal in the movement of women and recently was elected chairperson of the Yemeni Women's Union. She has published a book about Yemeni women pioneers. She is one of the few writers who have not stopped writing and publishing.

Al-Iryani, Ramzziya (1970) Dhahiyet Al-Jash'a [The victim of greediness]. Sana'a: Dar al-Qalem.

- (1981) La'alaho Ya'awood [He Might Come Back]. Damascus: Dar al-Mukhtar.
- (1998) Dar al-Saltanah: Qissah Tareekhiyya [The Palace of Sultan: A Historical Novel]. Sana'a: n.p.
- (1998) Al-Qanoon `Aroos [The Wedding of Law]. Sana'a: al-Ofest Printers.
- (1990) Ra'idat Yemeniyat [Pioneer Yemeni Women]. Sana'a: Ministry of Social and Labor Work.

Rayya Ahmed (1978-)

Rayya Ahmed is a poet and a journalist who was born in Sana'a in 1978. She has a Diploma in Computer Programming and is a student at the Faculty of Media, Sana'a University. Rayya is a member of the Short-Story Club, Al-Maqeh. She is very active in establishing an Internet network through which she has attempted to introduce and publish Yemeni literature.

Ahmed, Rayya (2003). Qatrat men Fidah [Drops of Silver]. Sana'a: Public Book Authority.

Raufah Hassan (Amat al-Rauf Hussein al-Sharqi) (1958-)

Raufah Hassan as she has been always known, born in 1958 in Sana'a, is one of the early short-story writers. Her published stories show a great talent in writing, but she did not continue writing and involved herself more in social, women and educational work. She wrote some life stories of her women colleagues and women activists of her generation, but she has not published them as yet. She earned her Bachelor's degree from Cairo University, her Master's degree from the United States, and her Ph.D. from the University of Paris. While still a schoolgirl, she was one of the first Yemeni women to become a radio announcer. She went on to work in television when it first came to Yemen in 1975. Raufah Hassan is one the pioneer activist in women's movement and has played a great role in several women's projects. She was the chairperson of the Empirical Research and Women's Studies Center until its closure in 2000, after an attack against the Center and against her personally.

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Hassan, Raufah. (February 1975). "Hel Hiya Mujared Qassih?" [Is it Only a Story?] Al-Thawrah Issue 2157.

- (December 1980). "Qisses" [Stories] Al-Thawrah Issue 4285: 8.
- (December 1998). "Kalam Akhder" [Green Talk] Al-Thawrah Issue 10: last page.

Salamah `Abd al-Qadir Ba-Matrif (1933-)

Born in Shahir, Hadramout, in 1933, Salamah `Abd al-Qadir Ba-Matrif is one of the pioneer short-story writers. She used to sign the short stories she published in the 1960's with the initials S.`A. B. She only began to use her name in 1998, after she had become a grandmother, by which time she felt that society had come to respect women who publish their work in newspapers.

Ba-Matrif, Salamah. (December 1963). "Men Wara'a al-Nawafeth al-Mughlaqah: al-Mufajah" [From Behind the Closed Windows: The Surprise]. Al-Ra'yi Al-`Aam Issue 25.

Salwa Yahya al-Iryani (1967-)

Salwa Yahya al-Iryani is a short-story writer. She was born in 1967 in Cairo, where her father used to work as an ambassador for Yemen. She has a Bachelor's degree in English literature from Sana'a University. Now she lives in Sana'a. She had first published in newspapers and then she published a collection of stories.

Al-Iryani, Salwa (1992) Lahadat Shajen [A moment of Sadness]. Sana'a:

- (July-august 1997) "Haketha Nahen," [This How We Are]. Al-Thaqafiyyah. Issue 33: 128-145.

Salwa `Abdo al-Qadasi (1973-)

Salwa `Abdo al-Qadasi, born in `Aden, is a poet and a journalist. In her weekly column in Al-Jamhuriyya Al-Thaqafiyya, she published most of her poems. She earned a license in Arabic Literature from Taiz University where she works now. She is a member of the Yemeni Literary Writers' Union and of the Women's Union.

Some of Salwa's works are:

Al-Qadasi, Salwa. (July-September 1997). "Aliaka Wa Hadel" [To You Only]. Al-Hikmah Issue 206-207: 171.

- (August 1997). "Eda'h" [Enlightment]. Al-Jamhuriyya-Al-Thaqafiyya: Last page.
- (August 1997). "Lel Mahjel Wa al-Shajen" [For Sadness and Mahjel (a farm song)]. Al-Jamhuriyya-Al-Thaqafiyya: last page.
- (September 1997). "Men Aqsa'a Al-Jurh Ela..." [From the Bottom of the Wound To...]. Al-Jamhuriyya-Al-Thaqafiyya: last page.

Salwa Mohammed al-Sarhi (1973)

Salwa al-Sarhi (born in Sana'a in 1973) is a short-story writer, who has published many stories in newspapers since late 1980s and the beginning of 1990s. Salwa started writing and publishing travel literature at the age of 13. Her publication in the Al-Thawara newspaper included travel literature, more than 20 short sorties, 4 novellas, and many social and social-criticism articles. Salwa has BA in English Literature from Sana'a University, and earned a Fulbright scholarship to the US to do her MA in American Literature at Colorado State University. Upon her return in 1998, Salwa published some articles in the English newspapers Yemen Times and Yemen Observer. However, since 1999 she has not published any literature. Currently Salwa is working as a program officer at the Public Affairs Section at the American Embassy, Sana'a.

Some of Salwa's work published in Al-Thawrah newspapers are:

- Al-Sarhi, Salwa. (July 16-29, 1985). Al-Hait Aqdar. [Life is a Destiny]. Al-Thawrah. (Short Novel published in series)
- (Sep 9-27, 1986). Entsar al-Amal [The Victory of Hopes]. Al-Thawrah. (Short Novel published in series)
 - (23-25-26 October 1987). "Rehalah Ela `Otmah" [A Journey to `Otmah]. Al-Thawrah: 7.
 - (Jan 22-March 20, 1988) Sera Maa Al-Hait Al-Thawrah. (Short novel)
 - (26 March 1989). "Akhbaar Lel Bae`e" [News for Sale]. Al-Thawrah.
 - (3 April 1989). "Dukan Lel Alem" [Pain Shop]. Al-Thawrah.
 - (31 July 1989). "Yomiyat Waleed" [Dairy of an Infant]. Al-Thawrah.
 - (2 August 1989). "Al-Kafen al-Abayed" [The White Coffin]. Al-Thawrah.
 - (3 September 1993). "Fuqa`at Baher" [A Sea Bubble]. Al-Thawrah.
 - (5 June 1998). "Mahrajan al-Sama'a" [The Festival of the Sky]. Al-Thawrah.

Sameerah `Abdo `Ali (1959-)

Sameerah `Abdo `Ali was born and raised in `Aden. After the Union in 1990 she moved to Sana'a to work as a director at the Yemeni Satellite Channel. Sameerah is a pioneer short-story and play writer. She received a MA in with Honor in Direction and Painting cartoon films and cinema fiction from the FGK Cinema & Photography Academy, Moscow 1986. She was awarded a Diploma for the best Political Caricature from the former USSR in 1980, and the Golden Prize of the Fourth Radio and Television Festival for the program "Arts and Handicraft" from Cairo, 1998. In 2003, she was awarded for her film "Al-Muhamiya" [The Female Lawyer] by the Cairo TV and Film Festival. Some of Sameerah's plays have been presented on the stage such as "Al-Sandooq" [The Box] in 1989 and "Al-Mushakelah wa al-Hel" [The Problem and the Solution] – the first puppet play in Sana'a. Sameerah also produced children cartoons, which were presented at the Yemeni Satellite Channel.

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`Ali, Sameerah. (July-September 1997). "Madinet al-Gherban" [The city of Crows] Al-Hikmah Issue 207-206: 1156-159.
– (1982). Al-Sheikh al-Hakim [The Wise Sheikh]. `Aden: Dar-al-Hamdani.

Samah Nasser Musleh al-Shaghderi (1979-)

Samah al-Shaghderi – born and raised in Sana'a – is a folk-poet. She writes the singing Humaini poems, which she published and presented on different occasions. Samah works at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. After she got a Diploma in Secretary in 2001, she decided to join the University and do a BA in Literature and Philosophy. Samah is an active member of several civil society organizations. She is a member of Amnesty, of the Handicapped Association, a founding member of Louqa and a member of the Yemeni Youth Union.

Al-Shaghderi, Samah. (2204). "Zaherat al-Mas" [The Pearl's Flower]. Sana'a: Ministry of Culture & Tourism.

Shafiqah Ahmed al-Zuqari (1942-)

Shafiqah al-Zuqari is a pioneer short-story writer who was born into a cultured family in `Aden in 1942. Her stories were read on the radio in `Aden. She won a youth competition in `Aden. She published two collections of short stories: Nabdat Quleb [Beating Hearts] in the 1960s and Dallah Ukhra [Another Loss] in the 1970s. She has a special interest in children's literature.

Al-Zuqari, Shafiqah (1970) Nabdat Qulub [Beating Hearts]. Beirut:
– (1977) Herman Dallah Okhra [Deprivation of Another Desire]. Beirut:

Shefa'a Munaser (1961-)

Shefa'a Munaser, born in Lahej in 1960, is one of the pioneer short-story writers and a journalist. She has also made some attempts at writing poetry. She has a License in Philosophy. She started publishing in 1982. She works as an editor for the 14 October Newspaper. She has participated on TV and Radio programs. Recently she has been attempting to write a novel.

Munaser, Shefa'a. (July-September 1997). "Al-Kamash" [The Pincer]. Issue 206-207: 143-145.

– (1992) "Al-Nafourah" [The Fountain]. Nahlah `Abd-Allah (Ed). Aswat Nisa'iyya fi al-Qissah al-Yemeniyya [Women's Voices in Yemeni Short Stories]. Sana'a: Dar al-Mufdhel: 125-138.

Thurayya Manqush (1948-)

Born in Aden in 1948, Thurayya Manqush graduated from Damascus University

and was active in the intellectual, political, and cultural life in the South. Along with the poets `Abd al-`Aziz Al-Maqaleh, Mohammed Sa`id Jaradah and `Abd-Allah al-Baradduni, she won the Arts Medal presented by President `Ali Nasir in 1980. She also received the Women's Medal from the Women's Union in 1983 and the Liberation Medal from the president `Ali `Abd-Allah Salih in 1997. She now teaches at `Aden University. Though Thurayya was one of the pioneer short-story writers and her published story "Mata Tuftah al-Abwab?" [When Will the Gates be Opened?] shows a talent in writing stories, she is more interested in writing books about history and philosophy.

Manqush, Thurayya. (February 1972). "Mata Tuftah al-Abwab?" [When Will the Gates be Opened]. Al-Hikmah Issue 10: 69-76

Wedad al `Aqel

Wedad al-`Aqel is poet. Her published collection of poems `Ala Jedar al-Samt [On the Wall of Silence] does not include any information about her. She dedicates her collection to her father.

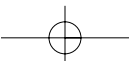
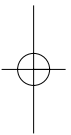
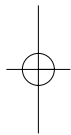
Al-`Aqel , Wedad. `Ala Jedar al-Samt [On the Wall of Silence]. (No Publication data).

Zahrah Rahmat Allah (1954-)

Zahrah Rahmat Allah is a short-story writer who was born in `Aden. With a bachelor's degree in English literature from `Aden University, she has worked as an editor at Sheba news agency and as a chief editor for the feminist magazine that belongs to the Yemeni Women's Union. She has published many stories in Yemeni magazines and newspapers.

Rahmet Allah, Zaherah. (1994). Bidayyah Okhra [Another Beginning]. Sana'a: Dar-Al-Hikmah.

– (2003) La Lel Rijal [No for Men]. Sana'a: Ministry of Culture.



Appendix 2

Transliteration Note

In cases where I have found it necessary to transliterate vocabulary, names, or titles from the Arabic, I have followed a modified version of transliteration from the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies.

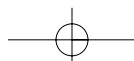
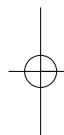
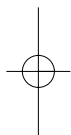
VOWELS

I have not distinguished between long vowels and short vowels. Semivowels: ay or ai corresponds to the ya or (ي) sound in Arabic; iyy corresponds to the doubled (ي) or ya followed by ta marbuta sounds in Arabic; w corresponds to the waw (و) sound in Arabic. i corresponds to the final Nisbah.

CONSONANTS

‘ hamza

b	ب	t	ط
t	ت		
th	ث	`	ع
j	ج	gh	غ
h	ح ه	f	ف
kh	خ	q	ق
d	ض د	k	ك
dh	ظ ذ	l	ل
r	ر	m	م
z	ز	n	ن
s	ص س	y	ي
sh	ش	w	و



Summary

In this dissertation, entitled “Gender and the Writing of Yemeni Women Writers”, it was my aim to discover the contextual reasons for the absence and neglect of women writers in Yemeni literary history books. A country that has been ruled by two outstanding queens in two totally different periods, the pre-Islamic period and the post-Islamic period, could not have been without some prominent women poets. Adopting the hypothesis that the compilers of literary history books probably ignored women writers, and that Yemeni social history has not always been in favour of women, who have had to face backward social ideologies that have led to the restriction of women to limited socially constructed roles and responsibilities, and to narrow definitions of the relations between men and women, I directed my study to answer the following questions: are there Yemeni women writers? If there were, as one would expect, how and why these women writers came to be neglected? What influence does gender have on the lives and works of Yemeni women writers? An additional aim of this study was to restore women’s corpus of texts, names, and lives. With a concern for the particularities of each nation and culture, describing differences in cultures, and creating a new idiom to express similarities and common ground, I also aimed to relate this study to the theories and discussions of international women’s studies. Thus, the approach of gender as an analytical tool with a concern for issues that affect the writing and reading of texts, and Virginia Woolf’s approach in *A Room of One’s Own*, were chosen as the appropriate theoretical framework to do justice to the Arab-Yemeni cultural particularities. The study is divided into six chapters and a conclusion.

In Chapter One, the Introduction, a concise review is given of the social and cultural situation of Yemeni women and the historical and contemporary contexts which have influenced women writers and are in turn influenced by them. Women’s status in Yemeni society has very contradictory manifestations. Women have been accepted and respected as queens when circumstances made it necessary or when their authority imposed this, but did never mean that the traditional backward culture that treated women as inferior to the point of not acknowledging them as human beings totally

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disappeared. A woman is sometimes seen as a possession in Yemen, a commodity like an animal, land, or any other property of a man. Even today, most Yemeni women do not have the freedom to choose their husbands, and a woman is not an independent entity in the family but must be under the custody of a male relative: her father, brother, or husband. During the Turkish colonization of Yemen (1849-1918), women in urban areas disappeared, adopting the harem castle culture in which women were detached from public life and were limited in their household activities. This continued during the most of the period of the al-Mutawakeliyya Kingdom (1918-1962). Since the 1940s however, Yemen has been exposed to the new forces of the twentieth century. Issues of women's education, women's hijab (veiling), and women's political participation started to be raised in the newspapers. Women have recently gained several rights in different fields of life. Women are now visible in public life. Nevertheless, the progress of women is still slow and a stronger will of authority and society is needed to encourage them to move forward. The high percentage of illiteracy among women (71%), the backward amendments in Personal Status Law, and the absence of women in decision-making positions indicate the patriarchal heritage of biased ideologies against women. The great opposition to the Empirical Research and Women's Studies Center can be regarded as a telling symptom of the current backlash.

In Chapter Two, the four basic theoretical debates that form the background of this thesis and determine the point of view in this work are expounded. This chapter introduces the concept of gender developed mainly as an analytical tool in the West, looks at gender in Islam and the construction of gender in the Arab world, particularly in Yemen. It discusses feminism and its various debates and the relation of gender and feminism to literary criticism, in particular, the impact of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. In the West, the term gender as a theoretical concept – which was introduced by John Money and Robert Stoller – has been the subject of long discussions and studies by the feminist movement. In this dissertation, I adopted Joan Scott's definition of gender, as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.” Though the term “gender” emerged in the Arab countries within the context of development projects, and was emphasized by the foundation of academic women's studies in some countries and at different times, it is misunderstood, particularly in Yemen, and Women's Studies is still in its early stages. Virginia Woolf's approach to women's writings in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) is an eminently applicable and suitable thematic and formal set of ideas to be used as a framework in investigating at Yemeni women's writings. She showed how the representation of female experience in literary form is gendered. I adopted Virginia Woolf's three main stages for the investigation into women's writings: (i) Revision; (ii) Recovering a Female Tradition; and (iii) Rewriting History. It is not possible to begin rewriting history in the manner suggested by Virginia Woolf at this

early stage because Yemeni women writers need first to be known and included in the mainstream of the literary canon. I am still answering the question asked even by educated people: are there any Yemeni women writers? Thus, in rewriting Yemeni literary history, I could only fill the gaps where women were lost and neglected.

My aim in Chapter Three was to re-position women writers in Yemeni literary history in the three main current genres: poetry, the short story, and the novel. I reviewed the position of women writers as depicted in the major contemporary Yemeni literary history books. I give an overview of women's contribution to the three genres which required a tireless search among Yemeni books and newspapers. I also received information directly from the Yemeni writers themselves. In reviewing the main recent Yemeni literary history books, I noticed that women writers have not taken their proper place in literary history. They are either neglected or marginalized. Even in the old history books, where some famous women are documented, there is not enough information about women writers and their work; the writers' biographies are full of information about their male relatives: a father, a brother, or a husband. In poetry, which is a basic part of Arab and Yemeni literature, there have been contributions by women poets in all periods except the Renaissance and Post Revolutionary period. This sterile period needs to be researched again, particularly in private libraries. The first short story written by a woman appeared three decades after the first short story written by a male writer, in the thirties. The first story by a woman writer presents the same level of excellence in its period. Women writers employed a realistic mode, which was the mode of men's writing at the time, as well. Contemporary women short story writers use different techniques of narration but the vivid and rich reality of Yemeni society continues to be a source of topics and themes. The novel is a comparatively new genre that was introduced to the Arab world in the 20th century. In Yemen, the novel comes after poetry and the short story in production and publishing. About forty novels have been published so far. Despite the fact that there are only three women novelists in the literary history of Yemen, women's contribution is integral to the development of the novel.

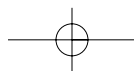
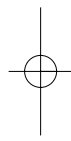
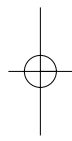
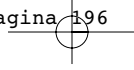
In Chapter Four, I am examining in detail some of the works of the first women short story writers in Yemen. The pioneering female short story writers, belonging to the newly educated urban class, present a good example of how Yemeni women writers have returned to the literary field after a period of total silence, and address issues important to women. When women write short stories about women, not only is it a way of revealing what is considered to be 'awra', or to be hidden, but it is a revolutionary act that liberates the writer and ends the imprisonment of "the age of the harim." Yemeni women writers used short stories as a means to self-liberation. The protagonists of all of the stories I have dealt with are women with only one exception. All the writers show concern for women's issues that were long absent from print. In the stories presented in this chapter, liberation is achieved at different levels: the levels of the individual, society, and state.

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Chapters Five and Six report an investigation of how gender has affected the lives of Yemeni women writers and their creative processes. This was achieved through a field research conducted by distributing questionnaires among twenty-eight Yemeni women writers in different cities in Yemen, and by holding interviews with seven women writers and writing down the life story of one of the writers. The results of the questionnaire confirmed my hypothesis that gender has a great impact on Yemeni writers' processes of writing at four levels: (1) symbols, (2) norms, (3) the level of social institutions and organizations and finally (4) subjective identity. Though women have overcome the constraints of lack of education, and many have already obtained decent levels of education, they still face other difficulties. Despite the general expectation that there should be more poets than prose writers because poetry has a prominent place in Arabic literature, the number of women short story writers exceeds the number of women poets. The explanation may be that Yemeni women writers find more space in prose for self-expression hiding behind a character to escape social criticism. Being females, women writers are not allowed to write in all literary genres and on all themes. Women writers avoid writing songs, in particular, love songs, and if they do, they do not reveal their names. Yemeni women writers face constraints from different organizations: family, marriage, state, and press. The constraints created by their own families limit their daily life and future plans. Whereas marriage for Yemeni men writers sometimes provides support, for women writers it is a great constraint. Women writers can not deal with the heavy duties of marriage, which in Yemen requires a complete self-sacrifice and submission. Political authorities, whether the state or the opposition parties, conservative or liberal, do not accept women's political writings, and women writers have to consider the consequences of their participation, for – unlike men – they have to face lasting social criticism. Social norms evaluate men's political struggle highly, considering imprisonment as an honour, for men, but for a woman imprisonment is a shame that can never be eradicated. Women's political writings are not taken seriously and women are requested by varied cultural organizations to limit their literary participation to women's and family subjects. In publication and criticism, Yemeni women face the same constraint: a lack of seriousness and blind encouragement in dealing with their works. Publishers have started using women's work as a commercial item either to attract readers or to show an exaggerated change in the attitudes of society. Yemeni social norms concerning women are integrated in all the constraints Yemeni women writers have to confront. With some changes in the social norms as a result of the development of society, many writers have started to publish under their real names. But it seems that the impact of social norms is not only felt from outside; they have become part of the women writers' identities, evident in strict self-censorship that deeply affect their process of writings. To overcome this self-censorship, courage and great sacrifice is required. Such an attempt can be seen in Nabilah al-Zubair's latest work, published in 2003.

In the Conclusion, I summarize, highlight, and interpret the points raised in the previous chapters of this dissertation. Critically reflecting upon my own work, I have emphasized that my dissertation is the first academic dissertation on this subject, and is based primarily on published books, Yemeni magazines and newspapers, a questionnaire, and personal interviews with Yemeni women writers. I have underscored the limitation that I found very little material by women writers in the long Renaissance and Revolutionary period (1930s-1970s). Despite the constricting factors which women faced, such as conservatism and illiteracy, women must have expressed themselves also during this long period. Future researchers will have to gain access to the personal libraries of individuals in their search for any published works and unpublished manuscripts.

The picture I have presented of women and women writers in Yemen is a dark one, but I have ended my dissertation with a ray of hope. With the spread of college education among girls, the women writers of the future will gain greater self-confidence and will overcome the gender restrictions which stand in the way of self-expression and publication of their works. Their relatives, friends, and their country will be proud of their self-reliant, intelligent voice, ONE DAY.



Samenvatting

In dit proefschrift, getiteld “Gender and the Writing of Yemeni Women Writers”, had ik als doel het ontdekken van de redenen voor de afwezigheid en het negeren van vrouwelijke auteurs in de Jemenitische literatuurgeschiedenis. Het kan toch niet zo zijn dat een land dat ooit, in twee totaal verschillende tijdvakken (de pre-islamitische en de postislamitische periode) geregeerd werd door twee uitnemende koninginnen, geen enkele prominente vrouwelijke auteur heeft voortgebracht? Ik ben uitgegaan van de hypothese dat de samenstellers van literatuurgeschiedenisboeken vrouwelijke auteurs waarschijnlijk genegeerd hebben, en dat de sociale geschiedenis van Jemen ook niet altijd in het voordeel is geweest van vrouwen, die geconfronteerd werden met conservatieve sociale opvattingen die maakten dat zij beperkt werden tot het vervullen van afgebakende, sociaal geconstrueerde rollen en verantwoordelijkheden, en dat de relaties tussen mannen en vrouwen nauw gedefinieerd werden. Ik heb mijn onderzoek gericht op het beantwoorden van de volgende vragen: zijn er vrouwelijke Jemenitische schrijvers? En als ze er zijn, zoals verwacht mag worden, hoe en waarom werden deze schrijfsters dan genegeerd? Ik heb onderzocht welke invloed gender heeft op het leven en het werk van hedendaagse schrijfsters uit Jemen.

Een ander doel van deze studie was het aanvullen van het corpus van teksten, namen en levensbeschrijvingen van vrouwelijke auteurs. Ik had tevens als doel om deze studie in verband te brengen met de theorieën en discussies binnen internationale vrouwenstudies, met inachtneming van de bijzonderheden van elke natie en cultuur, en met aandacht voor het beschrijven van culturele verschillen en voor het scheppen van nieuw idioom om overeenkomsten te omschrijven. De benadering waarin gender als analytisch instrument wordt beschouwd, met aandacht voor zaken die het schrijven en lezen van teksten beïnvloeden, en de benadering van Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, zijn gekozen als het passende theoretische raamwerk om de culturele eigenaardigheden van Jemen recht te doen.

Deze dissertatie bestaat uit zes hoofdstukken en een conclusie. In hoofdstuk I, de

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introdactie, wordt een overzicht gepresenteerd van de sociale en culturele situatie van Jemenitische vrouwen, en van de historische en hedendaagse context die van invloed is op vrouwelijke auteurs en die zelf ook door hen wordt beïnvloed. De status van vrouwen in de maatschappij in Jemen kent twee tegenstrijdige aspecten. Vrouwen werden geaccepteerd en gerespecteerd als koninginnen, in tijden waarin de omstandigheden dat noodzakelijk maakten of als hun autoriteit dit onontkoombaar maakte. Dat wil echter niet zeggen dat vrouwen op andere plaatsen in de maatschappij geen achtergestelde positie innamen, waarbij vrouwen als minderwaardig werden behandeld of zelfs niet erkend werden als menselijke wezens. Soms wordt een vrouw gezien als een bezit, als koopwaar net zoals een dier, land of andere bezit van een man. Zelfs tegenwoordig hebben de meeste vrouwen in Jemen niet de vrijheid zelf een echtgenoot te kiezen, en een vrouw is geen onafhankelijke entiteit binnen de familie maar dient onder toezicht te staan van een mannelijk familielid: haar vader, broer of echtgenoot. Tijdens de Turkse kolonisatie van Jemen (1849-1918) verdwenen de vrouwen in stedelijke gebieden, en werd de harem cultuur ingevoerd waarin vrouwen werden geïsoleerd van het openbare leven en beperkt werden in hun huishoudelijke activiteiten. Dit bleef zo tijdens het grootste deel van het al-Mutawakiliyya Koninkrijk (1918-1962). Sinds de jaren '40 werd echter ook Jemen blootgesteld aan de nieuwe krachten van de twintigste eeuw. Discussies over onderwerpen als onderwijs voor vrouwen, de sluier, en deelname door vrouwen aan de politiek, werden in de kranten ontketend. Vrouwen hebben recentelijk diverse rechten verworven op verschillende gebieden. Vrouwen worden nu gezien in het openbare leven. Toch gaat de vooruitgang van vrouwen nog steeds langzaam, daarom is een sterkere wil nodig van de autoriteiten en de maatschappij om hen aan te moedigen vooruit te komen. Het hoge percentage analfabetisme onder vrouwen (71%), de uitgestelde verbeteringen in het familierecht, de sterke oppositie tegen het Centrum voor Empirisch Onderzoek en Vrouwenstudies, en het ontbreken van vrouwen op besluitvormingsposities, wijzen op de patriarchale erfenis van bevooroordeelde opvattingen over vrouwen.

In hoofdstuk twee worden de vier theoretische debatten uiteengezet die de achtergrond vormen van dit onderzoek, en tevens het gezichtspunt ervan bepalen. Het hoofdstuk introduceert het concept gender, dat voornamelijk als analytisch instrument in de westerse wereld is ontwikkeld, bestudeert gender in de Islam en de ontwikkeling van gender in de Arabische wereld, met name in Jemen. Daarnaast wordt feminisme en de verschillende debatten daarin besproken, evenals de relatie tussen gender en feminisme enerzijds en literatuurkritiek anderzijds, met name de impact van *A Room of One's Own* van Virginia Woolf. In het westen was de term gender als theoretisch concept, dat is geïntroduceerd door Money en Stoller, lang onderwerp van discussie en onderzoek door de feministische beweging. In deze dissertatie heb ik Joan Scott's definitie van gender overgenomen, als "een basiselement van sociale verhoudingen, gebaseerd op waargenomen sekseverschillen; gender is een primaire manier waardoor

machtsrelaties betekenis krijgen.” Hoewel de term gender in Arabische landen opkwam in de context van ontwikkelingsprojecten, en in de belangstelling kwam door de stichting van universitaire vrouwenstudies in sommige landen op verschillende tijdstippen, wordt de term niet begrepen, vooral niet in Jemen, en verkeert vrouwenstudies er nog in een beginstadium. Virginia Woolf’s benadering van het schrijven door vrouwen in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), is een zeer toepasselijke en passende thematische en formele techniek om te gebruiken als raamwerk om het werk van vrouwelijke auteurs uit Jemen te onderzoeken. Zij liet zien hoe “de representatie van vrouwelijke ervaring in literaire vorm genderspecifiek is”. Ik heb Virginia Woolf’s drie belangrijkste stappen in het onderzoek naar geschriften van vrouwen te onderzoeken overgenomen: 1) revisie; 2) ontdekken van een vrouwelijke traditie; en 3) herschrijven van de geschiedenis. Het is echter in dit beginstadium niet mogelijk de geschiedenis te herschrijven op de manier die Woolf voorstelde omdat Jemenitische schrijfsters eerst bekend moeten worden en worden opgenomen in de literaire canon. Ik moet nog steeds de vraag beantwoorden die zelfs gesteld wordt door goed opgeleide mensen: bestaan er wel Jemenitische schrijfsters? Bij het herschrijven van de literatuurgeschiedenis van Jemen kon ik dus alleen maar de gaten invullen waarin vrouwen werden genegeerd of verloren waren gegaan.

Mijn doel in hoofdstuk drie was schrijfsters uit de literatuurgeschiedenis van Jemen te herpositioneren en in te delen in de hedendaagse hoofdgenres in de literatuur: poëzie, het korte verhaal en de roman. Ik geef een overzicht van de positie van vrouwen zoals die wordt beschreven in de belangrijkste huidige Jemenitische literatuurgeschiedenisboeken. Ik heb een overzicht gegeven van de bijdrage van vrouwen aan de drie genres, wat een zoektocht door de Jemenitische boeken en kranten vereiste. Daarnaast heb ik rechtstreeks informatie ontvangen van de schrijfsters zelf. Bij het maken van een overzicht van de belangrijkste literatuurgeschiedenisboeken, viel mij op dat schrijfsters niet de plaats innemen die ze toekomt. Ze worden ofwel genegeerd ofwel gemarginaliseerd. Zelfs in de oude geschiedenisboeken, waarin sommige beroemde vrouwen zijn gedocumenteerd, stond niet genoeg informatie over de schrijfsters en hun werk; hun bibliografieën stonden vol met informatie over hun mannelijke familieleden; vaders, broers of echtgenoten.

Op het gebied van de poëzie, die een fundamenteel onderdeel vormt van de Arabische en Jemenitische literatuur, hebben vrouwen altijd bijdragen geleverd, behalve in de Renaissance en in de Postrevolutionaire tijd. Deze steriele periodes moeten opnieuw aan onderzoek worden onderworpen, vooral in privé-bibliotheken.

Het eerste door een vrouw geschreven korte verhaal werd drie decennia na het eerste door een man geschreven korte verhaal gepubliceerd, in de dertiger jaren. Dit eerste verhaal van een vrouwelijke auteur is van hetzelfde niveau als gebruikelijk in die periode. Vrouwelijke schrijvers gebruikten een realistische stijl, dezelfde stijl als die van mannen toentertijd. Hedendaagse schrijfsters van korte verhalen gebruiken

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verschillende verteltechnieken maar de levendige en rijke realiteit van de Jemenitische samenleving is nog steeds een bron van onderwerpen en thema's.

De roman is een relatief nieuw genre dat in de Arabische wereld werd geïntroduceerd in de twintigste eeuw. In Jemen wordt de roman na poëzie en het korte verhaal het meest geproduceerd en gepubliceerd. Tot nu toe zijn ongeveer veertig romans verschenen. Hoewel er maar drie vrouwelijke romanschrijfsters zijn in de literatuurgeschiedenis van Jemen, vormt dit een volwaardige bijdrage van vrouwen aan de ontwikkeling van de roman.

In hoofdstuk vier heb ik een aantal werken van de eerste korte-verhalen schrijfsters in Jemen gedetailleerd bekeken. De pioniers op dit gebied, die behoren tot de recent opgeleide, stedelijke klasse, geven een goed voorbeeld van de manier waarop Jemenitische vrouwen zijn teruggekeerd in de literatuur na een periode van totale stilte, en behandelen onderwerpen die belangrijk zijn voor vrouwen. Als vrouwen korte verhalen schrijven over vrouwen, is dat niet alleen een manier om te onthullen wat *'awra*, taboe, of weggestopt was, maar het is tevens een revolutionaire daad die de schrijfster bevrijdt en een einde maakt aan de gevangenschap van "de eeuw van de harem". Jemenitische schrijfsters gebruikten korte verhalen als middel tot zelfbevrijding. De hoofdpersonen in al de verhalen die ik behandeld heb waren vrouwen, op één uitzondering na. Alle schrijfsters tonen belangstelling voor vrouwenzaken waarover lang niets in druk was verschenen. In elk verhaal dat in het hoofdstuk wordt gepresenteerd wordt bevrijding bereikt op een aantal niveaus: het niveau van het individu, de samenleving en de staat.

De hoofdstukken vijf en zes doen verslag van een onderzoek naar de manier waarop gender de levens van Jemenitische schrijfsters en hun creatieve processen beïnvloedt. Informatie is verzameld door middel van veldonderzoek, bestaande uit het verspreiden van vragenlijsten onder achtentwintig schrijfsters uit verschillende steden in Jemen, het houden van interviews met zeven schrijfsters, en door het levensverhaal van één schrijfster vast te leggen (in hoofdstuk 6). De resultaten van de vragenlijst bevestigen mijn hypothese dat gender van grote invloed is op de schrijfprocessen van Jemenitische vrouwelijke auteurs, op vier niveaus: dat van het individu, de organisatie, normen, en subjectieve identiteit. Hoewel vrouwen onderwijsbeperkingen te boven zijn gekomen en velen inmiddels een behoorlijk opleidingsniveau hebben bereikt, hebben ze nog steeds te maken met ander problemen. Ondanks de verwachting dat er meer dichters dan prozaschrijfsters zouden zijn omdat poëzie een prominente plaats inneemt in de Arabische literatuur, zijn er meer schrijfsters van korte verhalen dan dichters. De verklaring hiervoor zou kunnen zijn dat schrijfsters in proza meer ruimte voor zelfexpressie hebben, omdat ze zich kunnen verschuilen achter een fictief karakter om zo kritiek te vermijden. Vrouwelijke schrijfsters mogen niet schrijven in elk genre en over elk thema. Zij vermijden het schrijven van liedjes,

met name liefdesliedjes, en als ze het wel doen, doen ze dat niet onder hun eigen naam.

Jemenitische schrijfsters hebben vanuit verschillende instituties te maken met tegenwerking: vanuit de familie, het huwelijk, de staat en de pers. De beperkingen die opgelegd worden door hun eigen familie begrenzen hun dagelijks leven en hun toekomstplannen. Waar het huwelijk voor mannelijke schrijvers soms steun biedt, is het voor vrouwen juist vaak een moeilijk obstakel. Vrouwelijke auteurs kunnen niet omgaan met de zware verplichtingen van het huwelijk, dat in Jemen totale zelfopoffering en onderdanigheid vereist. Politieke autoriteiten, of het nou de regerende partijen of de oppositiepartijen zijn, conservatief of liberaal, accepteren geen politieke geschriften van vrouwen, en schrijfsters moeten rekening houden met de consequenties als ze dat genre wel beoefenen, want, anders dan mannen, moeten ze dan het hoofd bieden aan voortdurende sociale kritiek. Sociale normen hebben een hoge waardering voor de politieke strijd van mannen, gevangenschap wordt voor mannen als eervol beschouwd, maar voor vrouwen is het een schande die nooit meer kan worden uitgewist. Politieke geschriften van vrouwen worden niet serieus genomen, en zij worden door verscheidene culturele organisaties verzocht hun literaire activiteiten te beperken tot vrouwen- en gezinsonderwerpen. Bij het publiceren en in recensies ervaren ze dezelfde belemmeringen: niet serieus genomen worden en blinde aanmoediging voor hun werk. Uitgevers gebruiken tegenwoordig het werk van schrijfsters als commercieel product, om lezers aan te trekken of om verandering in de attituden van de maatschappij overdreven te benadrukken. Jemenitische sociale normen met betrekking tot vrouwen zitten besloten in alle belemmeringen die schrijfsters ervaren. Door sommige veranderingen in de sociale normen als resultaat van maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen, zijn veel schrijfsters begonnen met het publiceren onder hun eigen naam. Maar het lijkt erop dat de impact van sociale normen niet alleen van buitenaf gevoeld wordt, ze zijn deel uit gaan maken van de identiteit van de schrijfsters, zoals blijkt uit hun strenge zelfcensuur die van grote invloed is op hun schrijfprocessen. Om deze zelfcensuur te overwinnen is veel moed en opoffering nodig. Een poging daartoe kan gezien worden in het laatste werk van Nabilah al-Zubair dat is gepubliceerd in 2003. Omdat sociale normen vrouwen als minderwaardig aan mannen beschouwen, spreken Jemenitische schrijfsters zichzelf tegen in discussies over het werk van schrijfsters.

In de conclusie vat ik de punten die in eerdere hoofdstukken aan de orde zijn gekomen samen, en benadruk en interpreteer ik ze. Hierbij reflecteer ik kritisch op mijn eigen werk. Ik benadruk dat dit proefschrift het eerste is over dit onderwerp, en hoofdzakelijk gebaseerd is op gepubliceerde boeken, Jemenitische tijdschriften en kranten, een vragenlijst, en persoonlijke interviews met schrijfsters uit Jemen. Ik heb de beperking onderstreept dat ik weinig materiaal uit de Renaissance en de Post-revolutionaire periode (1930-1980) heb kunnen vinden. Ondanks de belemmerende factoren die vrouwen onder ogen moesten zien, zoals conservatisme en analfabetisme, moeten zij zich toch ook hebben geuit tijdens deze lange periode. Toekomstige

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onderzoekers moeten daarom toegang zien te krijgen tot privé-bibliotheken in hun zoektocht naar gepubliceerd werk en ongepubliceerde manuscripten.

Het beeld dat ik heb gepresenteerd van vrouwen en vrouwelijke auteurs in Jemen is somber, maar ik heb mijn dissertatie beëindigd met een sprankje hoop. Door meer opleidingsmogelijkheden voor meisjes zullen toekomstige schrijfsters meer zelfvertrouwen krijgen en de gendergerelateerde beperkingen die zelfexpressie en publicatie van hun werk in de weg staan achter zich laten. Ooit zullen hun familieleden, vrienden en het land trots zijn op hun zelfverzekerde, intelligente stem.

Arabic Summary

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

ملخص الدراسة

النوع الاجتماعي (Gender) وكتابات الأدبيات اليمنيات

تحدث القرآن الكريم عن ملكة سبائية راجحة العقل ديمقراطية المسلك يمنحها قومها الولاء والطاعة ويعيدون إليها اتخاذ القرار في الأمور الهامة لما يعرفونه عنها من فطنة ورجاحة عقل . كانت تتربع على عرش شعب بني حضارة لفتت نظر الهدهد وأثارت إعجاب النبي سليمان .

ويذكر التاريخ بعد الإسلام ملكة يمنية أخرى كانت ولا تزال محل فخر وإعجاب اليمنيين بما أنجزته من مشاريع وبما حقته من استقرار وعدل وهي أروى بنت أحمد الصليحي. هذا الدور الهام والقيادي الذي قامت به المرأة اليمنية هل يمكن أن يحدث في غياب نساء لهن أدوار أخرى في المجال الاجتماعي والثقافي؟

لماذا لا نجد في كتب التاريخ الأدبية اهتماماً بذكر ما أبدعته النساء في المجالات الأخرى وبشكل خاص في الكتابات الأدبية الشعر والقصة ؟ وإذا كان التاريخ السبائي لا يزال الكثير منه مدفوناً تحت الرمال فلماذا غياب أدب النساء في التاريخ اليمني بعد الإسلام ؟

الفرضية التي وضعتها الباحثة هي أن المؤرخين قد أهملوا أو تجاهلوا تدوين ما كتبه أو ما قالته النساء من قصائد ، وأن التاريخ الاجتماعي لم يكن في مجمله في صف النساء كنتيجة لا يدولوجيات متخلفة بعيدة عن الدين الإسلامي الحنيف كان من شأنها تضيق وحصر أدوار النساء.

السؤال الذي طرحته الدراسة هو : هل هناك كتابات يمنية ؟ إذا كان الجواب بالإيجاب - كما هو مقترض - فلماذا أهمل ذكرهن في كتب تاريخ الأدب اليمني ؟ علاقة هذا الإهمال بالنوع الاجتماعي وما الصعوبات التي تواجهها الأدبيات اليمنيات ؟

من أهداف الدراسة الأساسية هو تجميع ما أمكن تجميعية من إنتاج الأدبيات اليمنيات وإبراز الكتابات اللاتي أهملهن المجتمع الذكوري الظالم . ولتحقيق ذلك بدأت الدراسة بوضع بيبلوغرافيا متواضعة للكتابات

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اليمنيات مستقاة من المصادر المتوفرة في الكتب - رغم شحتها - ومن الصحف ، وعن طريق الكاتبات اليمنيات اللاتي تناولتهن الدراسة .

استخدمت الباحثة في منهجها النظريات المعاصرة في الدراسات النسوية والنقد النسوي بما في ذلك النوع الاجتماعي gender كأداة بحثية لتحليل العوامل والأسباب التي تؤثر وتتأثر في قراءة وكتابة النصوص الأدبية مستخدمة كإطار نظري مدخل فرجينيا وولف في (عُرْفَة خاصة للمرأة وحدة) مع مراعاة الاختلافات الثقافية وخصوصية المجتمع المبحوث .

احتوت الدراسة على ستة فصول :

الفصل الأول : تناول الأوضاع الاجتماعية والثقافية للنساء في اليمن ضمن السياق التاريخي والاجتماعي الذي أثر وتأثر بالكتابات النسائية . كما تناول الفصل الرؤية المتناقضة للمجتمع اليمني إلى النساء في الوقت الذي قابل فيه المجتمع النساء بترحيب واحترام كبير كملكات ... فإنه ظل يحمل الثقافة المتخلفة التي عاملت النساء بدونية إلى حد اعتبارها البعض ملكية خاصة للرجل كالأثاث والأرض والبيت وحيوانات المنزل . وهناك من النساء حتى اليوم من لا يملكن الحرية في اختيار أزواجهن . وما زالت المرأة في اعتبار أغلب الرجال كياناً غير مستقل في الأسرة بل هي تحت وصاية الرجل وتنسب إليه سواء كانت أما أو أختاً أو زوجة .

ويشير الفصل إلى أن النساء في الوقت الحاضر قد حصلن على العديد من الحقوق . وأصبحن يشاركن في الحياة العامة إلى حد ما .. وهن بحاجة إلى دعم أكبر من السلطة والمجتمع لتحقيق المزيد مما لهن من حقوق

المواطنة المتساوية بما في ذلك محو الأمية المتفشية بين النساء بنسبة عالية تصل إلى 71% ودفعهن للوصول إلى مواقع صناعة القرار بما يتناسب مع حجمهن في التعداد السكاني والذي يكاد يتجاوز نصف عدد السكان .
الفصل الثاني: تناول الفصل الثاني الإطار النظري للدراسة حيث تم مناقشة أربع نظريات معاصرة في النوع الاجتماعي . والنقد الأدبي النسوي بما فيها الإطار النظري (لفرجينيا وولف) .

الفصل الثالث : هدف إلى إبراز دور الكاتبات اليمنيات في كل من الشعر والقصة والرواية في سياق تاريخ الأدب اليمني قديمه وحديثه .

في مجال الشعر أكدت الدراسة أن الشاعرات اليمنيات قد ساهمن في كتابة جميع صنوف الشعر . الكلاسيكي .. الشعبي (الحميني والباله والزامل) والشعر الحديث (الحر وقصيدة النثر) .

وأكدت الباحثة الغياب الكلي لتدوين أي مساهمات شعرية نسائية منذ بداية عصر النهضة في الثلاثينات وحتى نهاية الستينات من القرن العشرين .. وقد يحتاج الموضوع إلى مزيد من البحث والتنقيب في المكتبات الخاصة والتي تجد الباحثة صعوبة في الوصول إليها .

أما في مجال القصة فيمكن القول أن ثلاثة عقود هي المسافة بين الأديب اليمني والأدبية اليمنية في نشر إنتاجهم القصصي . فإذا كانت الثلاثينات والأربعينات قد شهدت نشر قصة الأديب اليمني فإن نتاج الأدبية اليمنية لم يبدأ نشره إلا في الستينات في المحافظات الجنوبية وفي منتصف السبعينات في المحافظات الشمالية . وخلافاً للمنتوق نجد عدد القصصات اليمنية يزيد عن عدد الشاعرات اليمنيات . مع أن الشعر يحمل أهمية خاصة في العالم العربي.

يعتبر فن الرواية - بشكل عام - فن حديث في الأدب العربية وقد شهد تطوراً بطيئاً في اليمن فقد مضى ما يقارب العقد بين الرواية اليمنية الأولى 1939م والرواية اليمنية الثانية 1948م . وبين أول رواية لكاتبة نسائية - رمزية الإيراني - عام 1970م وروايتها الثانية عام 1998م ويرجع بعض النقاد هذا البطء إلى طبيعة كتابة الرواية والتي تأخذ وقتاً طويلاً . ويرغم التطور النسبي في فن الرواية فإن الروائية اليمنية قد ساهمت في تطور هذا الفن في اليمن.

شهد عقد التسعينات قفزة نوعية وكمية في كتابات الأديبات اليمنيات في كل من القصيدة والقصة والرواية . فقد تم نشر العديد من إنتاج الكاتبات اليمنيات سواء في مجال الشعر أو القصة أو الرواية . وقد بدأت الصحف في التسابق على نشر أعمالهن . لكن الخطوة الأهم أن المرأة اليمنية قد اتجهت إلى إصدار صحف خاصة بها . وأولت هذه الصحف إهتماماً خاصاً بنشر أعمال الكاتبات اليمنيات .

الفصل الرابع : تناول بالدراسة والتحليل عدد من القصص القصيرة القديمة للنساء حيث أن الفن القصصي هو الصنف الغالب لدى الكاتبات اليمنيات . وقد توصلت الدراسة إلى أن النساء قد وصلن إلى فن القصة القصيرة في تطور طبيعي كنتيجة لممارستن لأسلوب الرواية الشفهية للقصص والذي لا زالت تمارسه بعض النساء اللاتي يروين قصصهن لتجمعات النساء .

إن كتابة النساء للقصص لم يكن مجرد وسيلة للتعبير عما يجول في خاطرهن ورفض أنهن عورة يجب سترها بالبيت . وإنما استخدمت الكاتبات اليمنيات القصة القصيرة كوسيلة للتحرر الذاتي وقد تزامن ذلك مع التحرر الوطني والثقافي مما يؤكد أن تحرر النساء لا يتحقق بشكل جذري إلا بتحرر الوطن وأهله نساء ورجالاً . وكان محل استغراب الباحثة تجاهل معظم مؤرخين الأدب لمشاركات النساء المكتوبة في إطار الحركة الوطنية مما يؤكد دورهن - غير المعترف به - في ثورتي سبتمبر وأكتوبر .

الفصل الخامس والسادس : تناولت الدراسة أشكال تأثير النوع الاجتماعي gender ومداه على حياة الكاتبات اليمنيات وكتابتهن الإبداعية وذلك عن طريق استبيان وزع على (28) كاتبة يمنية يتوزع على امتداد الساحة اليمنية إلى جانب اعتماد شهادات لأديبات يمنيات نشرتها مجلة الحكمة ومقابلات أجرتها الباحثة مباشرة مع سبع من الأديبات . وقد أكدت نتيجة البحث الميداني فرضيات الدراسة عن تأثير النوع الاجتماعي على عملية الكتابة الأدبية وعلى مستويات أربعة: الفرد ، المؤسسة ، المبادئ والقيم السائدة والذات الفاعلة .

وهناك أسباب موضوعية أدت إلى تأخر الكاتبات اليمنيات من أهمها :

- 1- العائق التعليمي والثقافي حيث لم يبدأ التعليم الرسمي للفتيات في اليمن إلا منذ عام 1962م مع استثناء عدد محدود من النساء تلقين تعليماً محدوداً في محمية عدن .
- 2- العائق الاجتماعي : كان ولا يزال للعامل الاجتماعي والتقاليد المهيمنة الأثر الأكبر في تخلف النساء . لقد تمتع الرجل بحرية أوسع للتحرر داخل الوطن وخارجه مما منحه فرصة للمعرفة واكتساب الخبرة والإحتكاكات الثقافية بينما النساء كن حبيسات المنزل في المدينة باعتبارهن عورة . وأما أنهن في الريف غارقات في الأعمال الشاقة .
- 3- العائق العائلي والذاتي : لا يعيش الكاتبات سجن المجتمع وحرمان الدولة وحسب وإنما هن يفعل قيم المجتمع المتخلفة - يعشن سجنًا أكثر ضيقاً هو السجن العائلي . والأضيق من كل السجون هو السجن الذاتي الذي فرضته تقاليد المجتمع مما جعل الكاتبة تقيم داخلها رقيباً دائماً على كتاباتها .
- 4- دور الزواج : الزوج في عرف المجتمع وتقاليد هو المالك للمرأة بعد انتقالها من منزل أبيها وهو الذي يقرر أن تكون زوجته كاتبة أو لا تكون . وقد حاولت الباحثة - دون جدوى - الاتصال بإحدى الكاتبات المعروفات التي تزوجت حديثاً فمنعها زوجها من مواصلة حياتها الأدبية .
- 5- العائق السياسي : قد يكون العائق السياسي عائقاً مشتركاً بين الكاتب والكاتبة لكنه بالنسبة للكاتبة القشة التي قصمت ظهر البعير لأنه عائق مضاف إلى كل العوائق التي سبق ذكرها ، ومن المفارقات المحزنة أن السجن لسجين الرأي الرجل شرف يضاف له في رصيده الوطني بينما السجن للكاتبة : كيفما كان - عار عليها وعلى أسرته في ثقافة مجتمع غير عادل .
- 6- عائق النقد الأدبي : من المفترض أن يكون النقد أحد العوامل المساعدة على تطوير عمل الكاتب أو الكاتبة الأدبية . لكن للأسف أن بعض الكتابات الرجالية النقدية لعمل بعض الأديبات قد انطلقت من نظرة دونية وحس تحقيري فيما أنه نص أنثوي فيلحقه ما يلحق صاحبه من نظرة دونية ويحمل ما تحمله الأنثى من صفات في ذهنية مجتمع ذكوري متخلف . وفي قصة حياة الكاتبة نبيلة الزبير - التي تعرضت لها الباحثة في الفصل السادس - نسمع ونرى ونقرأ - ضمن السياق التاريخي

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والإجتماعي - ما تعانيه كاتبة يمنية حاولت الخروج على النمط التقليدي للنساء وللكتابات في اليمن

7- عائق النشر: وهو عائق يعاني منه كل من الكاتبة والكتّاب. بالرغم من مساعدة وزارة الثقافة والهنئية العامة للكتاب عدد لا بأس به من الكتابات والكتاب على نشر أعمالهم ولكن شروط النشر غير محقة أو مجزية حيث أن الكاتبة أو الكاتب لا يحصل على حق مالي مشجع ويحرم من حقوق النشر. عبرت بعض الكتابات عن انزعاجهن من تسابق الصحف على نشر الأعمال النسائية فقط لانها نسائية دون مراعاة الكتابات الجيدة.

الخاتمة:

تعتبر تلخيصاً للنتائج وتسلية للضوء على المواضيع التي ناقشتها الدراسة قد تكون الصورة قاتمة كما قدمتها الدراسة بشكل علمي وموضوعي . ولكن الخاتمة قد أشارت إلى أن الكتابات قد قطعن في الطريق الصحيح شوطاً طيباً رغم ما عانين من مصاعب . ومن إدراك الكتابات اليمنيات لحقائق الظروف المحيطة بهن ومتطلباتها فقد اخترن بوعي كامل القيام بالموازنة بين طموحاتهن واصرارهن على التقدم وبين الظروف المحيطة ومتطلباتها . و هن حين يتجنبن الصدام يتجنبنه بوعي واختبار وحين يواصلن مسيرة التطور يتقدمن بوعي واختيار . أصواتهن لا تحمل في طياتها ياساً وإحباط:

كلما هشم رأسي جدارا
قلت: مازال لي رأس..
كلما هشم رأسي جدار
قلت: مازال أمامي جدار.
نبيلة الزبير

ولكنها تحمل في طياتها بذور ثورة:

أطلق قصيدة قهرك الملغوم

لاتغفر لهم
ذا ليس عارك
انه عار الذين تربعوا صمت النساء
فقل لهم:
ان النساء-الصمت قد صار انجازا
ابتسام المتوكل

الجيل القادم من مشروع الكتابات اللاتي عرضن انتاجهن الأول باللغة الاجلزية في مسابقة قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية الآداب جامعة صنعاء يوحى بمستقبل أفضل في مسيرة تتواصل من أجل استنشاق هواء نقي حيث تكون فاطمة هي فاطمة لا ابنها ولا أخيها وسلوى هي سلوى الزوجة لا المعزة ولا الشوفة ... والزوج هو الشريك لا الدكتاتور وحامل السوط . والمجتمع هو مجتمع العدالة والمساواة كما أراده الله ودينه الحنيف لا مجتمع التمييز كما فرضته التقاليد المتخلفة من عصور العبيد ، وقصور الحرير وزمن المؤودة التي سنلت بأي ذنب قتلت.