MALE DOMINATION, FEMALE REVOLT: RACE, CLASS AND GENDER IN KUWAITI WOMEN'S FICTION

OLATUNBOSUN ISHAQ TIJANI

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies

University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work. No part of it has been submitted for any other degree or published before.

DEDICATION

To my parents

Alhaji Tijani Arikewu Olatunbosun

and

Mrs Sidikat Ayinke Tijani

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NOTES ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

Unless otherwise specified, the translation of all titles of books and articles and quotations from Arabic texts cited in this thesis is mine. The transliteration system herein used is that of the modified *Encyclopaedia of Islam* as adopted by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (*IJMES*). Unlike the *IJMES* style, however, diacritical marks are herein used for names of persons and places and titles of books, magazines, novels etc. All transliteration therefore reflects the literary Arabic form and pronunciation, e.g. Ṭayyiba rather than Taibah, Laylā rather than Laila, and al-'Uthmān rather than al-Othman. This literary standard is also maintained as regards the Arabic letter *qāf* which, in Kuwaiti dialect, is pronounced as *ghāyn*, e.g. al-Mirqāb rather than al-Mirghāb, and *al-Qurayn* rather than *al-Ghurayn.*

Arabic words and names with Standard English spelling have not been changed. Thus, unless they appear as part of Arabic titles (of books, magazines, articles etc.), names of countries like Kuwait, Oman and Cairo, and of persons like Abdullah, Muhammad and Ali have not been changed. The literary form is used, however, for some of these names when they are prefixed with "al" as in al-'Abdullāh and al-'Alī, as common among Kuwaiti surnames. Finally, titles of books, articles, novels and short stories in Arabic are transliterated with only the first letter and, where applicable, names of countries capitalised; for English works, including translations from Arabic titles, all main title words are capitalised.

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates various forms of women's resistance to male domination in Kuwaiti society, as represented in Kuwaiti women's fiction. Two short stories: Hayfā' Hāshim's "al-Intiqām al-rahīb" (1953) and Laylā al-'Uthmān's "Min milaff imra'a" (1979), and three novels: al-'Uthmān's *Wasmiyya takhruj min al-baḥr* (1986), Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm's *Mudhakkirāt khādim* (1995), and Fawziyya S. al-Sālim's *Muzūn* (2000) are closely analysed, drawing from Marxist-feminist literary criticism. I argue that these texts portray their respective heroines, representing the pre-oil generations of Kuwaiti women— born before or in the first half of the twentieth century— as resistant and/or revolutionary figures, contrary to the common notion of their stereotypical passivity and submissiveness. In view of the fact that these texts, as well as some others that are not represented here, form a minority among Kuwaiti women's fiction, they are here considered as 'feminist revolutionary' texts.

Part One introduces Kuwait and its people, with special reference to the development of Kuwaiti fiction (Chapter One), and the Kuwaiti female literary tradition (Chapter Two). Part Two (Chapters Three through Six) demonstrates how the Kuwaiti patriarchal tradition has affected, and continues to affect, race, class and gender relations in Kuwait, in a way that is discriminatory against and oppressive to women. An example of this is found in the sex-related concept of *sharaf* or *faḍīḥa* (social honour or dishonour) – a-common-denominator ideology which each of the texts seeks to reflect and deconstruct. Exploring the agency which each of the authors has constructed for her heroine's defiance, evasion, or subversion of

patriarchal authority, this study asserts that some pre-oil Kuwaiti women have been actively resistant to male domination, and that they have worked for social change.

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INTRODUCTION

Preamble

"Why Kuwait? Why Kuwaiti women's fiction?" These were some of the questions often posed to me whenever I introduced the subject of my thesis to people (even Arabs and Kuwaitis) who cared to know. Some would even go further: "why not, for instance, the much more internationally popular Egyptian women's literature, or Lebanese, Palestinian?" What underlies these sometimes 'bewildering' questions constitutes one of the aims of this study: to 'centre the periphery'. This study intends to contribute to the popularisation of Kuwaiti literature in general and the Kuwaiti female literary tradition in particular. Unlike Arab women writers from North Africa and the Levant whose works have become popular in the West, the feminist 'literature of resistance' by women from the Arab Gulf region has received little attention, especially in Western academia.

This thesis is limited to the study of select Kuwaiti women's fictional texts published within the range of nearly half a century. The texts are: "al-Intiqām al-rahīb" (1953) and "Min milaff imra'a" (1979), both short stories by Hayfā' Hāshim and Laylā al-'Uthmān, respectively. Others, all novels, are: *Wasmiyya takhruj min al-baḥr* (1986) also by al-'Uthmān, *Mudhakkirāt khādim* (1995) by Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm, and *Muzūn* (2000) by Fawziyya S. al-Sālim.

Argument

The social and political systems that have subsisted until the contemporary period in the Arabian Peninsula, whereby women continue to be suppressed and marginalized, to a varied degree of course, have led to the general assumption that

Arabian women (Kuwaiti inclusive) are passive and conformist, and that they lack voice. This thesis will demonstrate how the selected fictional texts by Kuwaiti women have disproved this common notion of Arabian women's inactivity and complicity, as often represented in especially the Western media and corroborated by some sociological and anthropological research. This study posits that the literature of a people also constitutes a source of knowledge about the social and cultural history of such people. Through the selected Kuwaiti women's literary texts, this study demonstrates how Kuwaiti/Arabian women have resisted male social and ideological dominance.

I argue that the above-listed texts portray their respective heroines, representing the pre-oil generations of Kuwaiti women— born before or in the first half of the twentieth century— as resistant and/or revolutionary figures, contrary to the common notion of their stereotypical passivity and submissiveness. This argument is supported by the fact that, despite their total lack or low level of education and exposure to foreign (especially modern western) civilisation, the heroines of the selected texts engage, in their respective ways, in a struggle against patriarchal domination and oppression. The authors of the texts – specifically Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm and Fawziyya S. al-Sālim, considered in chapters five and six, respectively – may be seen to argue that the pre-oil generations of Kuwaiti women were much more revolutionarily inclined than women of the second half of the twentieth century, who actually belong to the modern era in the country. The older generations of women were the 'real' victims of Kuwaiti patriarchal culture when it was most pervasive, and during the period of Kuwait's transition from a rustic and conservatively patriarchal society to a cosmopolitan and less restrictive one. Before

giving a brief note on the theoretical framework within which the second part of this study will be inscribed, it is necessary to explain what I mean by 'race', 'class', 'gender', 'feminist', and 'revolutionary', all of which constitute key aspects of my analysis.

I start with 'gender', by which, I mean the socially and culturally constructed notion of biological sexual difference between male and female. 'Race' – determined largely by 'nationality' from the context of modern and contemporary Kuwaiti society – and 'class' classifications, are complicated and interwoven. The inhabitants of the present-day Kuwait are classified into two 'races': (1) Kuwaiti nationals (2) and non-Kuwaiti nationals. Kuwaiti nationals, comprising people of different ethnic or racial ancestries (mainly Arab, Persian and Turkish), are regarded as a racial entity, and this is represented in some of the fictional texts considered in this thesis. The second racial category, non-Kuwaiti nationals (excluding the '*Bidūns*', mentioned below), consists of (non-Kuwaiti) Arabs (from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Sudan and so on) and non-Arabs from different countries of the world.

'Class' is herein used to refer to people of similar social and/or economic level; in the case of Kuwait, the class structure in both the pre- and post-oil eras requires some explanation. In pre-oil Kuwait, there were two main social classes: the lower/middle and the upper classes. The upper class consisted of members of the ruling family and wholesale pearl merchant families. The lower/middle class comprised the people who worked as petty traders, pearl-divers, ship labourers and so on.[1] However, starting from the 1950s, the class structure in post-oil Kuwait has been complicated by racial factors. The Kuwaitis constitute one class, and immigrant workers, another. The upper class in contemporary Kuwait includes the ruling

family, wealthy Kuwaiti merchant families and, perhaps, Kuwaiti politicians as well as wealthy immigrant entrepreneurs. The middle class are Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti civil and public servants; and the lower class consists of low-wage immigrant workers and, of course, the *Bidūns* (people who claim Kuwaiti ancestry but are not granted citizenship rights and benefits).

'Feminist/m' is often generally used to refer to an organized movement to attain women's right, or fight against gender inequality and women's oppression in society. In Part Two of this thesis, however, the word 'feminist' is used, specifically, to mean a social consciousness in line with Michele le Doeuff's definition: "A feminist is a woman who does not allow anyone to think in her place."[2] In the light of this definition, I use 'feminist' to refer to any female fictional character who thinks, behaves and acts subjectively – on her own conviction – and in a way that contradicts the norms of patriarchal society, or one who defies the patriarchal social order and resists her oppression and subjugation as a woman in whatever way. A text that depicts women in this manner is here considered a 'feminist' text.

The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary gives the meaning of 'revolution (in something)' as 'a complete or dramatic change of method, conditions etc.,' and its adjectival form, 'revolutionary', as "involving a complete or dramatic change." (Political) 'revolution' often involves taking 'violent' action (mostly by a large group of people) against authority. 'Violence' is thus a characteristic feature which 'revolution' shares with 'revolt', and perhaps both are generic. 'Revolt', a word that occurs in the topic of this thesis, means: 'showing violent resistance to authority' or 'expressing protest about something.'

This study considers as 'revolutionary' any act of violent or subtle revolt – deviance, defiance, protest, resistance, and so on – taken by a female fictional character against the Kuwaiti hierarchical social order. As demonstrated in part two, the women who populate the specially considered short stories and novels represent female dissatisfaction with the patriarchal social order. Each of the heroines is, therefore, portrayed as someone who desires or seeks a change in the male-dominated Kuwaiti social system. As shown in those texts, Kuwaiti women's revolts against, or revolutionary acts in defiance of, patriarchal authority are often carried out at a domestic level; they are always embarked upon by individuals (heroines), and sometimes by two individuals (heroines and other female characters) by way of female solidarity. Perhaps I should note here that I have used the word 'heroine' more frequently in this thesis than 'protagonist'. This is because the former is gender specific, while the latter is not. 'Heroine' invariably is used herein in the same sense as 'female protagonist' or 'female central figure'.

This study will focus on the speeches, actions, thoughts, and gestures of particularly the heroines of the texts, which portray them as defiant, resistant, and thus, 'revolutionary' figures. Similarly, it will note how the respective authors' style and language could also be considered 'revolutionary'. This is pertinent in view of the fact that Kuwaiti society still maintains a high level of public morality, especially on issues of femininity and sexuality, the effects of which are discernible through the writings of Kuwaiti women and men alike.

Theoretical Framework

Patriarchy – a system of male-dominated social, cultural, economic and political authority – constitutes the main source of women's oppression in Kuwait. Class and racial ideologies contribute to the oppression in different ways and at different periods in Kuwait's history. In view of the fact that class (which is sometimes determined by race) and gender are represented in the selected texts as coterminous factors in the perpetration of women's oppression in pre- and post-oil Kuwait, this study draws mainly on Marxist-feminist criticism, the concept of which is briefly explained below.

Marxist-feminism is a combination of two broad theories or concepts, 'Marxism' and 'feminism'. The first addresses the issue of class, and the other, of gender relations. Having noted that "[t]he concept of Marxist-feminism is highly problematised" and that "[t]here is no simple answer to question[s] like, 'What is Marxist-feminism?' or 'What elements is a Marxist-feminist reading required to contain?,'"[3] the four woman authors of *Feminist Readings/Feminists Reading* still provide us with a simple working definition. They define Marxist-feminism as "a practice or theory which considers both gender and class to be essential components of an analysis."[4] They explain that: "much Marxist-feminist literary criticism has taken the form of a simple *modification* of the Marxist paradigms of gender as well as class."[5] The aims of Marxist-feminism, as stated by Maggie Humm, are "to describe the material basis of women's subjugation, and the relationship between the modes of production and women's status; and to apply theories of women and class to the role of the family."[6] If Marxist-feminist critical practices basically focus on the

analysis of 'class and gender' relations, what precisely are the theoretical bases of such practices?

A groundbreaking work on this form of literary criticism is an article entitled "Women's writing: Jane Eyre, Shirley, Villette, Aurora Leigh". Published in 1978 in *Ideology and Consciousness*,[7] this article was jointly written by a group of women critics who called themselves 'The Marxist-Feminist Literature Collective'. Marxist-feminist literary criticism, not least as shown in its name, is far from monolithic. As demonstrated in the Marxist-Feminist Literature Collective's article, it began as a synthesis of Marxism, feminism and psychoanalysis. Hence, the authors of this article utilise Louis Althusser's and Pierre Macherey's revolutionary forms of Marxism and Julia Kristeva's appropriation of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis in analysing four British women's texts.[8] Other forms of Marxist-feminist reading would, on the other hand, combine Marxism and feminism with 'post-structuralism' and 'post-colonialism' (as practised by Gayatri Spivak[9]), or Marxist-feminism with 'cultural materialism' (as demonstrated by Cora Kaplan[10]).

One of the theories which Marxist feminist literary critics often utilise, and from which almost every chapter in part two of this thesis has drawn, is Louis Althusser's concepts of *Ideology* and *Ideological State Apparatuses* (ISAs). Beginning from chapter three, the various Althusserian terms relating to these two broad concepts are explained in some detail, and appropriated in analysing some aspects of the selected texts. However, some words on those terms are necessary here.

Althusser defines '*ideology*' as "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."[11] He states that "all

ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects [...]",[12] explaining that "*interpellation* or hailing, [...] can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'"[13] *Interpellation* is thus used by this French Marxist theorist to refer to how *ideology* 'acts' or 'functions' in society by governing the individual 'imaginarily' through some (traditional) institutions which he calls the *Ideological State Apparatuses* (ISAs). Those institutions include the family, the educational, legal and political systems, culture (including literature, the arts, sports, etc.), religion, and the media.[14] Embedded with Althusser's definitions of *ideology* and *interpellation* is the term '*imaginary*' which, according to him, "constitutes the failure of individuals to recognise that the ideological forces [or apparatuses] by which they are interpellated are neither real nor inevitable."[15]

The most frequently used of Althusser's terms in this thesis is *interpellation*. It is used at different points to describe the operation of the Kuwaiti patriarchal tradition and ideological institutions, with women as subjects. Where necessary, I have tried to note whether the respective heroines of the selected texts 'recognise' or 'misrecognise' the imaginariness of 'the ideological forces by which they are interpellated'. And if they do recognise them, how did that recognition come about? What action(s) does each of them take to break free from such impeding ideological forces?

The principal focus of analysis in this study, as usual in Marxist-feminist critical practices, is 'the family'. Beginning from chapter three, the thesis examines the selected texts' representation of the operation of the ideological state apparatus of the Kuwaiti family and its attendant ideological agencies. Those agencies –

incorporating traditional beliefs, codes, values and practices – include 'gender difference', 'women's seclusion', 'arranged and forced marriage', and 'motherhood'.

In view of the fact that the majority of the selected texts have received little or no critical attention, especially through the medium of English, the attempt here is not to 'deconstruct' them by looking for the contradictions inherent in them as a purely Marxist-feminist post-structuralist reading would do. Rather, this study aims to present the feminist implications of each of the texts in a coherently comprehensible manner. In addition to its largely literary outlook – based on the information and views expressed in the selected texts as well as other Kuwaiti women's fictional texts incorporating similar thematic elements – part two of this study draws on non-fictional 'narrative' (in the broader sense of 'narrative') texts: information from historical and sociological/anthropological materials and the printed media.

This study is not claiming that there are 'inherent' or singular meanings within the texts considered. Of course, there are various meanings or ways of interpreting the texts, depending on the ideological/political stance of a reader/critic. Where available, different views or interpretations expressed by other scholars on any aspects or the whole of a text herein considered are noted; and, where deemed necessary, such views are 'deconstructed' from a (Marxist-)feminist standpoint. An attempt has been made in this thesis to (re-)read Kuwaiti women's fictional texts so that they 'work for socialism' (Terry Eagleton)[16] as well as 'for feminism' (Sara Mills *et. al.*)[17] in post-war Kuwait.

A Brief Guide to the Chapters

It is important to bear in mind that the first two chapters of this thesis are meant to be introductory; they are intended to give the reader some background information about the historical, social and cultural environments within which the texts specially considered in part two were produced. The discussions in chapters one and two are based largely on secondary sources. As these chapters are historical surveys, they are not overly analytical.

Chapter one outlines the historical development of fiction in Kuwait, tracing its origins to the late 1920s. It pays special attention to the factors that have facilitated the writing and publication of fiction in the country, and concludes that the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait in the early 1990s has led to the emergence of a new genre, 'war narratives'. An example of Kuwaiti women's war literature is Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm's *Mudhakkirāt Khādim* (considered in chapter five). Chapter two focuses on the emergence of the female literary subculture in Kuwait. It shows how the rise of a feminist movement in Kuwait, among other factors, has contributed to the development of Kuwaiti women's literature in general. It concludes that Kuwaiti women continue, through literature, to raise feminist consciousness and to gain voice in the male-dominated Kuwaiti society.

Through the lens of two Kuwaiti women's short stories – Hayfā' Hāshim's "al-Intiqām al-rahīb" and Laylā al-'Uthmān's "Min milaff imra'a" – chapter three examines the representation of female revolt against Kuwaiti patriarchal domination and oppression. It argues that these two stories represent the early feminist revolutionary texts in Kuwait, and that the central female figures of these stories are the most 'radical' and disruptive, at least, of all the heroines of the texts considered.

Whereas Hāshim's story depicts masculine violence and feminine counterviolence, al-'Uthmān's explores the theme of female-initiated violence.

Chapter four examines Laylā al-'Uthmān's novel, *Wasmiyya takhruj min al-baḥr*. It argues against the view that this novel is a perfect reproduction of the dominant masculine literary discourse, contending instead that al-'Uthmān offers a serious critique of the pre-oil Kuwaiti society she depicts in the novel. The theme of class and gender relations, which features in this novel as obtained in pre-oil Kuwaiti society, is part of the subject matters of Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm's *Mudhakkirāt khādim*.

The discussion in chapter five centres on how *Mudhakkirāt khādim* qualifies both as a socialist and feminist text. The form of Marxist/Socialist-feminism represented in this novel is that of the struggle against gender and immigrant working-class oppression, exploitation and segregation in post-oil Kuwaiti society. This chapter demonstrates how the novel represents the Kuwaiti female as the victim of external aggression (the Iraqi invasion and occupation) as well as internal (the Kuwaiti patriarchal ideological) oppression.

The last chapter, chapter six, considers Fawziyya S. al-Sālim's 'postmodernist' novel, *Muzūn*. It examines the novel's representation of the changing concept and practice of sexuality, gender difference and socialisation not just in Kuwaiti, but in Arabian society as a whole. It demonstrates how *Muzūn* qualifies as an 'Islamic-feminist' text, how it engages the 'hegemonic' Western feminist discourse, and how it can be considered an 'interrogative' text, from the perspective of Marxist-feminist literary criticism. The chapter concludes that, in *Muzūn*, al-Sālim succeeds in creating a female fictional character whose silent and subtle

revolutionary acts have intergenerational, subversive effects on the patriarchal traditional social order in Arabian society at large.

The conclusion sums up some of the major issues discussed in this thesis *vis-à-vis* the major themes explored in the selected texts. It stresses that al-Sālim's *Muzūn* incorporates several elements of the messages in the other texts; *Muzūn* combines and represents the changing status of Kuwaiti/Arabian women from the pre-oil era through the conflicted transition periods of the middle of the twentieth century to the contemporary post-oil era. The conclusion also makes some general notes on the growing cultural implications of the introduction of information technology into Arabian society as a whole. I maintain that Arabian girls and women's access to satellite television and the Internet has changed their perception of love and sexuality. Some notes on related areas of further research bring this thesis to a close.

Notes and References

1. On the class structure in Kuwait during the pre-oil era, see Haya al-Mughni, *Women in Kuwait: the Politics of Gender* (London: Saqi Books, 1993), pp. 19-33.
2. Quoted in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (eds.), *Feminisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), "Epistemologies", p. 143.
3. Sara Mills *et. al.*, *Feminist Readings/Feminists Reading* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p.188.
4. *Ibid.*, 'Glossary', p. 244.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
6. Maggie Humm (ed.), *Feminisms: A reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), "Glossary", p. 407. This book also provides us with feminist concepts of most of the terms used in this study, see "Glossary", pp. 404-409.
7. 'The Marxist-Feminist Literature Collective' (MFLC), 'Women's writing: Jane Eyre, Shirley, Villette, Aurora Leigh', *Ideology and Consciousness*, vol. 1, no. 3, (Spring 1978), pp. 27-48.
8. Lynne Pearce and Sara Mills, "Marxist-Feminism" in Sara Mills *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-226.
9. See Gayatri C. Spivak, *In other words: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1988).
10. See Cora Kaplan, *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* (London: Verso, 1986).
11. Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISAs) in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, (trans.) Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), pp. 152, 153.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 135 *ff.*
15. Louis Althusser, *op. cit.*, cited in Sara Mills *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p.193.
16. Terry Eagleton, quoted by Raman Selden in *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (Brighton: Harvester, 1985), p. 45, and cited in Sara Mills *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
17. See Sara Mills *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

CHAPTER ONE

MODERN ARABIC FICTION IN KUWAIT: EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

This chapter presents a historical survey of the rise and development of modern Arabic fiction in Kuwait. Beginning with a brief history of Kuwait, the chapter proceeds to outline the emergence and growth of literary activity in the country. While Kuwaiti literature comprises poetry,[1] drama,[2] fictional and non-fictional narratives, this chapter only focuses on the development of the Kuwaiti short story and novel in the twentieth century (1929-2000). In addition to some major references on Kuwaiti literary history and criticism, the chapter draws on personal experience and observation during my fieldwork carried out in Kuwait between December 2002 and March 2003.

Kuwait in History[3]

The history of Kuwait is often divided into two broad periods: the pre- and the post-oil eras. The former was the period from the time of the foundation of Kuwait up to the middle of the 20th century; and the latter began with the oil boom in the 1950s and 1960s when its impacts on Kuwait and its people began to become remarkably conspicuous. The Iraqi occupation of Kuwait (1990-91) introduced a third period: 'post-war', which could still be regarded as part of the broader post-oil era.

A new post-war wave of research on the origin of the modern Arab Gulf State of Kuwait has asserted that Kuwait was "an independent political entity" by 1613,[4] contrary to the common belief that Kuwait was once under the control of Banī Khālid of the al-Hasa province of southern Iraq.[5] Banī 'Utub – the group of Arab

tribes that migrated from Central Arabia and settled in the small, northeast coastal area of the Arabian Peninsula now known as Kuwait – consisted of the al-Ṣabāḥ, al-Khalīfa and al-Jalāhima tribes.[6] Kuwait became a popular port throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, attracting intercontinental trading activities by foreign powers like Persia in the East, and Portugal, Great Britain and The Netherlands in the West.[7] Until the middle of the twentieth century when oil exploration began, the main occupations of Kuwaitis were boat and ship-building, pearl diving, fishing and some trade.[8]

By the late 1930s and the mid-1940s, oil was becoming Kuwait's major source of revenue. During the reign of Shaykh Abdullah al-Sālim al-Ṣabāḥ (1950-1965), Kuwait town began to change from "a sun-baked adobe town [...] to a modern metropolis of the most contemporary design and [...] architecture."[9] Through Kuwaiti government welfare programmes, the effects of the oil on the social and economic lives of the Kuwaiti people reached an astonishing level in the mid-1960s. With an unprecedented influx of immigrants into the country, "Kuwaiti nationals constituted [and continue to constitute] a minority in their homeland."[10]

Having been a British protectorate since 1899, Kuwait gained independence in 1961. Its system of government is both monarchical and partially democratic; parliamentary elections began to take place in Kuwait from the 1930s. Islam and Arabic are the official religion and language, respectively. One of the latest statistical reports shows that women constitute almost half of the population of Kuwaiti citizens; over 67% of university graduates are women; and women constitute one third of the labour force.[11] Nevertheless, Kuwaiti women continue to be marginalized, politically; they are yet to be enfranchised.[12]

Literary Tradition in Kuwait: mid-1840s – late 1920s

It is the general belief among Kuwaiti literary historians[13] that the history of the emergence of literary activity in the country dates back to 1843, when the great Arabic scholar and poet, Shaykh ʻAbd al-Jalīl al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1776-1853) of Persian origin,[14] came to settle in Kuwait. According to a Kuwaiti literary historian and critic of the modern period, Khālid Saūd al-Zayd (b. 1937), it was al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī who laid the foundation of intellectual thought and literary activity in the country. Some of his Kuwaiti students, who included Abdullah al-Faraj, Khālid A. al-ʻAdsānī, and ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz al-Rushayd, are usually referred to today as the founding fathers of scholarship in Kuwait.[15]

Kuwaiti literature began to evolve at the beginning of the 20th century. One of the major factors that was responsible for its evolution was the introduction of western-style form of education. The first primary school of this nature, named al-Mubārakiyya School, was opened in 1911.[16] A majority of the earliest Kuwaiti literary figures were the products of this school.

The second factor that facilitated the growth of literature among Kuwaitis in the first half of the twentieth century was the establishment of *al-Jam'iyya al-khayriyya* (The Charitable Organization) by a group of rich, upper-class Kuwaiti men. Founded in 1913, the main aim of this organization was to promote scholarship and intellectualism in Kuwait. It played an immeasurable role in that respect, contributing specifically to the development of Kuwaiti literature. For example, when the first public national library in Kuwait was established in 1923, members of the *al-Jam'iyya al-khayriyya* contributed to its funding. The government-founded

public library helped to broaden the horizons of most Kuwaiti intellectuals of the 1920s; it enhanced their enthusiasm for the reading and writing of literary works.[17]

The zeal for intellectual awakening in early twentieth century Kuwait gave birth to the establishment of some *dīwāniyyas* (halls/meeting places). The *dīwāniyya*, which has continued to exist and proliferate up to the present day, usually meets in the evening after the day's work. At the time of its introduction into the Kuwaiti social system, the *dīwāniyya* was meant, primarily, to serve as an avenue for interested Kuwaiti men to meet and interact and to exchange ideas on scholarship in general. Some of the earliest *dīwāniyyas* were, however, much more specialized, focusing mainly on literature. For example, while al-Mullah Ṣāliḥ's *Dīwāniyya* (*circa.* 1937) specialized in debating classical Arabic literature, Khālid al-Musallam's *Dīwāniyya* (*circa.* 1937) made modern Arabic literature its focus of debate. Modern Arabic literature began to gain popularity among the Kuwaiti people. This was because they had been following various publications on modern trends in all genres of Arabic literature, as they were developing in other Arab countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon in the early twentieth century.[18]

A related factor was the establishment of literary clubs in Kuwait. In 1924, Khālid S. al-'Adsānī – one of the most eminent Kuwaiti intellectuals and a student of Shaykh al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, mentioned above – established *al-Nādī al-adabī* (The Literature Club). *Al-Nādī al-adabī* "became an important forum for communicating and exchanging views" on literature in particular and scholarship in general, and its establishment "announced the real birth of a literary movement" in Kuwait.[19]

The period between the mid-1840s (when al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī arrived in Kuwait) and the late 1920s is regarded as the beginning of literary activities in Kuwait.[20] It was followed by a monumental period in the intellectual and cultural history of the country; that was the period here referred to as 'the formative stage' of, specifically, Kuwaiti fiction. Some of the factors discussed above continued to be instrumental in the growth of this genre in Kuwait, while other new factors also emerged, as we shall see below.

Kuwaiti Fiction: the Formative Stage (late 1920s – mid-1950s)

The formative era of Kuwaiti fiction, which may be said to have begun in the late 1920s and ended in the mid-1950s, witnessed the emergence and development of journalism in Kuwait. It is undeniable that journalism has always played a significant role in the evolution and promotion of literary works. Just as journalism had made a tremendous contribution towards the growth of fiction at the centres of modern Arab intellectualism – Egypt, Syria and Lebanon,[21] so also it contributed to the development of fictional narratives at the peripheries, including Kuwait. The short story was the first 'modern' genre to emerge in Kuwait; here follow some of the factors that were responsible for its birth.

In 1928, the first Kuwaiti magazine, *al-Kuwayt*, was founded. Its founder and publisher, 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Rushayd, mentioned above, was an eminent Kuwaiti historian and a student of Shaykh al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī. Perhaps because Kuwait did not have the skills, or the presses to produce it in the country, *al-Kuwayt* was printed in Egypt. During its short life (1928-1931), the magazine served as an avenue whereby

interested Kuwaiti men of thought and letters of the period were able to get their writings published.[22]

Al-Kuwayt contributed to the growth of Kuwaiti literature by publishing, among other things, literary pieces which ranged from poetry and prose fiction and non-fiction to articles on literary history and criticism. Of special concern to this study was the unprecedented role of this magazine in publishing and publicizing fiction. Its first issue in 1929 published what is hailed to be the first Kuwaiti short story. It was a story by Khālid al-Faraj, entitled "Munīra".[23] The publication of "Munīra" heralded the birth of fiction in Kuwait.

After 1929, it took long years before the impact of story writing activity could be felt in Kuwait. Kuwaiti literary historians have tried to give some reasons for the discontinuity in the publication of fictional narratives in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The main reason was that *al-Kuwayt* magazine ceased to appear after three years.[24] One other reason was that the acclaimed pioneer, Khālid al-Faraj, abandoned story writing in favour of the composition of narrative verse and poetry; the case was the same with many other Kuwaitis who had earlier shown interest and had attempted writing stories.[25] With the demise of *al-Kuwayt*, the publication of fiction in Kuwait also went into extinction for some years. It was resuscitated in 1946 with the appearance of another magazine, named *al-Ba'tha*.[26] *Al-Ba'tha*, and some other magazines that appeared after it (see table below), attracted wider authorship and readership.

During the formative period some literary clubs were also formed, adding impetus to the growth of fictional narrative in Kuwait. *Nādī al-mu'allimīn* (The Teachers' Club) was founded in 1952, and *Nādī al-thaqāfa al-qawmī* (The National

Club of Culture) in 1954; these two clubs established, respectively, *al-Rā'id* and *al-Īmān* magazines. The following table shows the names of Kuwaiti magazines that appeared between 1928 and 1956, together with the names of their founders, places of publication and the periods of their existence.

Name	Founder/publisher	Place of Publ.	From – To
al-Kuwayt	'Abd al-'Azīz al-Rushayd	Egypt	1928 – 1931
al-Ba'tha	Kuwaiti students in Egypt	Egypt	Dec. 1946–1954(?)
Kāẓima	?	Kuwait	1948-1949 (before completing a full year)
al-Ba'th	?	Kuwait	1950 (lasted 3 months)
al-Rā'id	*Nādī al-mu'allimīn* (The Teachers' Club)	Kuwait	1952 – Jan. 1954
al-Imān	*Nādī al-thaqāfa al-qawmī* (The National Club of Culture)	Kuwait	1953
al-Irshād	*Jam'iyyat al-irshād* (Islamic Guidance Society)	Kuwait	1953

As shown in this table, most of these magazines were founded by elite clubs or societies thus pointing to the effectiveness of group activity in the development of the Kuwaiti literary movement. Despite their short lives, these magazines had landmark effects on the development of Kuwaiti fiction in particular.[27] Some of them organised story-writing competitions, which helped to spark the potential of the mid-twentieth century generation of Kuwaitis. This is particularly true of women, as evidenced in the circumstances that led to the writing of "al-Intiqām al-rahīb". A 'feminist revolutionary' story by Hayfā' Hāshim, as we shall see in Chapter Three, "al-Intiqām al-rahīb" was the product of a competition organised by *al-Rā'id* magazine in May 1953.[28]

The role of the educational contacts between Kuwait and the outside (Arab) world in the development of Kuwaiti literature cannot be overstressed. Contact occurred in two ways: (i) the in-coming, teaching mission, known as *al-Ba'tha al-ta'līmiyya* (ii) and the study-abroad, education mission, known as *al-Ba'tha al-'ilmiyya.*[29] *Al-Ba'tha al-ta'līmiyya* was the mission embarked upon by Arab teachers from Palestine beginning from 1936. The influx of the Palestinian teachers was very helpful in the advancement of the education sector in Kuwait. Kuwait benefited in two ways: while Kuwaiti students gained much more experience from their immigrant Palestinian teachers, the latter contributed immensely to the further growth of scholarship, journalism, as well as literary activities in the country.[30]

The second type of educational contact, study-abroad mission, was of much greater significance. It gave rise to a more radical and vigorous form of intellectualism among Kuwaitis. It was a situation whereby Kuwaiti students began to go and study in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon on scholarships. *Al-Jam'iyya al-khayriyya,* mentioned above, was also responsible for this scholarship scheme.[31] The mission to Egypt in particular, which first took place in 1937, was as significant to the advancement of Kuwaiti literature as the study-abroad, education mission of Egypt itself in the nineteenth century. This involved sending young Egyptian intellectuals to France for further study during the time of Muhammad Ali. This Egyptian education mission constituted one of the causes of Arabic literary revivalism in Egypt and beyond.[32]

The Kuwaiti education mission to Egypt yielded positive results. First, it opened the way for a new strand of intellectual movement in Kuwait by producing a new forward-looking, progressive generation of intellectuals. Second, it led to the

establishment of *al-Ba'tha*, one of the above-listed magazines, which was jointly founded and run by Kuwaiti students in Egypt. Beginning with its first issue in December 1946, *al-Ba'tha* was concerned with the affairs of Kuwaiti students in the host country. It also served as a medium for promoting Kuwaiti culture and society at large, both at home and abroad. This magazine ceased to appear in 1954. But, as noted by al-Sanousi, *al-Ba'tha* issues were specifically important to Kuwaiti literary history "because [they] remain a vital source in which to trace the works of those writers from the late [19]40s to the early [19]50s."[33]

The general characteristic feature of Kuwaiti fiction of the formative stage was experimentation: writers experimenting with the writing of the short story, in its modern sense. As it was the case with modern Arabic fiction in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries,[34] the various early attempts at story writing by Kuwaitis came in the form of writing either original stories, or stories translated or adapted from foreign languages and cultures into Arabic. The stories published in this formative or experimental period, were scattered in different magazines; they were not compiled into a single volume until 1982. The volume by Khālid S. al-Zayd contains some ninety fictional and non-fictional narratives written by Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaiti Arabs up to 1955. It is entitled *Qiṣaṣ yatīma fī al-majallāt al-Kuwaytiyya 1929-1955* [Orphaned Stories in Kuwaiti Magazines: 1929-1955].[35]

The stories of the formative stage of Kuwaiti fiction shared certain similarities in terms of form and content, themes and style. Some of them are conventionally didactic, treating issues of religious and social moralities. Some of the narratives reflect social realism through the exploration of themes like love and

marital problems, the suffering of Kuwaiti women, women's denial of formal education, and the conflict between the traditional system and the emergent new system of life and civilization (resulting from the effects of oil exploration). Some of the prominent figures among Kuwaiti fictionists of the formative stage were: Fahd al-Duwayrī (b.1921), Fāḍil Khalaf (b. 1927), and Farḥān Rāshid al-Farḥān (b. 1928).[36]

The Mature Stage: late 1950s to the contemporary period

Whereas the period between the 1920s and mid-1950s was the formative stage of Kuwaiti fiction, the second half of the twentieth century can generally be regarded as the mature stage of its development. With the establishment of daily newspapers and more periodicals, and the foundation of some much more professional literary societies and governmental organisations, Kuwaiti fiction began to assume maturation. In 1958, two more magazines, *al-Mujtama'* and *al-'Arabī,* were founded. Like their predecessors these two weekly papers played a remarkable role in promoting Kuwaiti literature in general and the short story in particular.[37]

The emergent Kuwaiti print media became stronger in the 1960s and 1970s through the establishment of daily newspapers beginning with *al-Ra'y al-'āmm* (1961). Other dailies that appeared in the country during the period in question here were *al-Waṭan* (1961), *al-Siyāsa* (1965), *al-Qabas* (1972) and *al-Anbā'* (1976). The primary aim and objective of virtually every one of these dailies was to serve political purposes. But, besides that, the papers significantly promoted literature and contributed towards widening both the readership and the scope of literary writing in the country.[38] Connected to the role of the print media was that of the printing and

publishing companies. One of the most famous privately-owned Kuwaiti publishing companies, which has been facilitating the publication and distribution of fictional works in Kuwait, is al-Rubay‘ān.

Specifically signalling the maturation of Kuwaiti literature was the establishment of *Rābiṭat al-udabā' fī al-Kuwayt* (The Kuwaiti Writers' Association) in 1964.[39] This association is unlike the socio-cultural and literary clubs that had existed before it for which creative writing was either of secondary importance, or their members were amateur writers. The emergence of the Kuwaiti Writers' Association is proof that creative writing has become a profession in Kuwait. To support this point is the fact that whereas most of the literary clubs of the formative period had ceased to exist, the Kuwaiti Writers' Association continues to function and attract membership up to the present day.

In the Kuwaiti Writers' Association, authors have found a single umbrella under the rules and regulations of which they can operate, both as individuals and as a group. The association has worked to 'nurture' the ever-flourishing literary movement in Kuwait. As a body, it continues to promote the writing and publication of literary works; to censor the writings of its members; and to represent Kuwait in conferences and symposia abroad.[40] It set up a monthly literary journal, called *al-Bayān*.[41] As a mouthpiece of a versatile association, *al-Bayān* has served as an avenue for the publication of various forms of creative and critical works, serving various genres. Apart from publishing this journal, the association also serves as publisher of books on Kuwaiti literature.

The Kuwaiti government has continued to play a significant role in promoting scholarship in general and the cultural and literary arts in particular. It

was during the mature stage that various Kuwaiti government ministries and bureaus began to give different kinds of support and encouragement to the arts, literature and culture. For instance, the Kuwaiti government established *al-Majmaʿ al-waṭanī li-l-thaqāfa wa-l-fūnūn wa-l-adab* [The National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters] (1974), and *Muʾassasat al-Kuwayt li-l-taqaddum al-ʿilmī* [Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences] (1976).[42] Under the auspices of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Arts and Culture, these two foundations have continued to organise competitions on works of art, literature and science. Prizes are awarded to authors of the best entries, a phenomenon that has served as an incentive to talented individuals.[43]

Apart from the influence of the above-discussed factors, Kuwaiti storywriters of the mature stage derived their inspiration and enthusiasm from the events in society. The three additional factors that aided the writing and publication of fictional texts during the mature stage and beyond have been stated by al-Sanousi. They included the oil-engendered economic fortunes which have transformed Kuwait and the general outlook of its people; the exposure of Kuwaitis to western (notably, English and Russian) literature and culture, which came about especially through education and the translation of foreign works into Arabic; and the growing national consciousness and interest in political and ideological debates.[44] These three 'environmental factors' have continued to constitute some of the sources of inspiration for Kuwaiti writers.

The stories of the mature stage, in terms of content, do not reflect a great difference from those of the preceding stage. Women's issues, the conflict of civilisations, love and marital problems and so on continue to feature in the stories. The Arab-Israeli conflict became a popular theme in Kuwaiti fiction during this

era.[45] One of the most significant hallmarks of Kuwaiti fiction of the contemporary period is the evolution of war narratives in the 1990s. Needless to say, Kuwaiti war narratives were inspired by the experience of Kuwaitis during the Iraqi invasion and occupation of their country (August 1990 to February 1991). The Iraqi military occupation led many more male and female Kuwaiti citizens to take up the pen.

As well as better perfecting the style of Kuwaiti fiction, its form is also widened in the mature stage to include the novel. Kuwaiti writers' zeal to write longer fiction began in the late 1940s and early 1950s with the publication of *Ālām ṣadīq* [A Friend's Suffering] (1948) and *'Āshiq al-ṣūra* [The Picture's Lover] (1950). Written by Farḥān Rāshid al-Farḥān and 'Alī Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī, respectively, these two stories were much longer than their contemporaries and can be regarded as novellas.[46] But what is generally reckoned by contemporary Kuwaiti literary historians as the first Kuwaiti novel is Abdullah Khalaf's *Mudarrisa min al-mirqāb* [A Female Teacher from Mirqāb], published in 1962. The Kuwaiti novel began to standardize, to assume maturity, according to al-Sanousi, with the publication of *Mudarrisa min al-mirqāb*.[47]

While the short story has continued to be more popular among Kuwaiti writers of the contemporary period than the novel, more writers have also become novelists. Some of the prominent contemporary Kuwaiti male writers are: Sulaymān al-Shaṭṭī (1942-), Sulaymān al-Khulayfī (1946-), Walīd al-Rujayb (1954-), Muhammad M. al-'Ajmī (1956-), Ḥamad al-Ḥamad (1954-), Ṭālib al-Rifā'ī (1958-), and, of course, Ismā'īl Fahd Ismā'īl (1940-), who is the acclaimed 'greatest' and most prolific Kuwaiti novelist.[48] The names of contemporary Kuwaiti women

fictionists include Laylā al-'Uthmān (1945-), Thurayya al-Baqṣumī (1952-), Munā al-Shāfi'ī (1946-), and Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm (1952-);[49] more information about Kuwaiti women's fiction and fictionists will be given in the next chapter.

Literary activities are flourishing in Kuwait at present. The Kuwaiti Ministry of Arts and Culture continues to organise, directly or through some governmental foundations, various literary and cultural festivals. Some of their programmes include the organisation of the International Book Fair, usually held between December and January, and *Mahrajān al-Qurayn* (al-Qurayn Festival) – *al-Qurayn* being one of the old names of Kuwait – usually held in February to mark the anniversary of Kuwait's National Day (25 February). Part of the programmes of these two annual events is story writing or poetry competition/presentation aimed at encouraging especially the younger generation of Kuwaiti creative writers.[50]

Some weekly literary circles are functional in contemporary Kuwait. The Kuwaiti Writers' Association, mentioned above, continues to hold seminars every Wednesday, and public lectures on an occasional basis. Kuwaiti as well as non-Kuwaiti intellectuals are invited to give presentations on a literary topic, creative or critical. Another popular literary circle in Kuwait today is *Multaqā al-thulāthā'* (Tuesday Rendezvous), established by the acclaimed 'greatest' Kuwaiti novelist, Ismā'īl Fahd Ismā'īl, mentioned above. An informal weekly gathering, *Multaqā al-thulāthā'* is held in Ismā'īl's office at the heart of Kuwait City; and the coordination of its programmes is often done by Laylā al-'Uthmān, a close, long-term friend of Ismā'īl. Creative writers, literary historians, critics, journalists and scholars of Arabic language and literature from various countries of the Arab world are invited to give presentations.[51]

Conclusion

The foregoing overview shows that Kuwaiti fiction has grown and developed steadily from its inception. The stages of its development have been roughly labelled as 'the formative' and 'the mature' stages, as explained above. At both stages, the writing and publication of fiction in Kuwait have been facilitated by several factors. At the formative stage (the second quarter of the twentieth century), education appeared to be the most important factor. At the mature stage (the 1950s onwards), the oil-engendered economic buoyancy of both the State and the people of Kuwait greatly enhanced the production and consumption of literary works. The proliferation of fictional narratives from the 1990s to date is connected with the apparently inerasable effects of the Iraqi war on Kuwait. That war has automatically divided Kuwaiti fiction into two broader categories: 'peacetime' and 'war' narratives.[52]

By the year 2000, Kuwaiti men and women writers had published scores of collections of short stories and dozens of novels.[53] The wide difference between the number of Kuwaiti short stories and short-story writers, and that of novels and novelists is an indication that the short story is more popular among Kuwaitis than the novel. This might be due to the common fact that the former is quicker to read, easier and often assumed to be less demanding to write than the latter. The next chapter discusses the female literary subculture in Kuwait.

Notes and References

1. On the historical development of Kuwaiti poetry see, for example, 'Awāṭif al-Ṣabbāḥ, *al-Shi'r al-Kuwaytī al-ḥadīth,* (Kuwait: Kuwait University Press, 1972); N. Ṣ. al-Rūmī, *al-Ḥaraka al-shi'riyya fī al-khalīj al-'arabī bayn al-taqlīd wa-l-taṭawwur* (Kuwait: Sharikat al-maṭba'a al-'aṣriyya wa-maktabātuhā, 1980); M. M. al-Ṣūrī, *al-Funūn al-adabiyya fī al-Kuwayt* (Kuwait: al-Markaz al-'arabī li-l-i'lām, 1989, 1st edition), pp. 25-56; Khalīfa al-Wiqwān, "Muqaddima fī tārīkh al-shi'r al-Kuwaytī", *Majallat dirāsāt al-khalīj wa-l-jazīra al-'arabiyya* (Kuwait University), no. 2 (April 1975), pp. 67-82.
2. On the origins and growth of Kuwaiti drama, see al-Ṣūrī, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-138.
3. I acknowledge Dr Yaseen Noorani's suggestion, made in my First Year Report submitted in 2002, that I should add a note here on the history of Kuwait. On the socio-cultural and political history of Kuwait, see, for example, Jacqueline Ishmael, *Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982); M. F. Al-'Ajmi, *A Novelist from Kuwait: A Thematic Study of Ismā'īl Fahd Ismā'īl's Novels* (Kuwait: Kuwait University Press, 1996), Chapter 1: "Kuwait: Historical Background", pp. 1-30; Haya al-Mughni, *Women in Kuwait: the Politics of Gender* (London: Saqi Books, 1993), Chapter 1: "Class and Politics in Kuwait: Some Historical Background", pp. 19-39.
4. Y. Y. al-Ghunaim, *Kuwait Faces Avidity*, trans. E. I. Ayoub, (Kuwait: Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 2000), pp.13 *ff.*
5. See, for example, al-Mughni, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.
6. Al-Ghunaim, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 13 *ff.*
8. For more of the occupations of Kuwaitis in the pre-oil era, see Al-'Ajmi, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-24; and al-Mughni, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-25.
9. Al-'Ajmi, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
10. See *Ibid.* N.B. One estimate, published in 1999, states that Kuwaiti nationals constitute 35.1%, and non-Kuwaiti nationals, 64.9% of the total population. See Kuwaiti Information Office (USA) website: http://www.kuwait-info.org/country_profile.html. (This site was accessed on 25/4/2005).
11. See Kuwaiti Information Office, "Women in Kuwait" in http://www.kuwait-info.org/women.html. (This site was accessed on 25/4/2005).
12. I am aware of the very recent (May 2005) passing of a Kuwaiti parliamentary bill, which grants the long overdue Kuwaiti women suffrage.
13. One of the most cited early Kuwaiti literary historians is Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Rushayd who was the author of *Tārikh al-Kuwayt*, first published in 1926 and reprinted in 1971 (Beirut: Maṭba'at al-ḥayāt). On the development of Kuwaiti literature and the lives and works of Kuwaiti literary figures from 1843 to the 1980s, see Kh. S. al-Zayd, *Udabā' al-Kuwayt fī al-qarnayn* (Kuwait: Sharikat al-Rubay'ān li-l-nashr wa-l-tawzī') vol. 1, 1967; vol. 2, 1981; and vol. 3, 1982. A reproduction of the introduction to this book, in which the author traces the origins and development of Kuwaiti literature, is contained in the introduction to vol. 2, pp. 8-15.
14. For a biographical note on Shaykh 'Abd al-Jalīl al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, see al-Zayd, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 41-54.
15. Al-Zayd, *op. cit*, vol. 2, p. 10.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

17. On the role of *al-Jam'iyya al-khayriyya* and the National Library, see H. M. A. al-Sanousi, "The Kuwaiti Short Story: an Analytical Study of its Political and Social Aspects" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Glasgow, 1995), pp.12-13.
18. Al-Sanousi notes that the National Library subscribed to Egyptian periodicals like *al-Balāgh, al-Ahrām, al-Muqaṭṭam* and *al-Qabas*, and that the availability of copies of these periodicals in Kuwait made it possible for people to follow events in other Arab countries. See *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Al-Zayd regards the pre-1843 period in Kuwait as an age of 'stagnation' and 'backwardness' in terms of literary activity; and the period between the mid-1840s and the late 1920s as the second stage of Kuwaiti literary history. See al-Zayd, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 10-15.
21. For further information on the role played by journalism at the intellectual centres of the Arab world, see, for example, Abdel-Aziz Abdel-Meguid, *The Modern Arabic Short Story: its Emergence, Development and Form* (Cairo: al-Maaref Press, n. d.) pp.64 *ff*; J. A. Haywood, *Modern Arabic Literature 1800-1970* (London: Lund Humphries, 1971) pp. 24 *ff*; Hamdi Sakkut, *The Egyptian Novel and Its Main Trends 1913-1952* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1971), pp. 5 *ff*. For more information on the role of journalism in Kuwait, see al-Sanousi, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
22. Al-Sanousi, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
23. The story appeared in *al-Kuwayt*, vol. 2, nos. 6 and 7 (December 1929). It is included in Kh. S. al-Zayd's compilation, *Qiṣaṣ yatīma fī al-majallāt al-Kuwaytiyya: 1929-1955* (Kuwait: Sharikat al-Rubay'ān li-l-nashr wa-l-tawzī', 1982, 1st edition), pp. 33-41.
24. Al-Sanousi, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
25. This point is noted by al-Zayd in his introduction to *Qiṣaṣ yatīma fī al-majallāt al-Kuwaytiyya: 1929-1955*, above. He explains that he has labelled the stories in this volume *yatīma*, because each of them was "the only story" written by their authors, who thereafter abandoned story writing (see p. 1). The point is also stressed by M. M. al-Ṣūrī in al-Ṣūrī, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
26. Al-Sanousi, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
27. *Ibid.*
28. See Hayfā' Hāshim, "al-intiqām al-rahīb" in al-Zayd, *Qiṣaṣ yatīma*, pp. 195-201.
29. Al-Zayd, *Udabā' al-Kuwayt*, vol. 2, pp. 8 *ff*.
30. Al-Ṣūrī, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.
31. Al-Zayd, *Udabā' al-Kuwayt*, vol. 2, pp. 8 *ff*.
32. The continuity in the education mission to Egypt led to the establishment of *Bayt al-Kuwayt* (Kuwait House) in Cairo in 1945; it was meant to serve as hostel for Kuwaiti students in Egypt. See *Ibid.* For more information about the Egyptian education mission to France, see, for example, Matti Moosa, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997, 2nd edition), pp.5 *ff*. See also Sakkut, *op. cit.*, pp. 1 *ff*.; Haywood, *op. cit.*, pp. 29 *ff*.
33. Al-Sanousi, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
34. For more on the origins and development of modern Arabic fiction in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq see Matti Moosa, *op. cit.*, pp. 5 *ff*; Sakkut, *op. cit.*, pp. 1 *ff*.; Haywood, *op. cit.*, pp. 29 *ff*.
35. For the publisher and year of publication of al-Zayd's *Qiṣaṣ yatīma fī al-majallāt al-Kuwaytiyya: 1929-1955*, see note no. 21 above.
36. I have tried to indicate the dates of birth and, where applicable, death of writers mentioned in the whole of this thesis. I regret to say that, if unknown, such dates are

not indicated. All of the three men named here are now dead, but I am unable to ascertain the year each of them died. For their lives and works see, for example, al-Sanousi, *op. cit.*, pp. 55 *ff.* Fahd al-Duwayrī, in particular, was one of the most prolific Kuwaiti short-story writers; he lived from the formative stage to the contemporary period. He was dubbed *Shaykh al-qaṣṣāṣīn al-Kuwaytiyyīn* (Leader of Kuwaiti Fictionists) by al-Zayd in his biographical book, *Shaykh al-qaṣṣāṣīn al-Kuwaytiyyīn, Fahd al-Duwayrī: ḥayātuhu wa-āthāruhu* (Kuwait: Dār al-'urūba li-l-nashr, n. d.).

37. Al-Ṣūrī, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
38. For more information about the emergence of the press in Kuwait, see K. K. Murad, "The Kuwaiti Press: a Study of its Development, Structure and Characteristics", M. A. dissertation, University of Keele, 1988.
39. For more information about this association see the Kuwaiti Writers' Association website: http://www.kuwaitwriters.net/ (This site was last accessed on 25/4/2005).
40. Al-Sanousi, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
41. Beginning with its first issue in 1967, *al-Bayān* continues to appear up to the present day.
42. Some governmental organizations and institutions were founded in Kuwait to promote specific forms of arts and culture like drama, folklore, and painting.
43. Al-Ṣūrī, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
44. Al-Sanousi, *op. cit.*, p. 182.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Al-Ṣūrī, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.
47. Al-Sanousi, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
48. Ismā'īl Fahd Ismā'īl (1940-) continues to play a leading role in the Kuwaiti novel. He has published several collections of short stories and over twenty novels. For detailed information on his life and works, see al-'Ajmi, *op. cit.*
49. For the lives and works of some of these writers, see Laylā Ṣāliḥ, *Udabā' wa-adībāt al-Kuwayt* (Kuwait: The Kuwaiti Writers' Association Press, 1996). This book is also available online: http://www.althakerah.net/sub.php (This site was accessed on 25/4/2005; at the homepage click on *dhākirat al-shi'r*, then, *al-Kuwayt*, and then, *Tarājim al-udabā' al-Kuwaytiyyīn*). See also al-Sanousi, *op. cit.*, pp. 100 *ff.*
50. I attended some of the literary events organised during the period of the Kuwaiti International Book Fair in December 2002/January 2003, and those of the *Mahrajān al-Qurayn* in February 2003.
51. Through my attendance at some of the programmes of the Kuwaiti Writers' Association and *Multaqā al-thulāthā'* between December 2002 and March 2003, I met with and interviewed some of the writers.
52. See Barbara Michalak-Pikulska, *The Contemporary Kuwaiti Short Story in Peacetime and War, 1929-1995* (Krakow: The Enigma Press, 1997).
53. This is evident in the list of works published by Kuwaiti writers included in Laylā Ṣāliḥ's *Udabā' wa-adībāt al-Kuwayt*.

CHAPTER TWO

THE KUWAITI FEMALE LITERARY TRADITION: AN OVERVIEW

Beginning with an historical survey of the rise of the feminist movement in Kuwait, this chapter outlines the origins and development of the female literary tradition in the country. While noting some of the contributions of Kuwaiti women towards the development of Kuwaiti literature and scholarship in general, the chapter pays special attention to Kuwaiti women's participation in fiction writing. This is followed by a brief discussion of the status of women in pre- and post-oil Kuwaiti society, as represented in selected short stories by both Kuwaiti men and women writers. Besides some publications on Kuwaiti women's social and intellectual history, this chapter draws on my experience, observation, and interviews with Kuwaiti writers.[1]

The Rise of the Feminist Movement in Kuwait

Women in Kuwait, like their counterparts in other parts of the Arab world,[2] had to face a great struggle against the male-oriented, traditional Arab social order. A consideration of Kuwaiti social history reveals that some factors were responsible for the evolution and efflorescence of the feminist movement in Kuwait in the second half of the twentieth century. Those factors included education and job opportunities for Kuwaiti women, class affiliation, the press, and the formation of women's societies.

The education of Kuwaiti women was the most important factor that engendered the rise of the feminist movement in the country. The first girls' school in Kuwait was opened in 1938;[3] it was initially restricted to primary education, but upgraded to secondary level just over a decade later. Kuwaiti girls began to enjoy further education

opportunities from the 1950s, with the chance of reaching a secondary/diploma level. The first higher education institution in the country, Kuwait University, was founded in 1966, but women were not allowed to enrol at this university until around 1969. University education played a significant role in re-shaping young Kuwaiti women's worldview. Apart from Kuwait University, from where some of the 1960s/1970s generation had graduated, Kuwaiti women from the rich, upper-class families also studied at universities abroad, especially in Egypt and Britain.[4]

In its bid to avoid over-domination by foreign workers in its labour force consequent upon the oil boom in the country, the Kuwaiti government announced its official policy of equal education and job opportunities for male and female citizens, with effect from 1967/68.[5] Hence, the newly educated Kuwaiti women began to take up jobs as schoolteachers and nurses in the first place, and, later on, as 'subordinate' office workers in some specified government ministries. As they began to obtain university degrees, some of the women joined academia working as university lecturers.[6] The women in the labour force began to become independent of men, economically. In effect, some of them were able to pursue their feminist goals as individuals and as a group.

The class-affiliation factor is connected to the role of women's societies in the rise and development of feminist activism in Kuwait. According to al-Mughni, newly educated Kuwaiti women of the 1960s/1970s generation were divided by the traditional class system: the upper class women from rich merchant families, and the middle class women from less privileged families.[7] Some individuals from each of these categories of educated Kuwaiti women made a lot of efforts in their agitation for women's liberation

from perennial social injustice and inequality in Kuwaiti society. In order to consolidate and make their feminist propaganda more effective and enterprising, women from each of these classes endeavoured to found an organization. The two earliest women's societies in Kuwait emerged in 1963. They were: the 'Women's Cultural and Social Society' (WCSS), and the 'Arab Women's Development Society (AWDS). Whereas the former was founded by women of the upper class, the founders of the latter belonged to the middle class.[8]

In addition to fighting for Kuwaiti women's liberation, women's organizations contributed to the promotion of literature among Kuwaiti women. In 1970, the 'Arab Women's Development Society' (AWDS) organized the 'First Kuwaiti Women's Day'. One of the major events of this "lavish" celebration was the award of the 'Kuwaiti Women's Medal'. The fact that one of the five awardees of this medal at its inauguration was a woman creative writer, a poetess named Mūdī al-'Ubaydī,[9] might have served as an incentive to Kuwaiti women writers.

With regard to the press as a facilitating agent in the rise and promotion of the feminist movement in Kuwait, two factors were involved. First, the Kuwaiti print media encouraged the writing of feature articles by any woman or man who supported the growing agitation for women's liberation in mid-twentieth century Kuwait. Women's articles were particularly welcomed; and to boost their morale, one of the existing male-dominated magazines, *al-Ba'tha*, mentioned in the preceding chapter, created *Rukn al-mar'a* [Women's Corner] in its monthly issues, beginning from February 1950.[10]

The second way by which the press contributed to the propagation of the women's liberation movement in Kuwait was that women were later allowed to work in

media-houses – print and electronic – as freelance or paid-workers, and most importantly, as sub-editors. The advantage of Kuwaiti women working as sub-editors facilitated, among other things, the establishment of separate magazines owned and controlled by women themselves. *Usratī*, one of the earliest women's magazines in the country, was established sometime between 1963 and 1964; Ghanīma al-Marzūq became its first editor.[11] One of the most critical and openly feminist magazine, *al-Majālis*, was founded in 1980 by Hidāyā S. al-Sālim (1936-2001). Until her death, al-Sālim was the editor of this magazine.[12]

Kuwaiti Women and Literary Writing

In his review of Laylā M. Ṣāliḥ's bio-bibliographical book, *Adab al-mar'a fī al-Kuwayt* [Women's Literature in Kuwait] (1978),[13] Muhammad M. al-Ṣūrī notes that this book by Ṣāliḥ is a groundbreaking resource on Kuwaiti women's literature.[14] But, in addition to the fact that *Adab al-mar'a fī al-Kuwayt* is no longer on the market, it has been "replaced",[15] according to the author, by her much more comprehensive and non gender-specific book, *Udabā' wa-adībāt al-Kuwayt* (Kuwaiti Men and Women Writers] (1996),[16] hereafter referred to as *Udabā' wa-adībāt*. Hence, rather than the former, references are here made to the latter.

As evident in *Udabā' wa-adībāt*, Kuwaiti women have distinguished themselves as academics, critics, poetesses, short-story writers, novelists, biographers and folklorists.[17] It is only in the area of dramatic literature, that women's voices have not been heard very much in Kuwait. From the primary and secondary materials available at my disposal, Fawziyya S. al-Sālim, mentioned in the preceding chapter, appears to be one of the very few Kuwaiti women to have published plays. Even this newly established woman writer is becoming more popular as a novelist than as a poetess and a dramatist, as she was better known earlier. While there are few women playwrights, the number of Kuwaiti female theatre artistes has risen since the middle of the twentieth century.[18]

In the sphere of literary criticism, Kuwaiti women have demonstrated that they are as talented as their male counterparts, thanks to the higher education opportunities they have had. Apart from critical articles published in newspapers, magazines, literary and academic journals, Kuwaiti women have written major scholarly works on literary history and criticism. For instance, one of the earliest historical and critical studies on Kuwaiti poetry was written by 'Awāṭif al-Ṣabāḥ and published in 1972.[19] A similar work of broader scope, covering the history and criticism of Arabic poetry in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf in the modern period, was written by Nūriyya Ṣ al-Rūmī and published in 1980.[20]

Women have used their pens to promote the feminist as well as the nationalist movement in Kuwait in times of peace and war. During the years of and after the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in the early 1990s in particular, Kuwaiti women wrote and

continue to write articles, books and literary pieces to condemn the heinous invasion. Examples of such writings are Hidāyā S. al-Sālim's articles "Naḥn al-ṣāmidūn" [We Were Brave][21] and "A'yāduka yā waṭanī" [Happy Celebrations, My Nation] [22] both of which were published in the early 1990s in *al-Majālis*. The assassination Hidāyā al-Sālim in 2001 was linked to her overt criticism of some of the cultural/tribal practices that are still pervasive in some sections of contemporary Kuwaiti society.[23]

Poetry appears to be the most exploited literary genre by Kuwaiti women writers. They have used poetry to register their grievances against patriarchy, to demand women's rights in Kuwait and in support of the call for Kuwaiti as well as Arab nationalism/unity. Some of the famous women's names in Kuwaiti poetry include Princess Su'ād al-Ṣabāḥ (1946-), Janna al-Qarīnī (1956-), Kāfiya Ramaḍān (1948-), Ghanīma al-Ḥarb (1949-), Fāṭima al-'Abdullah (1961-) and Nūra al-Mulīfī (1966-).[24]

The men and women writers included in Laylā Ṣāliḥ's *Udabā' wa-adībāt* are not only registered members of the Kuwaiti Writers' Association, but also, they were those who had established themselves as writers by the mid-1990s. One in three (19 out of 57) writers listed in the book is a woman; this points to the existence of a female literary subculture in Kuwait by the end of the last century. Since 1996, when *Udabā' wa-adībāt* was published, a lot of young women writers have emerged, resulting in a preponderance of women's literary works in contemporary Kuwait.

Kuwaiti Women's Fiction: the Journey so far

As evidenced in Khālid S. al-Zayd's voluminous compilation, *Qiṣaṣ yatīma fī al-majallāt al-Kuwaytiyya 1929-1955* ['Orphaned' Stories in Kuwaiti Magazines: 1929-1955],[25] mentioned in the preceding chapter, Kuwaiti women began to publish short narratives from 1948. However, what appears to be the first fictional narrative published by a Kuwaiti woman was "Riḥlat Farīd wa-Laylā" [Farīd and Laylā's Journey], a story by Ḍiyā' al-Badr. This story, which appeared in *al-Ba'tha* in 1952, was followed, a year later, by two other fictional narratives: Hayfā' Hāshim's "al-Intiqām al-rahīb" [Horrible Revenge] in *al-Rā'id* (May, 1953), and Badriyya Musā'id's "Amīna" [Amīna] in *al-Ba'tha* (June, 1953).

Al-Sanousi notes that, after June 1953 when "Amīna" appeared, some Kuwaiti women continued to challenge men's domination in fiction writing, and that the short story continued to gain popularity among women.[26] But, it seems no effort has been made to compile those stories, if any, by Kuwaiti women published in various magazines in the late 1950s through the 1960s, a period of a decade and a half not covered by al-Zayd's compilation, mentioned above. This study has not been able to investigate Kuwaiti women writings of this period; they might be an area of future research.

The apparent resurgence in Kuwaiti women's literary publication came in the 1970s. In 1971, Fāṭima Yūsuf al-'Alī published her novella, *Wujūh fī al-ziḥām* [Faces in the Crowd];[27] it was followed, in 1972, by Hidāyā al-Sālim's "Kharīf bilā maṭar" [An

Autumn without Rain],[28] which is a short story. Kuwaiti women began to publish their respective collections of short stories by the late 1970s. The 1980s through 1990s witnessed the efflorescence of Kuwaiti women's short stories and novels.

Contemporary Kuwaiti women, who have become famous as fictionists, include Laylā al-'Uthmān (1945-), Munā al-Shafi'ī (1946-), Fawziyya Shuwaysh al-Sālim (1949-), Thurayyā al-Baqṣumī (1952-), Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm (1952-), Fāṭima Yūsuf al-'Alī (1953-), Laylā M. Ṣāliḥ, 'Āliya Shu'ayb (1964-), Khawla al-Qazwīnī, Fawziyya al-Suwaylim, Wafā' al-Ḥamdān, and Laṭīfa Baṭī.[29] These women constitute the older generation of women writers in Kuwait; the promising number of the emerging younger generation shows that there is a brilliant future for fiction in this small Arab Gulf State.

A cursory look at the works of the above-named Kuwaiti women fictionists shows that the short story is the dominant genre among them. So far and altogether, Kuwaiti women have published scores of short story collections and over twenty novels. Out of the eleven women listed above, only four – Laylā al-'Uthmān, Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm, Khawla al-Qazwīnī, and recently, Fawziyya S. al-Sālim – are published novelists. Their novels belong to a range of common sub-genres like social and historical realisms, to psychological and philosophical novels, and science fiction.

Images of Women in Some Kuwaiti Short Stories

The aim of this section is to discuss, very briefly, the status of women in pre- and post-oil Kuwaiti society, as depicted in some fictional texts by both Kuwaiti men and women writers. The section is meant to give the reader a basic impression of the various images of Kuwaiti/Arabian women's stereotypical passivity and conformity, which are commonplace in the dominant masculinist literary discourse. The summaries and general notes on the plots of the stories discussed below will show that not all fictional texts by Kuwaiti women can be classified as 'revolutionary'. The extent to which some of the female 'non-revolutionary' texts can still be regarded as 'feminist' will be explained later as the section progresses.

Appraising the status of Arab women in the Arabic short story in general, Roger Allen writes:

> From the earliest stages in the development of the Arabic short story, a good deal of attention has focused on the status of women in society. The traditional perspective of that predominantly male society has been that the primary aspiration of its female members is marriage [...]
>
> From the very beginnings of the short-story tradition in modern Arabic literature, writers have cast a most critical eye on the institution of marriage – its precedents, rituals and consequences – [...] The depiction of the sequence from young girl, to adolescent woman, to wife, to mother, has continued to provide the short story writer with a plethora of opportunities for the exploration of the conventions that govern the lives of women in the Arab world.[30]

The situation, succinctly described by Allen above, is particularly true of the Kuwaiti short story and novel at every stage of the history of their development. Each of the stories below illustrates Allen's observation.

The title of the very first Kuwaiti short story, "Munīra" (1929), mentioned in the preceding chapter, attests to the fact that woman is always a focus of attention in Kuwaiti fiction; Kuwaiti stories that have names of women as their titles abound. Besides giving women's names as titles, Kuwaiti writers – men and women alike – have always adopted the use of symbolic/descriptive words, or phrases, often attached to or associated with women and their status/situation. One can find examples of this in the titles of some of the earliest Kuwaiti men's stories like Fāḍil Khalaf's "Ḥanān al-umm" [Mother's Affection], "Sirr al-muṭallaqa" [Secret of the Divorcee] and "Min warā' al-ḥijāb" [From behind the Veil]; Farḥān Rāshid al-Farḥān's "Aḥlām fatāt" [Dreams of a Girl]; and Fahd al-Duwayrī's "Imra'a bā'isa" [A Miserable Woman]; and in women's stories like Khawla al-Qazwīnī's "Muṭallaqa min wāqi' al-ḥayā" [A Divorcee in the Reality of Life], and Laylā al-'Uthmān's "Imra'a fī inā'" [A Woman in an Urn].[31]

A much more insightful representation of the images of women in Kuwaiti society will be found in the contents of most Kuwaiti short stories and novels. Writers have tried to depict the sequence of the social development of a typical Kuwaiti woman from 'young girl, to adolescent woman, to wife, to mother' through different thematic approaches. "Munīra" (1929),[32] a story by the acclaimed precursor of the Kuwaiti short story, Khālid al-Faraj, presents an image of the stereotypical female. As I shall try to show in the next chapter through a comparative analysis of this story and another with similar thematic concern by Laylā al-'Uthmān, "Munīra" is utterly androcentric.

"Munīra" is the story of its eponymous heroine, a Kuwaiti woman who is married, as customary, to her cousin without her consent. Portrayed as a conformist and compliant woman, Munīra's problem does not stem from her objectification in the process of the marriage. As a wife, this young woman has to face one of the greatest challenges of marital life: she has no child. Knowing how shameful it is to be a childless wife in the pervasively patriarchal, pre-oil Kuwaiti society, Munīra continues to moan and groan in her private life for six years until she unilaterally decides to seek a solution by spiritual means. Having fallen into the traps of some soothsayers and spiritualists, Munīra commits suicide by drowning.[33]

In his brief comment on "Munīra", Mursel F. al-'Ajmī asserts that the heroine's "tragic end is made possible by her belief in superstitions and is brought on by the quack doctor, Umm Ṣāliḥ."[34] This reading fails to recognise the primary cause (the root) of the heroine's problem; instead, it argues on the basis of the secondary cause. A feminist reading of the story would, on the other hand, consider the effects: the heroine's misfortune – her deception and suicidal death – as engendered by patriarchal culture. The latent cause of Munīra's problem is ingrained in Kuwaiti societal values and norms, which consider childlessness as a despicable female characteristic. Patriarchal society might be the one to 'blame' for Munīra's inordinate desire to have a child by any means, and for her self-destruction, which the heroine believes is the only way of escape from the loss of her social standing and respect in society. The creation of a male author, Munīra lacks the agency to think and act contrary to societal conventions.

According to al-‘Ajmi, the text of “Munīra” “reflects the call of the new generation [of Kuwaiti intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s] for social reform”; it is meant to criticise superstitious beliefs and practices that were prevalent in pre-oil Kuwaiti society.[35] But the question is, why is a woman, Munīra, represented as an embodiment, and at the same time, the victim of such superstitious beliefs and practices? Why is her husband, ‘Abd al-Qādir, portrayed as an epitome of pristine faith and trust in Allah? Why not the other way round? The answers to these questions would reveal that “Munīra” is not simply a pioneering Kuwaiti fictional text, but also the one that laid the foundation of androcentric narrative discourse in Kuwait.

With the exception of “al-Intiqām al-rahīb”, the earliest fictional narratives by Kuwaiti women, published in the early 1950s, followed the same trend as the dominant androcentric narrative discourse. Let us look at Badriya Musā‘id’s “Amīna” (June 1953),[36] for example. Named after its heroine, this story tells us about a fifteen-year-old girl, who has been adopted by a loving and caring woman. On discovering that she is not the biological daughter of the woman, and that her parents are criminals whose whereabouts are unknown, Amīna becomes extremely unhappy. She finds solace only in the hope that she will soon be married to a rich young man, who has proposed to her.[37]

Though a story by a Kuwaiti woman, and set against the background of the pervasiveness of patriarchal culture in pre-oil Kuwaiti society, this story presents an image of the stereotypical woman. A conformist female figure, Amīna thinks and behaves in accordance with male-dictated societal conventions. The story imitatively depicts marriage as a major aspiration of the traditional Arab woman.

Whereas the likes of "Amīna" among Kuwaiti women's short stories are either imitative of the dominant narrative discourse, or apparently apolitical from the perspective of feminism, "Imra'a tatakawwan" [A Woman in the Making] (1991)[38] by 'Āliya Shu'ayb, and "Laylat al-iqtirā'" [Election Night] (1986)[39] by Laylā Ṣāliḥ represent another trend in the Kuwaiti female literary tradition. While they do not qualify as 'feminist revolutionary' texts from the viewpoint of this thesis, these two stories of the contemporary period are examples of one of the different phases of Arab feminist writing. The two stories under discussion here represent a preliminary stage of feminist consciousness: 'awareness' – "an awareness by women that as women they are systematically placed in a disadvantaged position."[40]

In "Imra'a tatakawwan", 'Āliya Shu'ayb expresses the awareness by women of gender inequality in Kuwait. Set, implicitly, in a pre-oil Kuwaiti environment, this story presents the status of an individual Kuwaiti girl 'within the traditional family structure.' Captured through the stream-of-consciousness technique, we meet the unnamed young heroine as she reflects on the discriminatory treatment she usually receives from her parents as against their preferential attitude towards Abdullah, her brother. After a lot of interrogations, the girl comes to infer from her hesitant mother's responses that she is being so treated because of the gender difference between her and Abdullah. As the story progresses, we see how the heroine realizes, at a later stage in life, the tremendous effects of gender discrimination and inequality that pervade Kuwaiti society. In her internal musings at the end of the story, we find her reflecting on how the male-

empowered conventional pattern of gender socialization has resulted in women's lack of self-confidence, self-realization and self-fulfillment.[41]

'Awareness' is also the rubric of Laylā Ṣāliḥ's "Laylat al-iqtirā'". Captured largely through the technique of interior monologue, this story depicts Kuwaiti women's political awareness and national consciousness in the second half of the twentieth century. Filtered through the point of view of an omniscient narrator, the author reflects the thoughts of the heroine, an unnamed woman, as she anxiously awaits the announcement of the result of a Kuwaiti parliamentary election for which her husband has just contested. In her soliloquy, she keeps lamenting the continual political segregation of women in Kuwait. She expresses dissatisfaction with the nonchalant attitude of the Kuwaiti government, the people, and the press towards the recognition of Kuwaiti women's rights to vote and to become members of the parliament.

The significance of this story as a feminist text lies in its reflection of Kuwaiti women's preparedness to seek a change in their 'second-class' status. This is implied at the end of the story, when the husband loses in the election, in spite of his aptitude and competence. The man decides to go into self-exile away from the "uncivilized, third world" country (Kuwait). The wife, on the contrary, refuses to follow him to his place of exile. This is because, as explicitly stated in the story, she is looking forward to a time when the progressive elements in society would work for a change in the Kuwaiti socio-cultural and political systems.[42]

Conclusion

The Kuwaiti female literary tradition, and the genre of fiction in particular, has a history of a little more than half a century. Factors like women's education and induction into the labour force, the press, and the establishment of women's societies were responsible for the growth of fiction among Kuwaiti women. What is arguably the single, most important underlying factor in the writing and publication of fiction by Kuwaiti women is the zeal to promote themselves, and to gain a voice in society, through literature. This is how, for example a writer and critic like Laylā al-'Uthmān see her writings.[43] The underlying zeal to raise women's voice in society could more importantly be observed in Kuwaiti women's fictional texts, whether the respective heroines of those texts are portrayed as stereotypically passive and conformist, or prototypically active and non-compliant. Even the writings of the so-called 'reactionary' contemporary Kuwaiti woman writer, Khawla al-Qazwīnī, mentioned above, represent the expression of a woman's voice through literature. Al-Qazwīnī's narratives represent a moderate point of view as regards gender roles in post-oil Kuwaiti society. This thesis focuses on the radical and revolutionary point of view, however.

When put within the context of the above, among other examples of Kuwaiti women's stories, the fictional texts to be examined in the subsequent chapters may be considered not only as feminist, but also, as revolutionary. 'Aliya Shu'ayb's and Laylā Ṣāliḥ's respective stories above, for instance, reflect women's awareness of their objectification and marginalisation in Kuwait. But these stories are wanting in the

portrayal of women's active agency in resisting patriarchal domination and oppression. They do not demonstrate women's resistance to the Kuwaiti patriarchal social order.

What therefore distinguishes the two short stories and three novels, studied in the subsequent chapters, from a large number of Kuwaiti women's fictional narratives is that, unlike the latter, the former represent women's resistance to male domination and oppression. Beginning from Hayfā' Hāshim's "al-Intiqām al-rahīb" (1953) to Fawziyya S. al-Sālim's *Muzūn* (2000), the texts examined in the following chapters represent some Kuwaiti women's overt or covert, violent or subtle, defiance and/or subversion of patriarchal authority.

Notes and References

1. As part of my three-month fieldwork in Kuwait between December 2002 and March 2003.
2. On the origins and development of Arab feminist writing beginning from the late 19th century, see Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (eds.), *Opening the Gates: a Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (London: Virago Press Limited, 1990), "Introduction".
3. See First Kuwaiti Women's Day Planning Committee, *al-Mar'a al-Kuwaytiyya fi al-māḍī wa-l-ḥāḍir* (Kuwait: Arab Women's Development Society, 1970, 1st edition) pp. 19-23.
4. See *Ibid.,* pp. 48-53; and on the role of education as a major factor in the rise and development of the feminist movement in Kuwait see Haya al-Mughni, *Women in Kuwait: the Politics of Gender* (London: Saqi Books, 1993) pp. 44 *ff.*
5. See *Ibid.*, p. 59.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 49 *ff.*
8. On the emergence and roles played by these two societies towards the emancipation of Kuwaiti women, see First Kuwaiti Women's Day Planning Committee, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-77; 84-94. See also al-Mughni, *op. cit.*, pp. 63 *ff*, which also includes information about other women's societies in Kuwait of the 1970s and 1980s.
9. *Ibid.,* pp. 75-76.
10. For the role of the print media in general in the promotion of the women's liberation movement in Kuwait, see *Ibid.,* pp. 50 *ff.*
11. 'First Kuwaiti Women's Day Planning Committee', *op. cit.*, p. 32.
12. On the life and works of Hidāya al-Sālim up to 1996, see Laylā M. Ṣāliḥ, *Udabā' wa-adībāt al-Kuwayt* (Kuwait: The Kuwaiti Writers' Association Press, 1996), pp. 78-82. This book is available online: Http://www.althakerah.net/sub.php (at the homepage click on *dhākirat al-shi'r*, then, *al-Kuwayt*, and then, *Tarājum al-udabā' al-Kuwaytiyyīn*).
13. Laylā M. Ṣāliḥ, *Adab al-mar'a fī al-Kuwayt*, (Kuwait: Dār dhāt al-salāsil, 1978).
14. M. M. al-Ṣūrī, *al-Fūnūn al-adabiyya fī al-Kuwayt* (Kuwait: al-Markaz al-'arabī li-l-i'lām, 1989, 1st edition), pp. 21-24.
15. Mrs Laylā Ṣāliḥ, interview conducted at her house in Kuwait on 18/12/2002.
16. For the publisher and year of publication of *Udabā' wa-adībāt*, see note no. 12 above.
17. This is evident in the annotated lists of their works as contained in *Ibid.*
18. 'First Kuwaiti Women's Day Planning Committee', *op. cit.*, p. 34.
19. See al-Ṣūrī, *op. cit.*, p. 26. The work was originally a M. A. dissertation submitted to Kuwait University in 1971. 'Awāṭif died in 1971 shortly after the completion of the book, which was published posthumously under the title: *al-Shi'r al-Kuwaytī al-ḥadīth* (Kuwait, Kuwait University Press, 1972).
20. Nūriyya Ṣ. al-Rūmī is a professor of Arabic literature at Kuwait University. The book is entitled *al-Ḥaraka al-shi'riyya fī al-khalīj al-'arabī bayn al-taqlīd wa al-taṭawwur* (Kuwait: al-Maktaba al-'asriyya, 1980, 1st edition). For a review of this book see al-Ṣūrī, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.
21. Hidāyā al-Sālim, "Naḥn al-ṣāmidūn" in *al-Majālis* (16/05/1992).

22. Hidāyā al-Sālim, "A'yāduka yā waṭanī" in *al-Majālis* (27/02/1993). For more on the feminist and nationalist writings of Kuwaiti women up to the mid-1990s see Ṣāliḥ, *Udabā' wa-adībāt*.
23. On the controversy over the reason behind the assassination of Hidāya al-Sālim see, for example, *al-Qabas* of 3/2/2002.
24. See *Ibid.*, for some biographical notes on these women.
25. Kh. S. al-Zayd, *Qiṣaṣ yatīma fī al-majallāt al-Kuwaytiyya: 1929-1955* (Kuwait: Sharikat al-Rubay'ān li-l-nashr wa-l-tawzī', 1982, 1st edition).
26. H. M. A. al-Sanousi, "The Kuwaiti Short Story: an Analytical Study of its Political and Social Aspects" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Glasgow, 1995), p. 193.
27. Faṭima Y. al-'Alī, *Wujūh fī al-ziḥām* (Kuwait: The Kuwaiti Government Press, 1971).
28. Hidāya al-Sālim's "Kharīf bilā maṭar" was first published in Kuwait in 1972, and serialized about three decades later in *al-Majālis*: 8/1/2000; 15/1/ 2000; and 22/1/2000.
29. For the lives and works of some of these, and other Kuwaiti women writers, see Ṣāliḥ, *Udabā' wa-adībāt*. See also the Kuwaiti Writers' Association website: Http://www.kuwaitwriters.net/writers.htm; and Joseph T. Zeidan, *Maṣādir al-adab al-nisā'ī fī al-'ālam al-'arabī al-ḥadīth 1800 – 1996* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'arabiyya li-l-dirāsāt wa-l-nashr, 1999).
30. Roger Allen, "The Arabic Short Story and the Status of Women" in Roger Allen *et. al.* (eds.), *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi Books, 1995), p. 78.
31. For more on how the titles of these stories reflect the status of Kuwaiti women at certain periods of time, see al-Sanousi, *op. cit.*, pp. 29 *ff.*
32. Khālid al-Faraj, "Munīra" in al-Zayd, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-41. This story first appeared in *al-Kuwayt*, vol. 2, nos. 6 and 7 (November and December 1929).
33. See also al-Sanousi, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25, for a summary of the plot of "Munīra".
34. M. F. al-'Ajmi, *A Novelist from Kuwait: A Thematic Study of Ismā'īl Fahd Ismā'īl's Novels* (Kuwait: Kuwait University Press, 1996), pp. 33-34.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Badriyya Musā'id, "Amīna" in al-Zayd, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-204. This story first appeared in *al-Ba'tha* (No. 6, June 1953).
37. See also al-Sanousi, *op. cit.*, p. 195, for a summary of the plot of "Amīna".
38. 'Āliya Shu'ayb, "Imra'a tatakawwan" in *Imra'a tatazawwaj al-baḥr*, a collection of short stories, (Kuwait: Maṭābi' al-waṭan, 1989), pp.3-4.
39. Laylā M. Ṣāliḥ's "Laylat al-iqtirā'" first appeared in the Kuwaiti newspaper, *al-Waṭan* (18/2/1985). It was included in the author's collection of short stories, *Jirāḥ fī al-'uyūn* (Kuwait: Maṭba'at al-yaqẓa, 1986). For a reproduction of the story, see Najma Idrīs, *al-Ajniḥa wa-l-shams: dirāsa taḥlīliyya fī al-qiṣṣa al-Kuwaytiyya* (Kuwait: The Kuwaiti Writers' Association Press, 1998, 1st edition), pp. 419-423.
40. Badran and Cooke, o*p. cit.*, p. xviii.
41. I acknowledge Najma Idrīs' analysis of this story in Idrīs, o*p. cit.*, pp. 98-99.
42. Ṣāliḥ, *Jirāḥ fī al-'uyūn*; Idrīs, *op. cit.*, pp. 419-423.

43. See, for instance, Laylā al-ʻUthmān's review of her two novels, *al-Mar'a wa-l-qiṭṭa* (1985) and *Wasmiyya takhruj min al-baḥr* (1986) entitled "al-Khurūj min baḥr al-kitāba" in *al-Qabas*, no. 8968 (9/6/1998), pp. 30-31.

CHAPTER THREE

MALE DOMINATION, FEMALE FURY IN KUWAITI WOMEN'S SHORT STORIES

Introduction

The texts selected for analysis in this thesis are studied in chronological order of their publication to reflect the dynamism of Kuwaiti women's fiction, as it develops and becomes more technically and ideologically sophisticated. Hence, my examination of the representation of Kuwaiti women's struggle against male domination begins with two short stories: Hayfā' Hāshim's "al-Intiqām al-rahīb" (1953) and Laylā al-'Uthmān's "Min milaff imra'a" (1979). Despite the gap of over two decades between the dates of their publication, these two stories constitute some of the early Kuwaiti women's fictional texts. This is because, as noted in Chapter Two, the first wave of the publication of fiction by Kuwaiti women was in the early 1950s, and fewer than five short stories were published then. The second wave was in the 1970s; until this period Kuwaiti women's fiction did not flourish, as explained in the preceding chapter.

Unlike their contemporaries (to be discussed briefly as this chapter progresses), the above-named two stories are exceptional, and one could identify several thematic and formal features which they share in common. They both explore the theme of 'gender and violence' as a way of reflecting the objectification and oppression of women in pre-oil Kuwaiti society. Each of these stories ends tragically, though in a different and contrasting manner; and their tragic plots are 'simple', in the Aristotelian sense, containing no *peripeteia*, or 'reversal of intention'.[1]

The most significant feature which these two early Kuwaiti women narratives have in common is that, in contrast with the dominant male literary discourse, they

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represent the radical and revolutionary pre-oil Kuwaiti female. Their respective heroines are represented not as simply submissive and stereotypical, but as resistant and defiant. Each of them demonstrates a woman's fury and rebellion against patriarchal social dominance and oppression. While "al-Intiqām al-rahīb" depicts male-initiated violence and female counterviolence, "Min milaff imra'a" portrays female-initiated fatalistic violence. Because I am looking at two separate stories in this chapter under different sections, each story/section will have its own introductory and concluding notes, in addition to this general introduction and a conclusion to the chapter.

1. "Al-Intiqām al-rahīb" [Horrible Revenge] [2]

Preamble

Written by an intermediate-school teacher, Hayfā' Hāshim, "al-Intiqām al-rahīb" was an award-winning entry in a story-writing competition organised by the now-defunct Kuwaiti magazine *al-Rā'id* in March 1953. "Al-Intiqām al-rahīb" (hereafter referred to as "al-Intiqām") was neither the first fictional narrative by a Kuwaiti woman, nor was it the first Kuwaiti narrative story with elements of feminist overtones. However, it is arguably a proto-revolutionary text, being a groundbreaking fictional attempt to represent Kuwaiti women's angry revolt against patriarchal authority. In virtually all the stories published between 1929 and 1955 by Kuwaiti male and female writers, which have been "inclusively" compiled by Kh. S. al-Zayd in *Qiṣaṣ yatīma fī al-majallāt al-Kuwaytiyya: 1929-1955*[3] (discussed at several points in the preceding chapters), "al-Intiqām" is the only story that can be

said to be a reversal of the dominant androcentric literary tradition of portraying female stereotypes.

Almost all the Kuwaiti female fictional characters in the narratives featuring in this compilation are essentially passive and submissive. Similarly, unlike most of those early narratives, the problem of the heroine of "al-Intiqām" is not that of a forced marriage, or childlessness. Rather, her problems revolve round her relegation to the domestic sphere. After the plot summary below, this section is divided into three thematically interweaving subsections: 'Alienation, repression and female defiance', 'female patriotism', and 'male violence, female revenge'. All these themes revolve round the broader themes of male domination and female fury.

Plot Summary

"Al-Intiqām" is the story of a teenage girl, Lu'lu'a, who is forcefully withdrawn from school by her brothers, 'Abd al-'Azīz and Ṣāliḥ, before the completion of her second year primary education. After four years of her reduction to total seclusion, Lu'lu'a begins to feel extremely alienated from the emerging new Kuwait of the mid-twentieth century. She then defies the Kuwaiti hierarchical social order by secretly escaping from home in order to explore the newly developed Kuwait City of the early 1950s. On her return home, Lu'lu'a is subjected to severe punishments. She is beating to a coma by her oldest brother, 'Abd al-'Azīz. Their old mother's passionate appeal to her raging son is an effort in futility. On regaining her consciousness, Lu'lu'a decides to protest her oppression. She takes her revenge by setting the family's residential compound ablaze, and she offers to die in the fire.

Alienation, Repression and Female Defiance

Though far from the narrative focus of the story, the text's reference to Lu'lu'a's girlhood experience is significant: it serves as a background to the distasteful circumstances that have led to the heroine's status, in the present time of the story, as a defiant girl. Besides depicting the process of the heroine's defiance, the first few paragraphs in the text are an encapsulation of some of the forms of women's objectification and devaluation in mid-twentieth century Kuwait. A common practice in pre-oil Kuwaiti society was that, as soon as a girl reached, or was about to reach puberty, she would be forcefully reduced to seclusion by her male relatives.[4]

Following the heroine's thoughts and actions throughout the story, the third person omniscient narrator tells us that Lu'lu'a sneaks out of her parental home one day, having been reduced to the domestic sphere four years earlier. Despite being veiled, Lu'lu'a is nervous. She is afraid of being noticed or identified by people; this indicates the extent of women's internalisation of the effects of patriarchal cultural ideology. As she walks through al-Sayf Street, where her home is located and the only street she is familiar with in the whole of the new Kuwait, reminiscences of her childhood freedom come to her mind.

Captured in a panoramic manner, Lu'lu'a recalls with disgust how she was forcefully withdrawn from school before the completion of her second-year primary education. Her brothers had claimed that, at her age then (perhaps between eight and ten), she was old enough to stop schooling; and that what she had learnt was more than enough for her to make a 'woman' (196). Exemplifying the patriarchal rule of force in keeping women under control is the fact that, on the day she was going to be

'told' that her childhood days were over, Lu'lu'a was told not verbally but by being physically violated. Connected with the problem of her relegation to seclusion and domesticity is Lu'lu'a's feeling of alienation from Kuwaiti society. As we see further under the section on "female patriotism", it is this feeling of alienation that incites the heroine's decision to tour the newly developed Kuwait City on the day of her defiance and rebellion.

The heroine's defiance could have been evoked by an instinctive desire for freedom and 'personhood'. However, the little education which Lu'lu'a has is apparently the only concrete thing that has had effects on her thinking and character. The fact that her former school, al-Sharqiyya Primary School, is her first point of call as she is on her way to the city supports this. The narrator relates that "[Lu'lu'a] found herself at the premises of the school. Her legs had inadvertently taken her to her great childhood institution" (196). That "she look[s] round the school in grief and distress", feels an extreme "nostalgia" and, "shed[s] tears" (*Ibid.*) serves to signify some Kuwaiti women's realisation of education as a means of enlightenment. Even though, due to the pervasiveness of Kuwaiti patriarchal culture, Lu'lu'a is unable to defy the authority of her brothers by joining the happy, unrestricted pupils she sees in the classrooms of her former primary school, the heroine remains defiant in identifying with her homeland. By continuing her journey into the city, she wants to challenge Kuwaiti patriarchal social convention.

Lu'lu'a's alienation from society is first reflected in the fact that, after leaving the school premises, she is faced with the problem of how to get to her destination. This provokes her expression of the view that she has been 'imprisoned' by her siblings. She identifies her brothers as patriarchal representatives, acting as "stubborn

warders" who "guard the prison" (home) where she had been confined four years ago. "[Her brothers] would never allow her to go out except once a year, and [even then, she would go out] in the company of her mother in order to visit her grandmother, who was living a very short distance away from their house" (*Ibid.*), the narrator comments.

Aware of her position as a marginalized and oppressed female member of mid-twentieth-century Kuwaiti society, Lu'lu'a realises the fact that her marginalization and alienation from society will continue unless she defies familial orders. Getting out on her own volition, and without the company of any of her relatives, constitutes the heroine's temporary escape from 'confinement'. Signifying her consciousness of this temporary escape as a decisive act of resistance to patriarchal domination, Lu'lu'a reflects that having endured her brothers' oppression and persecutions for four years, here she is "rebelling and revolting" (197). Captured through the interior monologue technique, this, and similar expressions by the heroine, serves to indicate the evocation of her subjectivity and active agency in defiance of the Kuwaiti patriarchal social order.

The class system as a factor in the perpetuation of women's social oppression in Kuwait has been stressed by Haya al-Mughni in her book, *Women in Kuwait: the Politics of Gender*.[5] Al-Mughni notes that strictly adhering to the practice of women's seclusion was among the "mechanisms of social control" employed by the pre-oil-Kuwaiti merchant class families. Whereas "[w]omen from more modest households were not entirely secluded" for economic reasons, the practice of "strict seclusion was a way of controlling women" from the merchant-class families in the pre-oil era.[6] Though refusing to recognise the fact that this practice is believed to

have some level of Islamic scriptural backing,[7] al-Mughni's assessment, that the always-on-the-move merchant-class men blindly adhered to it in order to ensure that their women were "safely protected [...] during the men's prolonged absence",[8] seems plausible. Lu'lu'a's social status, as a middle/upper class girl, seriously contributes to her alienation from society, alongside the general marginalisation of women from the public domain in Kuwait of the mid-twentieth century. Had she been from a lower class family, Lu'lu'a would not have been the victim of complete seclusion. This is what the taxi scene, discussed in what follows, serves to illustrate, though very 'ironically'.

Faced with the problem of how to reach her destination, Lu'lu'a decides to take a taxi to Kuwait city-centre; rather than simply pointing to the urban transformation of Kuwait, this shows how estranged she is from her town of residence. The narrator informs us that, in the taxi, Lu'lu'a meets a group of "dirty and smelly" Bedouin girls, who are going to the city on their normal trading activity (197). The encounter between Lu'lu'a and her female companions in the male-steered taxi is presented as a mere coincidence, making it appear less significant to the plot. But the taxi scene is significant for its representation of how class has been an important factor in the alienation of a considerable number of women in pre-oil Kuwait. In presenting this taxi scene, the author proves ironic: she refuses to reveal the significance of the symbolic encounter between Lu'lu'a and the female hawkers through her own frequent authorial commentary, or through a form of dialogue among the characters inside the taxi, or through even the inner consciousness of the heroine.

This taxi scene could be seen, therefore, as an instance of the 'unspoken' subtext of the story. Here we meet two categories of women in pre-oil Kuwait: the desert, or lower-class women, who enjoyed some level of social freedom; and the city, or upper-class women, whose lives were characterised by complete seclusion. Here represented by Lu'lu'a's female companion in the taxi, the desert and lower class, pre-oil Kuwaiti women were much less constrained; they worked outside their homes, mostly as peddlers, or domestic servants/assistants to women of higher social status. By contrast, it is the privileged, middle/upper-class women – represented by the heroine – who were victims of complete societal restrictions.

Whereas the free, working girls were believed to be unchaste, and therefore, disreputable in society, the secluded ones were held with respect and dignity, they were believed to be compliantly chaste. Although Lu'lu'a detests the suffocating odour emanating from the bodies of her female companions, she arguably admires the level of freedom they enjoy. Lu'lu'a implicitly envies the Bedouin girls for the level of freedom they enjoy which allow them to integrate into the new glamorous and multi-cultural society to which Kuwait is turning.

The alienation of a good number of mid-twentieth-century Kuwaiti women like Lu'lu'a is, moreover, manifested in Lu'lu'a's estrangement and amazement when she reaches Safat Square, at the heart of Kuwait city. The transgressing heroine is at odds with the dramatic transformation of Kuwait town from its old, muddy outlook, to a modern, urbanised city. Her amazement with this comforting transformation is however overshadowed by her feelings of being cheated and marginalised, the reality of which begins to crystallise before her eyes, as she roams about in the Safat area.

A significant feature of "al-Intiqām" is its vivid depiction of how women's oppression in patriarchal society is often sustained through several repressive means, physical and ideological. This is what the scene of the solitary Lu'lu'a's tour of Kuwait city-centre serves to illustrate. The narrator tells us that Lu'lu'a aimlessly wanders about in Safat until she gets to a building on which is written "Public Safety". Seeing some fully-armed, weird-looking men standing in front of this building and looking suspiciously at her, it crosses the heroine's mind that she has actually transgressed. There and then, she remembers home: "her brothers would have been back home from their work, they would have turned the house upside down" (197).

The juxtaposition between the heroine sighting the armed men in front of the Public Safety building, and her remembrance of her brothers at home is very striking. It is an example of the interplay of the (general) Marxist theory of the (*Repressive*) *State Apparatus* (SA), and the Althusserian theory of the *Ideological State Apparatuses* (ISAs). Explaining the distinction between these two categories of state apparatuses, Louis Althusser notes that the individual is governed "massively and predominantly" by 'violence' or 'repression' through the repressive State Apparatuses like the Government, the Armed and Police Forces, the Courts etc. On the other hand, the *Ideological State Apparatuses*, like religion, school, the family, the media etc, function "massively and predominantly *by ideology*," but also, "secondarily, by repression."[9] Althusser holds that the 'ideological state apparatuses' function through a process of what he calls *interpellation*, or "hailing",[10] as explained in the introduction to the thesis.

Whereas the heroine's intimidation (interpellation) by the armed policemen on guard at the Public Safety premises is an indication of some of the ways the (*Repressive*) *State Apparatus* works, her nervous remembrance of her father figures at home symbolises the 'ideological state apparatus' of the family. As we are made to realise later in the narrative, it is the fear of being arrested by the policemen that is much more threatening to Lu'lu'a than the familial interpellation; she has, in the first place, already overcome the latter by escaping from seclusion to discover the new face of her country. As we shall soon see, the heroine becomes restless, at this point in her defiance, neither because of the fear of her brothers nor because of the inevitable consequences of her transgression. Lu'lu'a becomes nervous here because of the way the repressive law enforcement agents – the armed policemen – are looking at her with utter suspicion. She believes she must have been declared "wanted". Hence, she "calls onto a young boy, who is passing-by. She asks him":

- Oh boy, does this road lead to al-Sayf Street

The boy laughed, jestingly, and said:

- Al-Sayf Street?! You're very faraway from it. You are at Mirqāb at the moment (198).

This conversation between the heroine and the passer-by Kuwaiti boy serves to underscore the story's argument that a large number of mid-twentieth century Kuwaiti women were victims of societal alienation and estrangement.

The respective statement of Lu'lu'a and the boy in this dialogue reflects the huge effects on women of the discriminatory, conventional pattern of gender socialisation. The dialogue points to the fact that no matter the type of class a boy belonged to in pre-oil Kuwait, he would be free to move about as he wished; he would not be alienated from society. On the other hand, it was only the lower class or desert women who enjoyed such freedom. Both the taxi scene and the brief dialogic

scene involving the heroine and her passer-boy helper, discussed above, point to the fact that Lu'lu'a is alienated from society because of her class and gender.

Female Patriotism

Because of its hierarchical social structure, the old Kuwait town "represented everything that Kuwaiti women wanted to forget – it symbolized their seclusion and reminded them of their oppression."[11] This point seems to explain why, in addition to what is apparently her assumption of feminist consciousness, patriotism is an underlying factor behind Lu'lu'a's defiant decision to explore her homeland, after four years of 'imprisonment'. As well as indicating the rejection of her objectification, the heroine's escape from the world of seclusion is a demonstration of mid-twentieth-century Kuwaiti women's curiosity and enthusiastic anticipation for the new face being worn by their country.

Through the inner consciousness of the heroine as she wanders about in Safat with mixed feelings, the author implicitly accuses the Kuwaiti patriarchal authority of lack of patriotism for denying some section of society – women like Lu'lu'a – the opportunity of following and contributing to national growth and development. The author's judgement in this part of the text appears to be a disapproval of an attempt to qualify the conservative, patriarchal elements in Kuwait as patriotic. If the men were patriotic, they would not prevent their female compatriots from participation in the public life of the country.[12]

The most striking aspect of the story that illustrates more clearly Kuwaiti women's sense of patriotism is when Lu'lu'a is back in al-Sayf Street, with the assistance of the passer-by boy, above. The narrator informs us that as Lu'lu'a gets

close to her house, located in the street, she bends down to collect a handful of sand, and that "she put the sand in her handkerchief" (197). Commenting on this, the narrator states that Lu'lu'a

> gently held tight [the sand in her handkerchief], as if she wanted it to share her sensations, emotions and feelings. She wanted to preserve it in remembrance of her adventure – in remembrance of the light that removed darkness in her mind; in remembrance of the return of faith into her ailing heart: faith in her motherland, in its people and in her own self (*Ibid.*)

While this authorial commentary is helpful in giving the reader less trouble on the possible reasons why Lu'lu'a wants to preserve the sand, there is room for further interpretation of what the heroine's action here symbolises.

Lu'lu'a's act of intending to preserve the sand (collected from a public space in her homeland) can be understood in view of the fact that whatever someone lacks possession of, or does not have regular access to, is often much valued. But the heroine's act under discussion here carries a much deeper signification. For instance, the reliable omniscient narrator – she is reliable because her speeches/reports and comments are in accordance with the norms of the text/author[13] – repeatedly refers to the heroine's defiant act of touring the city as a form of "adventure" (*Ibid.*). Thus, rather than laying emphasis on the sand in the handkerchief itself, I would comment on the significance of the heroine's "adventure", in remembrance of which the sand is collected. It is with regard to the significance of this adventurous visit to Kuwait city that the author most obviously interweaves 'feminism' – female resistance against their oppression and repression – and patriotism.

Lu'lu'a's adventure into the city is arguably a demonstration of her feminist consciousness, in the first place. With the heroine's successful escape from home, the author tries to prove that relegating women to compulsory seclusion is a patriarchal strategy of keeping them in perpetual "darkness"; that the women could remain

ignorant, unexposed, and, in effect, passive and docile. Both the sand and the adventure for which it is meant to be a reminder, on the other hand, signify a sense of patriotism: the growing national consciousness among the Kuwaiti women elite of the mid-twentieth century.

That a large section of women of this period who wanted to be identified with their country, as it transforms from a rustic and indigenous society to a modernised and multicultural one, were denied that opportunity is indicated in some of Lu'lu'a's internal musings on her way back from the city. For example, pointing to the desirability, rather, necessity of her transgressive action, Lu'lu'a, satisfied and self-fulfilled, says within herself: "It is only now that I have been acquainted with my homeland, that I have given my mind the water it loves to drink, and I have fed my deteriorating soul with the taste of dignity and honour it deserves" (198). This is evidently an expression of both patriotism and feminist consciousness.

The heroine's intention to preserve the sand she collects from the street, furthermore, seems to imply a claim by Kuwaiti women to the land on equal terms with their male counterparts. It illustrates the female belief that Kuwait belongs not only to the 'dominant group' – Kuwaiti men represented by Lu'lu'a's unrestricted brothers, but that the 'muted group' – Kuwaiti women which the heroine and her mother represent – deserve equal rights.[14] Both of Lu'lu'a's patriotic gestures – her defiant visit to the city, and her preservation of Kuwaiti soil collected from outside her claustrophobic home – symbolise a feminist critique of "inequality", its most basic definition being that "inequality [...] is a state where men are dominant due to their participation in public life and their relegation of women to the domestic sphere [...]."[15]

Male Violence, Female Revenge

Women's subjection to male physical violence is a major theme in "al-Intiqām". Before the sequential unfolding of the events of the consequences of Lu'lu'a's defiance, the author has earlier reflected, summarily, on the development by the heroine of some masochistic tendencies. This is evidenced in the heroine's disconcerting statement: "[my] body no longer feels any pains" (198). Captured through her internal musings (on her way back from the city) as she continues to imagine the severity of the inevitable punishment that her brothers would inflict upon her, this statement points to the tremendous psychological effect of masculine violence. For Lu'lu'a, life is as worthless as death. "Welcome, death!" (*Ibid.*), she says to herself, as she begins to prepare her mind for her brothers' atrocious punishment for her insubordination.

A similar element of masochism is contained, furthermore, in the heroine's expressions, as she contrasts the 'worthlessness' of her life with her happiness and feeling of self-fulfilment. "Having achieved my long-standing desire and imagination, I'm less concerned about the outcome of my action", Lu'lu'a notes with obstinacy. "I'll stand bold in front of my brothers; let them do whatever they wish with me" (*Ibid.*), she concludes. All the above reflections by the heroine are mere allusions to how she has been victim of male (domestic) violence. An explicit illustration of that violence features notably in the second part of the story, as discussed in what follows.

Beginning with the scene of Lu'lu'a's return home until the end of the story, the significance of the second part of the story lies in its representation of how male brutality is often the cause of female fury; the latter happening, mostly, by way of

"vengeance". Set inside the heroine's home, this second part is packed with events and actions from both the male oppressors – Lu'lu'a's brothers, 'Abd al-'Azīz and Ṣāliḥ – and their powerless female victims, Lu'lu'a and their mother. Marking the beginning of the unravelling of the plot, the narrator reports that, on reaching home, Lu'lu'a "knock[s]" on the completely locked entrance door, "firmly", and "await[s] her fate" (199). The use of various similes to compare Lu'lu'a's psychical being, as she awaits the opening of the door, with that of an "accused criminal", "someone trapped in an imminent natural disaster" and so on, serves to foreground the masculine brutality that is about to happen.

The narrator tells us that when the door opens, Lu'lu'a is confronted with what she has envisaged. Marking the beginning of the most dramatically treated aspect of the story where the author partially effacing herself, allowing her characters to speak directly, we are told that without any interrogation, the heroine's eldest brother, 'Abd al-'Azīz, beats her unsympathetically to a coma. "Don't kill her, leave her alone for God sake, kill me before you kill her. Enough of this torture; be kind to your old mother" (199), Lu'lu'a's mother shouts, pleading with her son. Even though merely reflecting, in women's text, this form of universally common, cruel act against women can imply a critique, the author still expresses a condemnation of masculine violence, not through her authorial commentary on it, but through the pathos of Lu'lu'a's mother's heartbreaking appeal above.

The two female characters in the story – the heroine and her mother – are portrayed as helpless and powerless in this scene of male violence. Lu'lu'a cannot fight back as a demonstration of her own strength, just as she remains silent at the time she is being battered. So also does her mother's plea above prove ineffectual.

But, as evident in Lu'lu'a's initial defiant act of secretly exiting from home, and in her mother's disapproval of 'Abd al-'Azīz's aggression, these women's helplessness and powerlessness are not tantamount to their complicity. Particularly interesting is the fact that Lu'lu'a's mother's reaction above shows that, even the much older generation of women in mid-twentieth-century Kuwait were dissatisfied with the Kuwaiti hierarchical social order.

Reflecting how grievous and embittered Lu'lu'a's mother is about her son's violence against her daughter, the narrator relates:

> The mother was choked on her tears; looking askance at her, 'Abd al-'Azīz said:
>
> - You want me to be lenient with this hopeless, impudent girl, who is about to bring shame and destruction unto us? Didn't I forbid her from going out of the house; then, why should she defy my orders?! (199).

This disrespectful response by the heroine's father-surrogate to their mother is as much an expression of male authority and supremacy, as it is an embodiment of the Arab notion of *faḍīḥa*, or social dishonour. Here, 'Abd al-'Azīz expresses the preconceived notion that a defiant girl like Lu'lu'a is close to losing her chastity, which will bring shame and disrepute to the family. The above instance of male brutalities against the heroine thus exemplifies the argument that "control [over women] in patriarchal society would be imperfect, even inoperable, unless it had the rule of force to rely upon, both in emergencies and as ever-present instrument of intimidation."[16]

According to al-Mughni, punishment and/or death threat are among the mechanisms of social control often imposed by Kuwaiti men on their women.[17] Apart from corroborating this point, the dialogue below – involving both of Lu'lu'a's brothers – indicates that the suppression of Kuwaiti women through physical

violence is systemic. In the dialogue, Ṣāliḥ - the heroine's elder brother – proves as patriarchal as his brother, 'Abd al-'Azīz. Having been searching for the previously missing Lu'lu'a, Ṣāliḥ returns home to find the girl lying faint on the ground, and in a pool of her blood. Leading credence to Lu'lu'a's earlier suspicion, Ṣāliḥ says addressing his brother:

> - Where did you find her? I've contacted the Public Safety office about the matter. The police have been seriously searching for her now. Where has this idiot been?
> - I don't know. She has received the punishment she deserves. I wish she died, so that she'd save us her evil (199).

For Lu'lu'a's brothers, their family's social honour is much more valued than the personal freedom, life and well being of their sister. For them, a defiant girl like Lu'lu'a does not only deserve punishment to death, she also deserves 'definition', or name-calling: Lu'lu'a is 'impudent', 'shameless', an 'idiot', a 'source of evil', and so on.

Lu'lu'a's final act of resistance to male oppression is demonstrated in the closing scene. Captured, characteristically, through the perspective of the third person omniscient narrator using the interior monologue technique, the closing scene represents female furious "revenge" on male oppressors. Following the conventional chronological order of the unfolding of events, the reader here meets Lu'lu'a as she recovers from a prolonged state of unconsciousness, engendered by her brother's brutality. With anger and distress, the heroine tries to recollect the events of the previous day. Terribly frail, and notwithstanding the seasonal "fiercely cold and windy weather", Lu'lu'a manages to get to the courtyard of their compound. At that moment

> One single thought dominated her mind: she wanted to avenge her brutal oppression, even if that would be at the expense of her life. Revenge was the only escape from her state of hopelessness, powerlessness and humiliation (200).

The narrator is precise in informing us about the times of the major events in this closing scene. For example she tells us that Lu'lu'a regains her consciousness at 12.00 midnight, and that exactly one hour later, at 1.00 am, tragedy strikes in the household: the heroine sets the building ablaze and offers to die in the fire (*Ibid.*).

The fact that the text avoids making the heroine's death come from the atrocious hands of her brothers undermines any attempt to qualify the story as a non-critical reflection of patriarchal power and supremacy. One might have expected that Lu'lu'a dies as a result of the severe battering she has received from 'Abd al-'Azīz, as described above. That might have seemed intelligible: it is not strange in Kuwaiti society that an apparently 'ungovernable' girl is beaten to death by the male defenders of the much more valued family honour. The author's construction of the heroine's death thus seems to carry an additional feminist undertone: Lu'lu'a dies as a result of a vengeful, suicidal destruction of the family's compound. This purposeful suicidal act of self-assertion and empowerment thus constitutes the heroine's final act of resistance to patriarchal oppression.

In spite of the lack of dramatisation of the tragic process – when the heroine is about to set the compound on fire – such that it could produce some emotional effects like 'pity', 'fear' or 'shock' on the reader, the narrative of the heroine's vengeance is remarkable. "The people of the house are safe", the narrator tells us. "But .. they left empty-handed, they no longer have a single possession", she remarks (*Ibid.*). Encapsulating the significance of the heroine's rebellious act, and its implication for the Kuwaiti patriarchal social order, these opening sentences of the

concluding remark by the narrator show that Hayfā' Hāshim is a consciously feminist Kuwaiti woman writer of the mid-twentieth century. These statements embody the overall judgement of the text: that women possess destructive potential with which they can resist their oppression.

Lu'lu'a's suicidal death can be viewed in line with some feminist perspectives, one of which would consider an oppressed woman's "recourse to illness and suicide as her only realisable means of protest and revolt."[18] Lu'lu'a's recourse to suicide can also be explained "as an inevitable factor in a power struggle between the master and the dispossessed."[19] A helpless girl like Lu'lu'a, "having realised that she will never be allowed to have her own way [...], will be quite prepared to give her own life in the cause of revenge."[20] As we have seen, the author represents Lu'lu'a as someone who "has power over nothing but her own body" and for whom "suicide is the only exercise of power left to" her.[21] The difference between Hayfā' Hāshim's story and Laylā al-Uthmān's (to be discussed shortly) thus lies in the form of agency and women's power each of them depicts. As we shall see in the next section, while the one depicts 'suicide' as a form of women's protest against patriarchal hegemony, the other portrays 'murder' as an exhibition of women's disruption of patriarchal social order and values.

It might be necessary to note, by way of concluding this section, that "al-Intiqām" specifically represents the experience of the middle/upper class women of the period of the Kuwaiti transition and transformation from the pre- to the post-oil era. It depicts how mid-twentieth century women could be victims of social alienation and unrelenting domestic oppression.

2. "Min milaff imra'a" [From a Woman's File][22]

Preamble

"Min milaff imra'a" (hereafter referred to as "Min milaff") appears in *al-Raḥīl*,[23] a collection of short stories first published in Kuwait in 1979. It is a five-page story by the leading contemporary Kuwaiti woman writer, Laylā al-'Uthmān. It is one of the very few works of murder literature in Kuwait. The social problem depicted in the story is not merely that of forced marriage, but also the effects of a marriage characterised by a wide age gap between husband and wife. The main argument of the text is that Kuwaiti girls, objectified through the traditional practice of forced marriage, are victims of human rights abuse, primarily; and that, in some cases, such girls are often susceptible to various forms of psycho-social and sexual depression. This story is particularly remarkable for its representation of murder as an expression of women's rage against patriarchal domination. Being a murder text, not least by a Kuwaiti female writer, this story is revolutionary. Unlike much Kuwaiti women's fiction, where women's resistance to male domination and oppression is often expressed in subtle or silent ways, this story represents a brutal exhibition of female revolt targeted at a Kuwaiti patriarchal representative, the heroine's husband.

"Min milaff" is obviously a fictional attack on Kuwaiti patriarchal culture, a critique of the pervasive traditional marriage system through which a great many of Kuwaiti girls, from one generation to another, have been objectified. Representing the pre-oil-era Kuwaiti female, the unnamed heroine of this story, like Lu'lu'a in "al-Intiqām" above, is portrayed as far from a stereotype of female habitual passivity and compliance. In line with my argument in this thesis, I demonstrate in this section that

the heroine's fatalistic violence against her husband – a patriarchal representative – constitutes a form of Kuwaiti women's resistance against their continued objectification and oppression through the traditional marriage system. After the plot summary, this section examines al-'Uthmān's treatment of the broader themes of male domination and female fury under the rubrics of "forced marriage", "women and childlessness" and "sex and murder".

Plot Summary

An unnamed fourteen-year-old girl confesses before an implied law court to murdering her husband. Recounting the circumstances that have made her commit the crime, the heroine relates that she was forced to marry the seventy-year-old man three years earlier. Her problems begin with the discovery that the aged husband is weak in libido, and lacks sexual fitness. Feeling sexually deprived, the heroine begins to think about getting rid of the man; a devilish thought that is exacerbated by her envy of the regular, pleasurable sexual intercourses between her married-couple neighbours, Waḍḥā and Fulayḥān. Carried out while her husband is asleep in the night, the murder act is incited by the heroine's surreptitious peep into her neighbours' privacy; it is made to coincide with the moment of an arousing intercourse between the couple.

Forced Marriage

The objectification of a considerable number of Kuwaiti girls through the conservative practice of forced marriage is represented in the first part of "Min milaff". Using a first person, confessional narrative mode, al-'Uthmān makes the

heroine tell an implied court of law the story of why and how she has killed her husband. "A strange feeling always occurred to me every night, as I looked at this frail man lying wearily by my side" (31), thus the accused-heroine begins to recount the circumstances that have led to her homicidal act. This opening sentence in the text is so premonitory that the reader begins to sense a likely tragic ending.

In her attempt to make the causes of her heroine's rebellion seem graver than the murder crime itself, the author makes women's objectification in pre-oil Kuwait the narrative focus of the story, rather than the murder act itself. Captured through the flashback technique and filtered through the consciousness of the accused-narrator, we are told that the heroine was forced to marry her husband, who was aged seventy. "[I was married off] against my will, and in spite of being aged fourteen" (*Ibid.*). Though implying her lack of consent to the marriage, this statement by the heroine does not seem to denote her voicing of any objection to the familial order.

In addition to her inability to express, openly, her objection to her marriage to the family imposed husband, the heroine has also remained completely silent about the problem of her sexual depression in her marital relationship. These two instances of the heroine's 'speechlessness' are an indication of women's internalisation of patriarchal culture. Her initial passivity and submissiveness to familial orders is quite understandable in view of the fact that a majority of young adults, especially girls, are vulnerable to the social and cultural injustice embedded in the Kuwaiti conventional marriage system. Customarily, choosing one's husband (or wife) is often a male-dictated family affair.[24]

The objectification of the heroine in the process of her marriage is explicitly reflected as the events of the panoramically treated first part of the story unfold. For

instance, in her internal musings, as she laments her bad fortune as wife of the aged husband, we find the heroine asking herself:

> What's keeping this man alive? […]
> Is it in order to keep reminding me of the 'crime' of my father, who collected the [bridal] price?
> How much was the price?
> A thousand dīnār, a hundred sheep, twenty fertile female camels; where are all those now? What has been my share of them now apart from this [husband's] frail body? (32).

In addition to revealing the heroine's premeditative contemplation that presupposes the murder act, this quotation reflects the status of women as "objects" or "commodities" of exchange among men.

Speaking through the heroine in the above extract, al-'Uthmān declares the practice of forced marriage a "parental crime". She predicates that parents (fathers) who force their daughters into marital relationships are criminals for usurping the girls' rights by dictating and collecting bridal prices on their behalf and, implicitly, by exploiting them. Part of the significance of the first part of the story, therefore, lies in its reflection of how economic factors have been a major player in the perpetration of women's oppression in patriarchal society.

Women and Childlessness

Considered a major social problem in Kuwaiti society, childlessness is given an important thematic status in "Min milaff". Al-'Uthmān's treatment of 'women and childlessness' situates the story as a feminist text, rather than a mere reproduction of the dominant, Kuwaiti masculinist literary tradition. Captured through the interior monologue technique, the heroine asserts before the court that her childlessness is not unconnected with the lack of 'biological compatibility'

between her and the husband. The man's age-caused weak libido cannot match that of the youthful, presumably fertile, wife.

Contrasting the marital life of her parents with that of herself and the husband, the accused-heroine gives the impression that it is because her parents are of the same age group, and so compatible with each other, that their relationship has been fruitful. The result of a too-wide age gap between her and her husband is, therefore, the denial of her sexual satisfaction and an inability to conceive a child (32-33). Since we do not meet the also-unnamed husband directly in the story, it is through the perspective of the accused-heroine that we know that the man is very old, ugly and, above all, sexually inactive. Describing how she has suffered from sexual depression throughout the period of her three-year marriage, the heroine recounts that by night, the husband would fall into deep and prolonged sleep, not minding his wife's sexual desires. The man is so "obnoxious" that the sexually deprived heroine often wonders if her parents could afford "to look at [his] face every night", and be able to "sleep peacefully while [his] loud whistling and snoring disturb the calmness of the night" (31).

The heroine's pathetic obsession is that of desperation for motherhood. "One single thought always crossed and preoccupied my mind, inadvertently", the heroine narrates, "it was always painful: I've no child from this old man, and where would the child come from?" (32), she laments. It is in connection with this distressing feeling and thought about her childlessness that she recalls an occasion sometime before her marriage when her father uprooted a date tree because it was "fruitless," "old," and so, "hopeless" (34). This recollection not only intensifies the heroine's rage against the husband, it also incites her despair of becoming a mother.

In patriarchal culture, women's childlessness is often (mis)understood as their barrenness. In representing the theme of women and childlessness in this story, al-'Uthmān appears very conventional: she portrays childlessness as a despised characteristic of the female sex. This is manifest in part of the character of the heroine, who perceives procreation not only as the essence of human life, but also as a symbol of a happy marriage. Underpinning the sociological significance of biological reproduction is the fact that the text is replete with similes and metaphors, through which the heroine compares herself with various animate and inanimate beings. She describes herself, for instance, as "a lamp with its wick burning wastefully day after day in th[e] old man's hut" (*Ibid.*). The heroine is so depressed that she believes that a fertile and procreative animal's, or plant's life is better off and worthier than hers (*Ibid.*).

The heroine's stereotypical belief and thinking, described in the last two paragraphs above, are an instance of the story's non-critical stance on the essentiality of human biological reproduction. The author refuses to make the heroine (directly or indirectly) deplore the androcentric notion of women as sex and biological objects. This might appear undermining to the overall judgement of the text. It might imply that had there been a chance for her to have a child from her victim (husband), the heroine would have remained submissive and complacent; she would not have surrendered to the recurring devilish thought of eliminating the husband. However, the author appears ironic in her representation of the notion of essential motherhood. She seems to have reversed the patriarchal formulation of gender roles by turning man, rather than woman, to sex object, useful only for childbearing.

Al-'Uthmān's uncritical (or ironic) parody of the male-favoured theme of women's desperation for motherhood is, nonetheless, aimed at disrupting and deconstructing Kuwaiti patriarchal social and cultural values. Even though the objectified and sexually depressed heroine thinks conventionally with regard to her childless status, she thinks deviantly with regard to a solution. Signalling the process of the evocation of her subjectivity and agency in the murder act, the heroine begins to reflect on the necessity of changing by herself what society would normally have regarded as her (bad) luck.

Seeing her continual existence in the husband's "suffocating" house as signifying her confinement in the attic of distress, repression and despair (33), the heroine simply resolves: "I want to live" (*Ibid.*). While this statement by the heroine indicates her desire for sex and her desperation for freedom from marital bondage, it also underlines her culturally influenced perception of the worthlessness of a non-procreative life. It is in pursuance of her resolution – that she wants to live a 'supposed' worthy life – that the heroine has murdered her sexually inactive, aged husband. Thus, the author utilises a patriarchal ideological weapon through which women in particular are dehumanised – the despicability of women's childlessness – against patriarchy itself. Al-'Uthmān's construction of the events of the murder act and the mode of the heroine's confession to it seems to be a mockery of patriarchal hierarchical and social order, as we shall see in the following.

Sex and Murder

Men have used their pens, as has been argued by some feminist critics, to 'kill' women in their texts, just as some men do conceive of using their sexual organs

as weapons through which they symbolically 'slaughter' women during penetrative intercourse,[25] especially if it involves defloration. In "Min milaff", al-'Uthmān appears to have reversed this. Making the narrative voice entirely that of the heroine, and denying, particularly, the victim-husband any voice in the story, the author appears to have literarily 'killed' the man in "Min milaff". The author's representational killing of a man in the story is constituted in the murder act perpetrated by the heroine against her husband. Al-'Uthmān's devised use of the first person pronoun, "I", as in "Yes, my Lord, I killed him" (34 and 35), thus making the initially silenced and objectified woman in the story assume a subject position, supports the above supposition.

That this story represents sex and murder as related activities is indicated by the use of the words *al-tamazzuq*[26] and *al-mumazzaqa*[27] in the text. Both of these words are derivatives of the Arabic triliteral verb *mazzaqa*, which means 'to tear, rend, shred, or rip apart (something).[28] Denoting 'tearing or ripping apart' etc., something that was hitherto intact, the use of *al-tamazzuq* in particular in the context that it appears gives a sense of female defloration through heterosexual intercourse. The juxtaposition of the murder act – the accused heroine kills her husband by cutting off his head (35) – is thus identifiable with the implied act of her deflowering by the husband: both involve the painful outpouring of blood from the body.

Overshadowing other psycho-social effects of the practice of forced marriage on women is the story's latter focus on the events of the murder act, as featured in the last part of the text. What has prompted the heroine's murderous violence can be described as "sex-envy". Deprived of love and sexual pleasures in her marital home, the heroine begins to envy the presumably satisfactory sexual life of Waḍḥā and

Fulayḥan, a married couple living next door. "[D]espite the hard work within her household, my neighbour, Waḍḥā, never worried about [sex]" (33). This statement of jealousy by the heroine underlies the fact that her objectification in the process of her marriage is much less a significant source of her problem than being the victim of her husband's weak libido. Rather than being happy and contented (as wife of a rich, upper-class man, who is not subjected to burdensome domestic labour), the heroine feels cheated for her denial of a youthful and sexually active husband like her poor, lower class neighbour, Fulayḥān.

It is because of sex that the heroine has decided to eliminate her husband. The manner of achieving her resolution: "I want to live", mentioned above, is utterly deviant. "Why can't I free myself from him?" (31), and "Why can't I kill him" (repeated twice in the story; 32 and 33), are the two notable expressions in the text pointing to the heroine's conclusive determination to murder her husband. Both of these statements signify the evocation of her active agency in the crime: whereas the first connotes her desire for "freedom and escape", the second seems to denote female ability to transcend patriarchal social values. The heroine believes that even without having her initial will – of marrying a youthful, childhood male friend who lives in her parents' neighbourhood – as an alternative to the family's arranged husband (34), she can still have her way. She wants subjectively to free herself from not only an unwanted, but also an unfruitful, conjugal relationship in which she has been entrapped.

The murder scene, pictorially treated rather than dramatised, fails to arouse the reader's 'pity' and 'fear' for the victim. Because the homicidal act is carried out

while the husband is, as usual, fast asleep (not minding the sexual desires of his wife), we are not privileged to see how he might have reacted as his wife was about to take his life. Nonetheless, the murder scene - from the sex-instigated tragic process to the tragic incident, is technically impressive. Here, two conflicting events are made to occur in parallel: sex and murder. The heroine narrates that, on the fateful night, she surreptitiously peeps at her neighbour's privacy. Hearing the erotic groans and breathings of the couple, her long suppressed sexual urge becomes uncontrollable. At that moment, she remembers the youthful, handsome boy in her parent's neighbourhood, with whom she wishes that she were having pleasurable sex as Waḍḥā and Fulayḥān are doing. Though serving as a descriptive pause in the narrative of the tragic incident, this juxtaposition of the heroine's listening to the arousing sexual groans of her neighbours, with her remembrance of the boy she would have preferred to marry, represents the text's feminist alternative to the practice of forced marriage.

> All of a sudden, I was strangely empowered. I held an axe in my hands; I was shivering like palm-leaves in a windy night. I rushed .. before my extreme rage would calm down
> I 'swooped' down on the completely bared head; the blow had broken the silence of the night...
> And so, Waḍḥā and Fulayḥān separated (35).

This closing scene in the story can be used to explain what Josephine McDonagh has observed that "it is only through death, an ending that preempts any form of interference, that the murderer is sure that [her] actions can be represented or displayed without fear of alteration."[29] Though made with respect to male 'aesthete murderers' – who derive certain pleasure in their acts – this note by McDonagh is applicable to the murderer-heroine of "Min milaff". That she acts swiftly "before [her] extreme rage [against the husband] would calm down" signifies her effort to

avoid any interference in the display of her rage against patriarchal authority. If she delays a second, she might lose her evolving agency in the murder act.

This kind of domestic violence contrasts with the common forms of masculine violence against women in Kuwaiti society, as reflected in "al-Intiqām" above, for example. It is also contrary to conventional forms of masculine domestic murder in Western literatures.[30] "Min milaff" reverses what often obtains in most murder texts whereby it is women or children who fall victim to male violence. Rather, al-'Uthmān here 'masculinises' the so-called weak female, represented by the heroine, while she feminises the so-called strong male, which the victim (heroine's husband) represents.

A comparison between this story and some other Kuwaiti fictional narratives on women's oppression and the problem of childlessness in Kuwaiti society reveals that "Min milaff" is a radical, feminist revolutionary text. That the character of the heroine contravenes that of the compliant, selfless and passive female is obvious in view of the fact that there is a good number of other possible, non-violent and non-fatal means by which she could resist or protest against patriarchal oppression and repression. For instance, the heroine of "Min milaff" is unlike the similarly defiant heroine of al-'Uthman's "al-Mubādara",[31] who, also a victim of forced marriage, resists her objectification in a subtle way, by secretly betraying the husband her family has imposed on her.

Put in the general Kuwaiti literary context, the heroine of "Min milaff" is, moreover, not as stereotypical as the central female figures of most of the earliest Kuwaiti short stories (of the mid-twentieth century) that depict the beginning of the struggle for an end to various forms of women's oppression. For instance, the girl in

"Min milaff" is unlike the heroine of the male-authored "Ṭa'ana fī al-qalb,"[32] who is a paragon of female self-abnegation of power: she resigns herself, but vows to continue silently to curse her patriarchal oppressors. Furthermore, the heroine of "Jināyat ab"[33] is not as assertive and aggressive as that of "Min milaff"; in what is represented as the effects of patriarchal culture on oppressed women's psyches, as well as a form of protest against her objectification through marriage, the heroine of the former runs mad.[34]

"Min milaff" could be seen as a revisionist text: it appears to have revised the acclaimed first Kuwait short story, "Munīra",[35] discussed in Chapter Two. A male-authored story (by Khālid al-Faraj), "Munīra" explores the theme of women and childlessness just as "Min milaff" does. But the woman in "Munīra" is not only stereotypical. She is also foolish: the problem of her childlessness leads to her deception by soothsayers, which then leads to her self-destruction by drowning. Though explored through a plot structure different from that of "Munīra", al-'Uthmān's construction of the heroine of "Min milaff"'s reaction to the problem of childlessness indicates a feminist alternative to the androcentric model.

The significance of "Min milaff" as a female-authored text lies, not in reproducing some of the causes and effects of Kuwaiti traditional practices and values, but in fantasising with the counter-effects of such practices on the Kuwaiti hierarchical social order. Suggesting that the story's murder scene is a product of mere imagination rather than a reflection of social reality is the author's making the sexual act between Waḍḥā and Fulayḥān parallel the process of the murder act, and

the tragic incident – the cutting off of the victim's "bared" head – to the disengagement of the couple from intercourse, as explicit in the closing scene extracted above.

"Min milaff" seems to exemplify Angela Carter's feminist perspective on the relationship between murder and literary representation. It can be said to have "[encapsulated] a radical transgression of values which suggests the possibilities for women to transcend the oppression that is deeply embedded in patriarchal social and cultural practices."[36] By publishing this kind of story, al-'Uthmān appears to be, in Carter's words, "interested in the ways in which representations can transform consciousness at the level of fantasy."[37] Espousing social realism (the reality of women's oppression through the practice of forced marriage) with a fantasist imagination, al-'Uthmān demonstrates the possibility of female transcendence and self-assertion in the face of male social dominance.[38] The author's portrayal of an outrageously disruptive and transcendental form of female violence in Kuwaiti society seems to be targeted at transforming the consciousness of oppressed Kuwaiti women.

Though silent on whether or not the accused heroine is punished under the law, the story implies that she is acquitted based on her convincing transference of guilt to the Kuwaiti patriarchal society for encouraging women's oppression and repression. This act of transferring the guilt of a crime from the accused onto patriarchal society constitutes one of the characteristics of "Min milaff" as a feminist revolutionary text. The heroine claims before the court that she has been compelled to resort to murder as a way of liberating herself from continued oppression. This is comprehensible in view of the fact that, traditionally, an average young female

member of Kuwaiti society lacks *locus standi* to challenge her objectification in the process of marriage. Because the culture also inhibits the overt expression of a woman's sexual desires, the heroine could not speak out about her experience of sexual depression.

The assumption of subjectivity and agency by the heroine of "Min milaff", to conclude this section, is preceded by her passivity and compliance with familial orders, as we have seen above. It is not until after three years of "unfruitful" marriage that she is able to claim her freedom and personhood. What incites her agency is not simply the lack of sexual satisfaction in her marital life, but what is obviously a "sex-envy" – a radical dimension introduced by al-'Uthmān into the theme of female resistance to patriarchal domination in Kuwaiti women's fiction. In both her circumstances as daughter and wife within a typical Kuwaiti family structure, the unnamed heroine remains speechless. Her claim to subjectivity, freedom and speech derives from her murderous violence against her sexually inactive, family imposed husband. By creating such a strong, self-empowered, and rebellious female character in "Min milaff", al-'Uthmān deconstructs the conventional notion of women's docility and their immanence, or lack of transcendence of Arabian patriarchal cultural values.

Conclusion

Both "al-Intiqām" by Hayfā' Hāshim and "Min milaff imra'a" by Laylā al-'Uthmān represent women's power in undermining patriarchal hegemony. These two representatives of early Kuwaiti women's radical feminist fictional narrative portray the family as the main social institution within which women's oppression is

perpetrated. Both stories situate their respective heroines within a typical, male-headed Kuwaiti family. Whereas the problem of the heroine of "al-Intiqām", Lu'lu'a, is her denial of formal education, her alienation from the emerging new Kuwait of the 1950s, and her subjection to frequent physical violence by her brothers, it is the objectification of the heroine of "Min milaff" through the traditional practice of forced marriage that causes her problem.

Like the heroine of the second story, Lu'lu'a – the girl in the first one – is represented as initially submissive to the patriarchal orders of her brothers. She lacks 'speech', remaining silent throughout the years of her subjugation, until the day of her defiance, and at the point of her fatalistic and destructive rebellion. Her suicidal death is evidently a way of putting an end to her oppression. Her destruction of the family's compound is a protest against male brutality; it is a proof of her strength and latent power.

Unlike the heroine of the first story, whose oppression remains unrelieved while alive and culminates in her suicidal destruction of the family house, the heroine of the second story rather eliminates her representative oppressor (husband), in what can be considered as an act of female self-assertion and transcendence of patriarchal values. Both heroines can be identified as female prototypical literary figures with which, to quote Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, Kuwaiti women have begun to reject the "patriarchally produced female archetypes and replace them with their own prototypes."[39]

Notes and References

1. Aristotle classifies tragedy into complex or simple, depending on whether or not the plot contains "reversal of intention" or "recognition/discovery". For more on this, see S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Arts with a Critical Text and Translation of The Poetics* (London: Macmillan, 1902, 3rd edition), p. 39.
2. "Al-intiqām al-rahīb" first appeared in *al-Rā'id*, Year 2, no. 2 (May 1953). It was reproduced in Kh. S. al-Zayd, *Qiṣaṣ yatīma fi al-majallāt al-Kuwaytiyya: 1929-1955* (Kuwait: Sharikat al-Rubay'ān li-l-nashr wa-l-tawzī', 1982, 1st edition), pp. 195-201; reference is here made to this edition.
3. *Ibid.*
4. For more on the lives and experiences of women in pre-oil Kuwait see Haya al-Mughni, *Women in Kuwait: the Politics of Gender* (London: Saqi Books, 1993), pp. 41 *ff.*
5. Al-Mughni, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Qur'ān chapter 33, verse 33, which reads: "And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former times of ignorance..." is often cited by the upholders of the belief that Muslim women should be secluded.
8. Al-Mughni, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
9. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)" in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), pp. 135 *ff.*
10. On 'interpellation', see *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.
11. Al-Mughni, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
12. I acknowledge Dr Yasin Noorani's suggestion that I should also stress Lu'lu'a's tour of her homeland as emblematic of female patriotism, alongside its feminist significance.
13. On the 'reliability' or 'non-reliability' of a narrator, see Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 159.
14. On feminist classification of the two sexes into "dominant" and "muted" groups see Shirley Ardener (ed.), *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society* (London, Croom Helm, 1978); this has been appropriated by Elaine Showalter in her "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", *Critical Inquiry*, (Winter 1981). See also Sue Spaull's chapter on "Gynocriticism" in Sara Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 83-121.
15. This is Michelle Rosaldo's definition of "inequality" as extracted in Maggie Humm (ed.), *Feminisms: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), "Glossary", p. 407.
16. Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics*, first published in 1971, (London: Verso Press Limited, 1977), p. 43.
17. Al-Mughni, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
18. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979) cited in Lynne Pearce, "Sexual Politics" in Sara Mills *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
19. This is in line with Kate Millet's sexual political interpretation; see Sara Mills *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. Except for some structural and conceptual changes, my analysis of this story remains as it was presented under the title "'Yes, my Lord, I'd killed him': Murder as Female Transcendence in Contemporary Arab Women's Fiction, "Min milaff imra'a" by Laylā al-'Uthman" at "Transcendence versus Traditions" Conference organized by

the Department of Philosophy, University of Dundee, Dundee, United Kingdom, 29 May 2004. I acknowledge the comments and questions raised by the audience, some of which I have considered in re-writing this section.

23. Laylā al-'Uthmān, "Min milaff imra'a" in *al-Raḥīl* (Kuwait, 1979, 1st edition); reference is here made to the 2nd edition (Kuwait: Maṭābi' al-waṭan, 1984), pp. 31-35.
24. See al-Mughni, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
25. See Gilbert and Gubar, *op. cit.*, pp. 14 *ff.* See also Sue Spaull and Elaine Millard, "The Anxiety of Authorship" in Sara Mills *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-153 and Kate Millet's analysis of the "images of women" in some male-authored Victorian novels in Millet, *op. cit.*, p. 292.
26. *Al-tamazzuq* is used in the text by the accused-heroine to indicate that during sexual intercourse with the husband, she always ever falls short of experiencing orgasmic pleasure. The heroine narrates: "He would mount me every night. Weak in libido, he would bath me with his body sweat, and then, climb down like an exhausted animal, while I would remain a mouse licking up traces of *al-tamazzuq* (injury/tear) on its body" (*al-Raḥīl*, 33).
27. *Al-mumazzaqa* appears in a much more metaphorical context, making it carry a much deeper signification: "Who would punish *al-fa'ra al-mumazzaqa* (an injured mouse)? Who would blame me? Who would grieve for this emaciated man?" (*Ibid.*), the heroine premeditates as her belligerence against the husband looms. The linguistic signification of *al-fa'ra al-mumazzaqa* (an injured mouse) underlies its contextual sociological implication. Traditionally in Kuwait, as in some patriarchal societies, the loss of a woman's virginity indicates the lack of intactness of her body. Having already been deflowered by the old man, the heroine believes she has become a 'second-hand' woman, who is much less admired by most youthful men in a society that places much emphasis on female virginity before marriage. The heroine's feeling of devaluation thus serves to aggravate her fury against the husband.
28. See J. M. Cowan (ed.), *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (New York: Ithaca, 1960).
29. Josephine McDonagh, "Do or die: problems of agency and gender in the aesthetic of murder" in Isobel Armstrong (ed.), *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts* (London: Routledge, 1992), Chapter 13, p. 234.
30. For an overview of the representation of domestic murder in western writings, see *Ibid.*
31. Laylā al-'Uthmān, "al-Mubādara" in *Fī al-layl ta'tī al-'uyūn* (Beirut: Dār al-ādāb, 1980), pp. 63-69.
32. Yūsuf al-Shāyijī, "Ṭa'ana fī al-qalb", first published in *al-Ba'tha* (June 1949); and reproduced in al-Zayd, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-93.
33. Khālid al-Ghirbālī's "Jināyat ab" first appeared in *al-Rā'id* (June 1952); it was republished in al-Zayd, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-165.
34. The theme of women and madness has been widely debated by western feminist critics. Because "Jināyat ab" falls outside the scope of this thesis, I will delay my comments on women writers' representation of madness either as a form of protest against or resistance to patriarchal oppression to Chapter Four.
35. Khālid al-Faraj, "Munīra" in *al-Kuwayt* (Nov./Dec. 1929); republished in al-Zayd, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-41.
36. This point is made by Josephine McDonagh (in McDonagh, *op. cit.*, p. 228) when assessing Angela Carter's feminist interpretation of Marquis de Sade's murder

accounts that specifically treats cases of male violence against women. Reference is made to Carter's *Sadeian Woman: an Exercise in Cultural History*, London, 1979).

37. McDonagh, *op. cit.*, p. 229.
38. A philosophical interpretation of the text might want to consider the death of the husband as symbolic of the death of patriarchy. But the court at which the accused-heroine is tried is a male-headed patriarchal institution: the judge is male, *al-qāḍī* (34, 35), not female, *al-qāḍiya*. This shows that the Kuwaiti patriarchal authority, part of which is the heroine's husband and which her disruptive homicidal act might appear to have overthrown, remains in control; and its agents continue to maintain law and order in society.
39. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (eds.), *Opening the Gates: a Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (London: Virago Press Limited, 1990), "introduction".

CHAPTER FOUR

SUBVERTING PATRIARCHY: WOMEN'S DEFIANCE AND SOLIDARITY IN LAYLĀ AL-'UTHMĀN'S *WASMIYYA TAKHRUJ MIN AL-BAḤR*

Introduction

Published in 1986, Laylā al-'Uthmān's *Wasmiyya takhruj min al-baḥr* [Wasmiyya Emerges from the Sea][1] (hereafter referred to as *Wasmiyya*) is a novel of social criticism, depicting class and gender relations in pre-oil Kuwaiti society. Simple and lucid in its language, less sophisticated in its emplotment, conventionally sequential in the unfolding of its events, and running through some one hundred and ten pages, *Wasmiyya* is one of the earliest novels by a Kuwaiti woman. This chapter examines the novel's representation of the effects of Kuwaiti patriarchal social values and practices on women in particular. It focuses on the novel's depiction of women's defiance and violation of the Kuwaiti traditional social order, as well as their evasion of the patriarchal oppression embedded in the Arab ideology of *faḍīḥa* (social dishonour).

Beginning with a summary of the plot, the chapter examines the novel's representation of Kuwaiti women's subversion of patriarchal hegemony under the following headings: '*Wasmiyya*: a 'feminine' or 'feminist' novel?', 'Defiance and Violation of Patriarchal Social Order', 'Evasion of Societal Chastisement', and 'Women's Solidarity'. I conclude that, rather than merely reflecting the reality of women's oppression and subordination in pre-oil Kuwait, *Wasmiyya* offers a critique of the society it depicts. The heroine of this novel, a pre-oil-era Kuwaiti female youth, is portrayed not as stereotypical, but as defiant and non-conformist.

Plot Summary

With his present marital relationship on the rocks, Abdullah sets out of his home one night, going to the seaside from which he had just returned a few moments earlier. Abdullah threatens never to return to his "unaffectionate, uncaring" wife who often refuses him sex, because of her resentment for his startling obsession with his fishing occupation. Lying on his back inside a shed at the beach and in a state of extreme psychological depression, Abdullah recounts in grief his past, ill-fated, secret love with Wasmiyya.

In spite of the class difference between the two – Wasmiyya belongs to the upper class, while Abdullah comes from a lower-class family background – Abdullah and Wasmiyya grow up to love each other. At adolescence, both Abdullah and Wasmiyya agree to date each other secretly, in defiance of societal inhibition on gender interactions and inter-class marriage. When both lovers surreptitiously set out on a late-night "romantic adventure" to the seaside, they soon find themselves in trouble. As they have been enjoying their childlike romance at the beach, they suddenly notice the light of an approaching nightwatchman. In a sequel, Wasmiyya reacts swiftly and rashly by deciding to hide in the sea. Wasmiyya drowns as she tries to avoid being caught and accused of lack of chastity. Appalled by the sudden loss of his lover, Abdullah decides to 'bury' Wasmiyya's corpse in the sea as a step towards keeping the matter secret from the Kuwaiti public.

The novel ends with the process of Abdullah's hallucination engendered by his compounded distress over the tragic loss of Wasmiyya in the past and his troubled marital life of the present. Hardly has he completed the recollection of the circumstances surrounding Wasmiyya's death than Abdullah begins to fantasise

about her emergence from the sea. Under the illusion that Wasmiyya is emerging from the sea, calling on him to come and re-unite with her, the solitary Abdullah rushes ferociously into the sea. He drowns.

Wasmiyya: A 'Feminine' or 'Feminist' Text?

Invoking Elaine Showalter's categorisation of the phases of the female literary tradition, Sabry Hafez, in his essay "Women's Narrative in Modern Arabic Literature: a Typology"[2] notes that al-'Uthmān's *Wasmiyya* falls within the category of the 'feminine' narrative discourse. Before discussing Hafez's assessment of this novel, it is necessary to give a brief note on Showalter's definition of 'the feminine' phase of women's writing. In her *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Charlotte Bronte to Doris Lessing,*[3] Showalter roughly categorises the phases of the (British) female literary tradition from 1840 to 1960 into three: "feminine", "feminist" and "female". She writes:

> In looking at literary subcultures, [...] we can see that they all go through three major phases. First, there is a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages, *Feminine*, *Feminist*, and *Female*.[4]

In line with Showalter's definition of the 'feminine' phase above, Hafez asserts that "in [*Wasmiyya*] we find a clear example of the internalization of the male perspective and its faithful reproduction by a female writer."[5] Hafez's remark that *Wasmiyya* "aims to reflect the reality of a changing Kuwait and the impact of this change on social interactions, roles and gender"[6] is quite understandable. However, one would contend his assessment that this novel, like other fictional texts by

contemporary Arabian women writers, adopts the masculine discourse of "the passive, docile, selfless female."[7]

The form, especially the narrative strategy, of *Wasmiyya* might appear conventionally imitative. But the language of the text, the actions and thoughts of the novel's female characters, all greatly undermine the veracity of Hafez's generalist statement that in a "representative" novel like *Wasmiyya* "the value system encoded in the hierarchical social order which places the female at the bottom is adopted without questioning and is even praised for its concern and protection of the meek, helpless female."[8] As I shall try to demonstrate below, the women in *Wasmiyya* demonstrate, to a varying degree of course, a certain level of resistance to the pre-oil Kuwaiti hierarchical social order. Whereas the older female characters, Wasmiyya's and Abdullah's mothers, are apparently conformist and submissive, Wasmiyya – the eponymous heroine of the novel – is portrayed not only as a non-conformist, but also a defiant and resistant Kuwaiti female figure.

A feminist reading of this novel would situate al-'Uthmān as a Kuwaiti woman writer in whose texts "the hierarchical social order which places the female at the bottom"[9] is criticised and questioned, explicitly or implicitly. Hafez's main criterion for considering *Wasmiyya* as an epitome of the Arabian 'feminine' literary discourse is based on the fact that "[t]he dominant narrative voice in this novel is not that of the heroine, Wasmiyya, [...] but that of the hero, Abdullah."[10] For Hafez, "[t]he prevalence of Abdullah's point of view is" not only "a textual equivalent of the stereotypical male whose women conform to his system of values and ideals regardless of whether he is physically present";[11] it is also "a manifestation of the all-embracing patriarchal order whose control over the world of narrative is seen as the

norm."[12] Based on the fact that Abdullah's narrative voice is dominant in the novel, Hafez has classified *Wasmiyya* as representing the imitative 'feminine' phase of the Arabian female literary tradition.

This narrative strategy is not peculiar to *Wasmiyya*; the author also adopted it in her first novel, *al-Mar'a wa-l-qiṭṭa* [The Woman and the Cat] (1985).[13] In many of al-'Uthmān's short stories, published before and after these two novels, the dominant narrative voices are either authorial or those of the heroines; this suggests a kind of literary dynamism on the part of the author. That means that, as a woman writer trying to raise the long suppressed female voice in literature, al-'Uthmān is not limiting the narrative 'point of view' of her texts to that of the female. This has been admitted by the author herself: "What I have been able to achieve in these two novels [*al-Mar'a wa-l-qiṭṭa* and *Wasmiyya*] is a detachment from 'myself'; in these novels, I dropped the female skin and I took on the character of the male narrator and protagonist of each of the novels."[14] This suggests, therefore, that the narrative strategy adopted by al-'Uthmān in *Wasmiyya* in particular is systemic, intentional; it is not simply imitative of the dominant androcentric narrative discourse.

In the above-mentioned essay, Hafez seems to have focused on the narrative strategy and the dominant point of view through which the story is told, rather than on the actions, thoughts and speeches of the female characters, who populate the world of the novel. A feminist reading of the novel would focus on its content as it vividly represents the revolutionary rather than the stereotypically compliant and conformist female. As has been argued by feminist critics,[15] it is immaterial whether a literary work represents women's resistance against male domination in an explicit or implicit manner. Similarly, it is less significant whether women's resistance

against their oppression is confrontationally expressed, or undertaken silently in a non-aggressive manner. What is significant for the feminist struggle is the representation in women's literature of the exhibition by women of any form of defiance and resistance to male domination.[16] This is what al-'Uthmān has arguably done in *Wasmiyya*, the dominant narrative voice being masculine, notwithstanding.

Defiance and Violation of Patriarchal Social Order

Through the character of the heroine of this novel, Wasmiyya, 'Uthmān demonstrates Kuwaiti women's capability to defy the patriarchal social order at several levels. Beginning with her preliminary in-house acts of insubordination to the much more transgressive ones, Wasmiyya exhibits female resistance to patriarchal authority as a teenager. Although Wasmiyya's most decisive act of defiance is male-motivated – she is persuaded by her secret lover, Abdullah – Wasmiyya remains an active agent in the assertion of her subjectivity. She is largely responsible for the actualisation of her personal wishes and desires at both the preliminary and final levels of her defiance. This section looks at the process of Wasmiyya's consciousness and assumption of subjectivity that presupposes her most decisive acts of resistance against patriarchal oppression.

Minor acts of defiance

Despite being considered an abominable practice in Kuwait even up to the present day, the text of *Wasmiyya* expansively treats the problems associated with secret dating, specifically in pre-oil Kuwaiti society. The heroine's violation of Kuwaiti social values is first represented in the text in the episode of Abdullah's first visit to Wasmiyya's house as a grown-up boy. Constituting the opening scene of this

episode is both youths' dating plan, captured through the consciousness of the distressed Abdullah as the middle-aged narrator. Gloomily recounting the beginning and the end of his ill-fated clandestine love affair with Wasmiyya, Abdullah tells us that as indicative of their lower class status, his mother works as domestic assistant for a good number of upper class women, including Wasmiyya's mother. He recounts how he and Wasmiyya became lovers at childhood, unrestrictedly playing together before they both reached adolescence.

As his recollection of the origin of his life-long distress continues, Abdullah informs us that one day his mother returns home exhausted by much of her daily work and asks him to help deliver some household materials belonging to Wasmiyya's mother. Assured by his mother of the absence from town of Wasmiyya's male relatives, Abdullah joyously carries out his mother's request. As he had wished, it is Wasmiyya who meets him at the door. Amazed and extremely happy to have luckily met each other after years of conventional forcible separation, both love-ridden youths seize the opportunity of this momentary companionship to chat.

In the absence of both her father (whom the reader never meets in the text) and her brother, Fahd (who often acts as the father-figure within the household), we find Wasmiyya claiming her freedom through different ways. Despite the fact that both youths are now grown-up teenagers, Wasmiyya appears to Abdullah "unveiled", and without conforming to the traditional norms of dealing with male visitors (38). This indicates some Kuwaiti women's dissatisfaction with male-dictated restrictive rules on women's seclusion.

Reflecting further on how Wasmiyya honours him in this scene in a rather deviant manner, Abdullah relates that rather than letting him stay by the door outside the house, Wasmiyya "asks him to come in" (Ibid.). A societally interpellated Kuwaiti male, Abdullah initially hesitates: "I looked round, to the back. Front. Right. [And] left. Was there anyone in the street? Was there any eye that might obstruct my movement forward, thus preventing me from enjoying the pleasure of going in?!" (*Ibid.*). For Abdullah, it is absolutely "unbelievable" and "amazing" that Wasmiyya could freely and fearlessly invite him into her house; this serves to underlie the fact that Wasmiyya's actions here are a purposeful form of violating the seclusion rules. A point to be noted here is the fact that all of the heroine's acts of violation at this level – her appearing to, and remaining unveiled before Abdullah, her inviting the boy into the house and her subsequent engagement with him in an amorous chat – are done wilfully, rather than under any external influence or pressure from Abdullah. This thus suggests that Wasmiyya is an instinctively defiant female figure. Her aforementioned actions are a demonstration of women's (silent) exertion of their subjectivity; they are a way of expressing the heroine's wishful desires and personal freedom, even though they contravene Kuwaiti traditional values.

Had her father and brother not been away on business trips abroad, as was commonplace among merchant-class Kuwaiti men of the pre-oil era, Wasmiyya would not have been the one to receive guests, particularly not a grown-up male visitor like Abdullah. If any of the two patriarchal representatives were to be in town, Wasmiyya would not be so courageous as to invite the-seventeen-year-old Abdullah into their house. Noting these facts, Abdullah reflects on how Fahd has always exercised restrictive controls on Wasmiyya. Fahd often enforces his sister's strict

compliance with the tradition of women's seclusion; he keeps her under continuous surveillance. Fahd is often suspicious of the two childhood lovers; he has been brutally violent against each of Wasmiyya and Abdullah (17, 24-25, 29, 33).

Rather than portraying her as a stereotypically passive and compliant female figure, Wasmiyya's inability to interact freely with Abdullah at adolescence is an indication of the pervasiveness of societal restrictions on women. Making Wasmiyya violate the sacredness of women's seclusion as discussed above, therefore, confirms al-'Uthmān's construction of the subjective and non-conformist female in this novel. Wasmiyya's several defiant acts presented in this episode of Abdullah's first visit to her house are relatively minor and less decisive, compared to the girl's latter act of insubordination, featured later in the narrative.

Though largely captured through a male's (Abdullah's) narrative point of view, the author's portrayal of the heroine's defiant actions and thoughts betrays any classification of the novel as an epitome of the so-called 'feminine' narrative discourse. This novel's own discourse – including perhaps the underlying authorial intention – is arguably in contrast with the dominant masculinist narrative discourse of female selflessness and complacency. That Wasmiyya is far from a stereotype of the passive female is explicitly reflected in the first scene of the Abdullah-Wasmiyya dating plan. Constituting a significant aspect of the episode of the grown-up Abdullah's first visit to Wasmiyya's house under discussion, in this scene of the lovers' dating plan, the author makes the heroine exhibit the desire and will to transgress.

In the dialogic aspect of this dating scene, we meet both Wasmiyya and Abdullah expressing their discontent with Kuwaiti societal inhibitions on post-

childhood gender interactions. As reminiscent of their childhood romance, both youths begin to re-affirm their long-standing love and affection for each other (40). Abdullah declares that he wishes he could get a date with Wasmiyya to be able to "tell [her] all that is in [his] mind" (*Ibid.*). That Abdullah is amazed to hear that Wasmiyya is "wonderfully" interested in dating him, too, serves to underpin the fact that the heroine is subjectively defiant; it also suggests that she is potentially transgressive.

Due to the pervasiveness of the Kuwaiti patriarchal social system, dating between secret lovers was extremely difficult in Kuwait before the second half of the twentieth century. Rather than a kind of the 'boy meets girl' system, what has remained customary in Kuwaiti society is the practice of arranged and forced marriage; this usually happens between cousins, or by forcing a girl to marry a rich, elderly man.[17] As shown in several chapters of this thesis, the traditional marriage system constitutes one of the major forms of the objectification of women in Kuwait.

In the text of *Wasmiyya*, however, al-'Uthmān creates a young, upper-class, Kuwaiti female figure who decides to date a lower-class, poverty stricken boy in defiance of her society's ingrained practices of both class and gender discrimination. The restrictiveness of pre-oil Kuwaiti society with regard to dating is reflected in the dramatically treated scene of Abdullah and Wasmiyya's dating plan under discussion here. Here the reader finds that both lovers could easily agree on the need to have their passionate wish for dating each other realised. But, according to Wasmiyya, the problems are: "How, where, [what about] the people, and my family?" (*Ibid.*). These questions by Wasmiyya serve to reflect women's sensitivity to their repression in

patriarchal society through several of what Kate Millet calls "patriarchal agents", i.e. the family, society etc.[18]

Wasmiyya as a female member of male-dominated Kuwaiti society appears cognisant of the implications of dating Abdullah. She is well aware that, as a female, she would be held more liable for the taboo should both of them be caught together in a societally outlawed romantic encounter. Al-'Uthmān uses Wasmiyya's reaction to Abdullah, as he begins to insist on fixing a date on this occasion of his meeting with the girl, to demonstrate women's internalisation of the effects of patriarchy. A victim of the conventional discriminatory pattern of gender socialisation, Wasmiyya's 'interpellation' (to borrow a term from Althusser) by Kuwaiti society, and her (especially male) family members, is illustrated by her initial hesitation about the possibility of actualising the dating plan, as noted above. By contrast, as an empowered male member of Kuwaiti society, Abdullah becomes much more determined and increasingly persuasive on this issue.

Underlining the gravity of such a transgressive plan is Abdullah's statement that their dating affair is "a project that began like a dream" (41). But their dating plan is a 'project of defiance' not as far as Abdullah is concerned, for the boy is much less a victim of societal restrictions. As a Kuwaiti male, Abdullah is never reduced to seclusion; he does not wear the veil; he has been socialised to be adventurous and transcendent; after all, he works as a fisherman (3 *ff.*). On the other hand, their dating plan is a project of defiance considering Wasmiyya's social status as a completely restricted, upper-class girl. By having her love dreams realised, Wasmiyya would be transgressing the societal bounds imposed on her. The actualisation of a romantic date with Abdullah would signify her defiance of the

authorities of both her family and the patriarchal society. It would be an aberration of Kuwaiti societal norms.

That Abdullah as narrator represents al-'Uthman in this novel is evidenced by most of his commentaries on some of Wasmiyya's reported or dramatised actions, gestures and thoughts, like the one he makes on the implied significance of Wasmiyya's reactions to his suggestion that they go to the seaside one night when

- Your mother .. and my mother .. and the people are asleep. After 'Ishā',[19] all eyes are asleep .. and ..
- And what next?
- Your father and Fahd are not around (41).

Getting impatient with Wasmiyya's relatively long silence in responding, Abdullah pursues his request further: "Wasmiyya, will you come?" (42). "[Wasmiyya] raised up her face [and looked] at me", Abdullah narrates. "[A]s if she had instantly decided to transcend [societal] bounds, to give to herself the right she deserved, [at least] for once (42), he comments. Couched in figurative terms, Abdullah reflects further that Wasmiyya seems to have decided to begin to "dive in a deluge of experimentation she was not accustomed to" (*Ibid.*).

Al-'Uthmān makes Abdullah's commentary, as he hints at the significance of Wasmiyya's defiantly promising gestures above, to overshadow the heroine's initial hesitation over the issue of actualising their dating dreams. The significance of Abdullah's commentary on Wasmiyya's reaction here lies in presenting an example of the strength of the female "will" for transcending societal limitations. Speaking through the first person narrator (the middle-aged Abdullah), al-'Uthman stresses that the moment of Wasmiyya's contemplation and of the articulation of her approval of (the adolescent) Abdullah's proposal is like a moment of the oppressed female's movement from the state of passivity and submissiveness to that of "*al-ṣaḥw*", or

consciousness (46). Described by Abdullah as a moment of *"al-wa'd al-thābit"*, or a firm promise (47), Wasmiyya's reactions here symbolise the girl's readiness to violate the patriarchal social order.

The word "mad"[20] is used on several occasions in this novel to refer to any individual who rebels, or intends to rebel, against the Kuwaiti hierarchical social order. Each of Wasmiyya, Abdullah and his mother (later in the narrative) uses the word to describe both the intention for and the real act of "dating", later embarked upon by Abdullah and Wasmiyya. This serves to underline the implications of dating as an honour-threatening, abominable act in Kuwaiti society. For instance, pointing to the evocation of her subjectivity as regards her final act of transgression, Wasmiyya eventually expresses her readiness to go to the seaside on a date with Abdullah. She says to Abdullah: "I will try [...] I will be mad like you" (42). These two laconic statements by the heroine thus confirm all that Abdullah has extrapolated from the girl's unspoken thoughts and feelings of defiance, discussed above.

Al-'Uthmān uses the Abdullah-Wasmiyya love story to show not only how difficult dating was in Kuwait before the second half of the twentieth century, but also, how extremely hard it was for secret lovers to communicate with each other in those days. Before the era of modernisation beginning from the 1950s, there were very limited neutral avenues available for secret lovers like Wasmiyya and Abdullah to meet, let alone to date each other. This form of women's objectification in pre-oil Kuwaiti society is expressed through the consciousness of Wasmiyya in the scene of their seaside romance, part of which will be discussed later in this chapter. When asked by Abdullah why she has not been coming out to play at the seaside as she used to do during their childhood, Wasmiyya regrettably replies that it is because, as

a female, she is customarily allowed to go out only occasionally and in the company of her relatives. But for Abdullah's mother's occupational relationship with Wasmiyya's parents there could have been no way for both lovers to revisit their childhood love.

The primitiveness and lack of sophistication in the manner of dating by secret lovers in pre-oil Kuwait is, moreover, reflected in the scene of Wasmiyya and Abdullah's first dating plan. As the dialogue between the lovers progresses, Wasmiyya promises Abdullah that she will "place a stone by the side of the door of [her] home" within few days following their agreement on meeting on a date. Signifying "the day of [Wasmiyya's] choice" for the planned secret outing (43), the use of a 'natural', coded sign – stone – as a means of communication between secret lovers here, points to the extent of the repressiveness of pre-oil Kuwaiti society.

It is, similarly, in the scene of Wasmiyya and Abdullah's first encounter after they both have reached puberty that al-'Uthmān presents to the reader an instance of the female "double voice" as reflected in the character of the heroine. Wasmiyya's voice in this novel is double: she represents both the apparently conformist as well as the defiant and trangressive female. Wasmiyya behaves in this scene, first, as non-conformist – her appearing unveiled to Abdullah, her allowing the boy to enter their house, and her engaging him in a prolonged romantic chat – before reverting to her state of apparent compliance with Kuwaiti traditional values; this serves to underscore al-'Uthmān's portrayal of some Kuwaiti women's desire for freedom and selfhood over their suppression and objectification.

The heroine's revolutionary sensibility is constituted in that she is conscious of her deviation from the norms. It is not until she has satisfied herself in her

amorous conversations with the visiting Abdullah that Wasmiyya remembers that she has breached the Kuwaiti conventional order on women's seclusion. Before going to call her mother and inform her of the presence of Abdullah, Wasmiyya shyly pleads with the grown-up boy to go outside and wait by the door because "[she] did not want her mother to know that [he] had already entered, and that [they] ... had even talked [...]" (*Ibid.*). Corroborating the advertency of her initial act of deviating from the norms, this statement by the heroine also signifies the fact that even within the claustrophobic domestic spheres, women could subvert the patriarchal social system. That the heroine of this novel is not selfless is constituted by the fact that she seizes the opportunity of the absence of her domineering male relatives, as well as the 'inaccessibility' of her mother at the moment of her lover's arrival in the house, to defiantly assert her personal freedom.

Wasmiyya is not alone in this act of in-house violation of Kuwaiti traditional social values. In the same episode of Abdullah's first visit to Wasmiyya's house as a grown-up boy, the author also portrays Wasmiyya's mother as an equally silent, non-conformist female character. As the events of this episode continue to unfold, we find that, like Wasmiyya, her mother honours Abdullah, treating him in a non-discriminatory manner. Like Wasmiyya, her mother acts contrary to Kuwaiti societal norms as regards women's appearance before, and mode of interaction with, a grown-up, non-relative male like Abdullah. Whereas Wasmiyya had considered it "non-permissible" and "transgressive" to have allowed Abdullah into their house, her mother – acting as the matriarch – feels free before the seventeen year old boy.

Like her daughter, Wasmiyya's mother appears to Abdullah unveiled such that the boy could observe her physique and the length and colour of her hair.

Describing the lovability of Wasmiyya's mother, the visiting Abdullah observes: "Her body is sturdy. A body that has been living a pleasurable life; it's not like my mother's tall [and skinny] body" (45). Occupying almost a full page in the text, the significance of this appreciative, rather than jealous, comparison by Abdullah lies not simply in its reflection of the physical difference between the lower and upper class Kuwaiti women of the pre-oil era. Rather, his description of, specifically, Wasmiyya's mother's physical qualities serves to underpin the novel's argument that 'secluded' women are not as conformist as widely perceived. Wasmiyya's mother's free interactions with the grown-up Abdullah thus represents the desire for social change by even the much older generation of Kuwaiti women of the pre-oil era.

The major act of defiance

Al-'Uthmān's adoption of intermittent narrative 'gaps', or suspense devices, in this novel creates serious effects in intensifying the reader's curiosity as regards how Abdullah lost his lover, Wasmiyya. Constituting the narrative gaps of the texts are the frequent references to the present causes of the middle-aged Abdullah's anguish, captured through the consciousness of a third person omniscient narrator. For instance, it is this 'undramatised' (Genette's term) third person narrator who succinctly reflects on the distressed mind of the middle-aged Abdullah as it oscillates between the recollection of the sad events of his past and the remembrance of his current marital problems (52-54). It is at this moment of Abdullah's double sorrowful recollections, as he remains completely lonely at the beach in the night of the narration of the entire story of the novel, that the events of the heroine's final and most decisive act of transgression and resistance are unfolded.

A good example of women's internalisation of the effects of patriarchy in the novel is its representation of Wasmiyya's initial failure to fulfil her promise that she would give her lover a coded signal concerning the day of her choice for the date. It is not until Abdullah's second opportunistic visit to Wasmiyya's house, during which he rekindles Wasmiyya's potential for defiance, that the girl can begin to exhibit her strong will and decisiveness. Having adhered to the 'feminine' stereotypes – cowardice, fear and indecision – Wasmiyya begins to demonstrate that she is a self-assertive, decisive 'feminist' figure, on this occasion.

Though relatively short, the second, also dialogically presented, scene of the Abdullah-Wasmiyya dating plan is as significant as the first one in its vivid representation of the process of the evocation of the heroine's active agency. Here, the reader meets the dejected Abdullah insisting that Wasmiyya should be specific on the date she would place the stone at the agreed point. Slightly embarrassed, Wasmiyya retorts:

> - OK. Why the stone? [I am announcing it to] your hearing now.
> - You mean tonight?
>
> She nodded her head, smiling.
> I said:
> - Are you jesting?! [I mean], are you saying this just in order to pacify me?
> - No, [I swear] by God. Tonight would be convenient […] (66).

On this second occasion of their dating plan, Wasmiyya fulfills her promise (73). A point to note here, above all, is that it was her promise to place a stone at the specified point, through the medium of which she will inform her lover about the date of her choice that the heroine has failed to fulfill, not the promise for a date itself. Keeping her promise on the 'confirmed' date, as expressed in the above dialogue, therefore, portrays Wasmiyya as an embodiment of women's decisiveness and strong will in resisting their continued suppression in patriarchal society.

Beginning with the point of their departure from the front of Wasmiyya's house to the point of the sudden death of the girl, the 'dating episode' is the most significant aspect of this novel, as far as this thesis is concerned. Partially dramatised and partially pictorially treated, this episode is essentially remarkable for its portrayal of Wasmiyya's consequential transgression. It is here that the heroine's radical thoughts, feelings and wishes are freely and most directly expressed by herself in the text. Being an episode of successive actions, this part of the text evidently situates al-'Uthmān as a creator of the resistant and revolutionary Kuwaiti female fictional figure. This episode should suffice to prove that the novel is far from the unquestioning reproduction of the androcentric narrative discourse of the docile and selfless female.

That Abdullah as narrator represents the author in the novel is also evident in the narrative of how Wasmiyya has "escaped from her enclave" i.e. home (74), in order to meet her secret lover on the night she has specified. Using the metaphor of a "caged bird" to refer to the circumstances of a great deal of pre-oil Kuwaiti women, al-'Uthmān again stresses the implications of any acts of defiance by a secluded woman like Wasmiyya to the Kuwaiti hierarchical social order. Speaking through Abdullah, the author emphasises that Wasmiyya's act of sneaking out of her home in order to satisfy her lustful desire is an act of "transgression" (80). Abdullah informs us that no sooner had they both reached the beach on that night of their "romantic adventure" than they began their childlike romance (78 *ff.*). Sitting down on the ground, tightly close together, holding each other hand-in-hand, chatting and playing with the sand, Abdullah asks Wasmiyya: "Why have you agreed to come [with me]?" (80).

Wasmiyya's unpleasant reaction to this annoyingly "embarrassing question" by her lover provokes Abdullah's note on the significance of Wasmiyya's act of 'elopement'. "I imagined that I have accused her of 'transgression'"(Ibid), Abdullah comments. In a sequel to Abdullah's self-corrective, yet interrogative statement: "I mean have you really been longing to see me? And to have a chat with me?" (*Ibid.*), Wasmiyya "looked relieved"; she "smiled", "and nodded her head *in affirmative*" (*Ibid.*, my emphasis). These affirmatively positive gestures by the heroine indicate that she is an active agent in this act of defiance and transgression. Wasmiyya has decided to be on a date with Abdullah in spite of the class dichotomy between them, and despite her awareness of the dangerous implications of flouting patriarchal conventional order.

Evasion of Societal Chastisement

While representing Kuwaiti women as victims of traditional social values and practices, the text of *Wasmiyya* at the same time portrays them as evaders of patriarchal oppression embedded in the ideology of *faḏīḥa* (social dishonour). A very uncommon feature in Kuwaiti women's social realist fiction with similar plot elements, this novel presents the tragic incident of Wasmiyya's death, associated with her involvement in an act of *faḏīḥa*, to be accidental, rather than a deliberate punitive act of aggression taken by a male relative against the so-called meek female. It is Wasmiyya's own rash action as she tries to avoid losing her family honour that leads to her destruction. This is presented at the point of denouement of the Abdullah-Wasmiyya secret love story, where the author seductively demonstrates that the heroine's fatalistic end is ideologically caused.

Following the conventional chronological unfolding of events, Abdullah recounts that being extremely happy with each other during their late-night romance at the seaside, he and Wasmiyya become "oblivious of the passage of time" (83). The idealistically thinking, romantically obsessed youths forget about the society around them. They are awakened to the reality of their lives when "Suddenly, [...] the beam of a light came from afar [...]" (*Ibid.*), indicating the presence of a night guard in the area. Marking the beginning of trouble in their surreptitious dating, it is from this point in the text that the story begins to turn out as a 'tragedy', rather than (as the reader may have been expecting) a quest story of love between two adolescents kept apart by traditional convention on class and gender interactions.

It is Wasmiyya, interestingly, rather than Abdullah, who takes an urgent action in order to prevent the occurrence of a "*muṣība*" (tribulation) (*Ibid.*) that is about to befall them. "I'll jump[21] into the water until they go" (84), Wasmiyya nervously says to Abdullah in her desperate bid to avoid the approaching night watchman. Vanishing before Abdullah could warn her of the danger involved in this decision, Wasmiyya leaves her lover terribly perplexed. It is Wasmiyya's rashness here – her wilful jump into the sea – that constitutes the novel's representation of women's act of evasion of the Arab patriarchal ideological oppression in the name of *faḍīḥa*.

Through the narrative of the scene of both the 'tragic process' and the 'tragic incident' in the novel, al-'Uthmān inversely presents what appears to be an instance of feminine weakness – Wasmiyya's cowardice and ineptitude in the face of a looming, dangerous threat to her honour – as, rather, an act of courage. This is expressed through Abdullah's internal musings, presented later in the narrative, as he

returns home in tremendous grief and shock. In what could also be identified with al-'Uthmān's authorial voice, the reader finds the bereaved Abdullah praising the late Wasmiyya's courage for dying gallantly for a worthy cause: her purposeful evasion of patriarchal chastisement. By contrast, Abdullah self-consciously ascribes cowardice to himself for his inability to have committed an instantaneous suicide on realising his lover's death (93). Acknowledging the effectiveness of Wasmiyya's fatalistic but evasive act, Abdullah reflects that it is Wasmiyya who saves both of them from being exposed. For Abdullah, Wasmiyya's ability to avoid the vigilante acting as an "agent" of Kuwaiti society is an act of courage. The text posits that the heroine's escape into the sea is a decisive act of evasion of the oppression of the Kuwaiti patriarchal society, a society "that detests any moments of [...] love between innocent youths" (83-87).

Summarily presenting the narrative of Abdullah's obnoxious encounter with the night guard serves to provide an immediate link between Wasmiyya's evasive action: hiding in the sea, and Abdullah's, which happens soon afterwards. Signalling the opening of another scene in this 'dating at the seaside' episode, the process of Abdullah's own form of evasion begins as soon as the suspicious night guard leaves after interrogating the secret-lover Abdullah. The depressed middle-aged Abdullah tells us that no sooner had the night guard left him alone on that fateful night than he quickly rushed into the sea.

Evidently the most moving part of the entire text, the scene of Abdullah's discovery of Wasmiyya's death, represents the change of the hero's fortune from that of a lucky and happy, lower-class boy winning the heart of an upper-class girl, to that of a bereaved and grievously devastated lover. Presented mono-dramatically, the

reader here meets Abdullah in his restless search for Wasmiyya under the water. "Oh sea, guide me .. tell [me]; is [my] lover here, [or] there?" (87), Abdullah anxiously pleads with the sea. Describing his extreme grief as he begins to despair when he could not hear Wasmiyya respond to his silent call not "even by gasping" (88), Abdullah notes: "Darkness surrounds me, darkness was in my eyes .. darkness was in my mind" (88). On noticing the girl's black veil floating in the terribly turbulent water, Abdullah "hurriedly gripped [it] .. he pulled it toward [himself] .. thinking that it was Wasmiyya emerging from the sea" (88).

As the rest of the events of the dramatically treated tragic aspect of this dating episode unroll, the text begins to arouse the reader's 'pity and fear' which, according to Aristotle, are essential elements of 'tragedy' as a literary genre.[22] When Abdullah eventually finds his lover, Wasmiyya has already given up the ghost. All effort to revive her fails (88). Traumatised, Abdullah remains standing, "half of his body inside the water, and Wasmiyya's dead body in his hands". He begins to move up and down "bowing like [a Muslim faithful] in a devotional posture .. pleading [for divine intervention]" (89) in his predicament. Abdullah's action here has an element of religious irony or mockery. Nevertheless, he and his mother are portrayed as people who are not only religious but also distinguish between religion and cultural practices. While realising the oppressiveness of their society, they both turn to God, with regard to their current predicament, for two purposes: to pray for the repose of Wasmiyya's soul, and to pray for a divine succour as regards how to cover up the *faḍīḥa* (99).

The overall judgement of the text of *Wasimyya* is that, as reflected in this scene of the hero's shocking realisation of the heroine's death, it is the societal

interpellation enshrined in the Arab cultural ideology of *faḍīḥa* that was to blame for the latter's premature death. The author appears to have used the sea here metaphorically to refer to Kuwaiti patriarchal society. This is understandable in several of Abdullah's elegiac pronouncements: his grievances and annoyance addressed to the sea as the "killer" of his beloved Wasmiyya. Through Abdullah's hyperbolic statement – "I wetted [Wasmiyya's body] with my tears; the dog—'the sea'—had not wetted it as I had done" (89) – the text creates an effect that suggests some allusions to the restrictive, pre-oil Kuwaiti society as the cause of the heroine's death. Here Abdullah/the author uses the words "*kalb*" and "*ibn al-kalb*" (literally: dog, and son of dog), both common abusive forms among Arabs, to refer to the personified killer-sea. Thus, the novel allegorically points an accusing finger at the killer-sea, as if it were a human oppressor (89-90).

It is at the end of his mournful reactions to Wasmiyya's sudden death that Abdullah's own act of evasion of societal chastisement unfolds. For Abdullah, just as the sea had been Wasmiyya's beloved object and her place of escapade to which she "had come, full of happiness as she explores [her freedom]", so too should the sea now "be [Wasmiyya's] grave which will conceal her secret and protect her" from oppressive society (90). Abdullah does not only refuse to take home Wasmiyya's corpse, he also decides not to leave it lying conspicuously on the beach. Referring to the prevalence of societal inhibitions on gender and inter-class interactions in pre-oil Kuwait, Abdullah notes that should the secret of their "scandalous" dating come out into the open "the shame would be double: [people would be saying, derisively, that] 'Wasmiyya went out to meet a [secret lover (Abdullah)]; and the [boy] is the son of a poor female domestic assistant'" (*Ibid.*). The hero's 'burying' the heroine in the sea

thus constitutes his own form of evasion of or self-protection from societal chastisement; it is as important as Wasmiyya's elusion of the night guard, discussed above.

Al-'Uthmān's hero in this novel is portrayed as a pro-feminist, non-patriarchal figure who protests, though covertly, against the Kuwaiti hierarchical social order that has "caused" his misfortune. Abdullah's protests against society is constituted by his refusal to marry, after the events of Wasmiyya's death, until late in his thirties, and under persistent pressure from his aging mother. Similarly and in pursuance of the pledge which he had made at the time of Wasmiyya's death – that "rather than forsaking [the killer-sea], [he] will be a fisherman, hunting fish and donating it to Wasmiyya's spirit [...]" (91) – Abdullah refuses to engage in any work or profession other than fishing (53 *ff.*).

Even though it is Abdullah's narrative voice and point of view that are dominant in the text, as argued by Sabry Hafez and discussed above, al-'Uthmān does not fail to make her heroine perform a significant role in her representation of the subversion of patriarchal hegemony in the novel. In fact, Abdullah's evidently audacious act – throwing Wasmiyya's corpse back into the sea – is less significantly evasive than Wasmiyya's escape into the sea in the first place.

The significance of Wasmiyya's escape from seclusion on a date with Abdullah as an act of defiance is vividly depicted in the novel in the scene of Abdullah's breaking the sad news of Wasmiyya's death to his mother. When the secret-lover boy returns home, completely "wet", "frighteningly shivering", and looking utterly distressed, his mother is forced to ask what is amiss. Abdullah's mother faints on hearing the shocking news of Wasmiyya's death (97). But that

notwithstanding, the woman is representationally much more astounded and aggrieved by the fact that her son had earlier been on a date with Wasmiyya on that fateful night. In the dramatically treated scene of Abdullah and his mother's quarrel over the circumstances surrounding the death of Wasmiyya, the reader finds that the tragic loss of Wasmiyya's life itself is not presented as enigmatic. What the text presents, on the contrary, as most puzzling to the pre-oil Kuwaiti public – here represented by Abdullah's mother – are the questions that: 'how could a secluded girl like Wasmiyya have 'escaped' from her home? How could she have behaved so defiantly in order to satisfy her wilful desires?' (95).

Exemplifying the Marxist-feminist ideology, the author identifies both class and gender discrimination as coterminous in the perpetration of women's oppression[23] in pre-oil Kuwaiti society. This is reflected in both the defiant Abdullah's reactions to and his comments about his mother's act of not believing that he had been on a date with Wasmiyya. A creation of a conscious feminist writer, the hero interprets his mother's extreme astonishment about Wasmiyya's being on a surreptitious date with him as an indirect way of expressing the culturally constructed notion of dating as an abomination. For the defiant hero, his mother's angry reactions to this issue point to the pervasiveness of societal and cultural interpellation through which the individual is "ideologically" forced to abide by the law and conform to patriarchal authority (96). Articulating what he believes his societally-interpellated mother is wondering about, Abdullah retorts:

- Yes. Wasmiyya, a girl of noble descent … was with this poor [boy] .. your son .. the son of an underprivileged woman .. Yes .. [Wasmiyya had been with me earlier] this night (*Ibid.*).

This serves to stress the prevalence of class dichotomy in pre-oil Kuwait. For an average Kuwaiti traditionalist, defiant figures like Wasmiyya and Abdullah "must have been mad" (Ibid) to have purposefully contravened societal order.

Both the heroine's gender and class affiliation constitute the causes of her tragic end. It is the fact that Wasmiyya is neither skilled in swimming nor diving that makes Abdullah worry when she decides to hide in the sea in order to avoid being caught together with him (84). (Although she used to play at the seaside as a child, Wasmiyya does not know how to swim. In pre-oil Kuwaiti society it was unusual that women would swim; they could go to the sea for cleaning purposes like washing clothes and other household things, as evident in the lies with which Wasmiyya's and Abdullah's mothers cover up the scandal). Being a less empowered and conventionally socialised female member of pre-oil Kuwaiti society, therefore, it is Wasmiyya's lack of the lifesaving skills of swimming and diving that has contributed to her drowning. Had she been male, Wasmiyya would not have been the one of the two lovers to have to hide somewhere in their desperate bid to avoid a "spying" night guard. If she were a male, Wasmiyya might not have drowned; like Abdullah, she might have been familiar with and confident under the water.

The several ways through which al-'Uthmān's women in this novel defy patriarchal authority have so far constituted the focus of discussion in this chapter. These include the heroine's and her mother's silent non-conformity with seclusion rules, the former's escape from home on a surreptitious date with a lover and her act of evasion of the attendant loss of her family's *sharaf*, or social standing. The following section will look at the theme of women's solidarity as represented in the

novel. The two older female characters in *Wasmiyya* form a kind of solidarity the underlying significance of which I would like to note before concluding this chapter.

Women's Solidarity

In *Wasmiyya*, al-'Uthmān argues that, as victims of patriarchal ideology and culture, women should work together, at least, to protect themselves, from patriarchal oppression. The author explicitly demonstrates that the conscious female should avoid her continued oppression by not colluding in the perpetuation of women's oppression. This is evidenced in the novel's depiction of women's ploy and solidarity in undermining the effectiveness of patriarchal authority. Presented in the last part of the main story (of Abdullah and Wasmiyya's secret love affair), the novel represents women's shrewdness in eluding patriarchal punishment in form of the loss of their social standing that would have been inescapable should the secret of Abdullah and Wasmiyya's fatal "scandalous" dating be uncovered. While depicting cooperation and solidarity as necessary for women's struggle against male social domination, the author represents pre-oil Kuwaiti women's apparent submissiveness as a medium for undermining patriarchal hegemony.

In her *Women in Kuwait: the Politics of Gender*, Haya al-Mughni notes that, during the pre-oil era, Kuwaiti women indulged in the use of some magical powers: "they believed in witches and in *jinn* (demons) and practised *zār* (spiritual possession)."[24] "[T]he practise of *zar* involves the manipulation of power relations in favour of the powerless. In other words, 'spirit possession is a form of bargaining from a position of weakness.'"[25] However, in spite of making the status of women and their oppression in pre-oil Kuwaiti society the focus of this novel, al-'Uthmān

depicts a form of female empowerment that is much more rationalistic than the historically realistic, magical and sometimes devilish ones mentioned above. This is reflected through the role played by the older female characters in the novel, who are affected by the tragic death of the heroine. "I must do something. I must [...]" (98), Abdullah's mother says to her son on the necessity of covering up the secret behind Wasmiyya's sudden death.

Each time her son asks her what action she is planning to take in order to save the two families from an imminent threat to their honour, Abdullah's mother replies: "It does not concern you" (98); "This is none of your business" (99). Exemplifying the novel's representation of what could be called the "women's zone", these and similar other expressions by the hero's mother serve to show not simply that Abdullah is a young, inexperienced person, but that he is not female. Abdullah's mother's statements here are backed by her complete secretiveness, which serves to keep the boy in the dark on her pre-planned subterfuge until the moment of the announcement of Wasmiyya's death to the public. Both her statements above and the ploy she enacts are an illustration of women's silent empowerment as well as the existence of certain women-controlled realms within any male-dominated hierarchical social system.

Kuwaiti women's potential in undermining the patriarchal social order is finally manifested in the novel in the scene of the announcement of Wasmiyya's death to the public, featured in the last part of the story of Abdullah and Wasmiyya's ill-fated love affair. The questions which both the "offending" hero and the reader have been curiously asking since the occurrence of Wasmiyya's death are: If at all the concerned older women (Abdullah and Wasmiyya's mothers) are able to resolve

the issue amicably between each other, what would they tell the people was the cause of Wasmiyya's death? And how convincing could that be? Often portrayed by Abdullah/the author as a kind of a female 'demigod', as "trustworthy", "reliable" and "clever" (94, 102), Abdullah's mother comes out with a "wise lie" (103). The fact of Abdullah's mother's subterfuge is put in the mouth of a minor female sympathiser-character, as she explains the cause of Wasmiyya death to another sympathiser: "They'd taken Wasmiyya to the sea.. her mother and Abdullah's .. [They'd taken her there] in order to wash her hair and [some] pieces of clothes before the sun rose .. But she was grasped by the sea (103).

According to Abdullah, "no one would ever doubt" the chastity of a completely secluded, closely watched, upper-class girl like Wasmiyya (103). This shows, therefore, that the women's (Abdullah and Wasmiyya's mother's) lie, above, is societally acceptable; it is convincing and rational. Al-'Uthmān inversely represents the societal expectations from the typical Kuwaiti female – conformity to patriarchal social order – to demonstrate how restrictive controls on women's social interactions could be exploited to the disadvantage of patriarchal culture.

By publicly attributing the blame for Wasmiyya's death to themselves in order to avoid the attendant societal chastisement, Wasmiyya and Abdullah's mothers demonstrate women's affection and compassion as mothers. Abdullah tells us that the bereaved woman, Wasmiyya's mother, "totally agrees to and affirms" the "great lie" suggested by his own mother (103). The older women's act of covering up their children's 'scandal' can be viewed as perpetuating the Kuwaiti patriarchal culture, as they struggle to avoid any confrontation or disturbance to the patriarchal ideal. Nevertheless, this cover up serves to emphasise the necessity of women's

solidarity in protecting themselves in the face of male assertive social authority. This action reflects female subjective capability in undermining patriarchal authority.

Conclusion

The text of *Wasmiyya* is far from a perfect example of the 'feminine' narrative discourse, which merely reproduces the dominant androcentric literary tradition. As I have tried to demonstrate in the preceding sections, this novel does the contrary; it reflects (or reproduces) and, at the same time, criticises the Kuwaiti patriarchal culture that suppresses and oppresses women in particular. The novel's reproduction of the hierarchical structure of Kuwaiti society is constituted by its expansive representation of the pervasiveness of class and gender dichotomies in pre-oil Kuwait. The heroine's and her mother's reduction to total seclusion is indicative of their affiliation to the upper class. Pointing to her lower class status is the hero's mother's freedom from complete seclusion; for economic reasons, it is societally acceptable that poor women like Abdullah's mother work outside their homes. The novel's questioning of the masculinist literary discourse, on the other hand, is explicitly indicated, particularly, in the actions and thoughts of the heroine, Wasmiyya. Though male, the protagonist, and principal narrator, Abdullah's voice is evidently authorial (al-'Uthmān's) and 'feminist'.

Despite its little significance to the plot of the novel, al-'Uthmān's adoption of "fantasy" as a narrative strategy in order to explore the social realist themes of love, class and gender in *Wasmiyya* creates a remarkable literary effect. Reflecting the effects of the cause of the heroine's (Wasmiyya's) wilfully evasive drowning in the sea on the life of the hero (Abdullah), the novel makes the time and manner of

the latter's death correspond with those of the former. Consequent upon his fantastic illusion that the living spirit of Wasmiyya "is emerging from the sea", Abdullah, too, drowns in the sea on a night that shares some descriptive similarities with that of the night Wasmiyya drowned (111).

By constructing the same form of heroically suicidal death for her heroine and hero in the novel, al-'Uthmān has illustrated some of the fatalistic consequences any attempt by an individual to attain superior freedom and assert her or his subjectivity in the pervasively repressive pre-oil Kuwaiti society. Individual freedom is excessively limited and can only be exercised within strict boundaries in Kuwaiti society of pre-second half of the twentieth century. This seems to explain why al-'Uthmān represents 'evasion', rather than 'confrontation', as a form of subverting patriarchy. Whereas the hallucinating Abdullah's drowning is a form of escape from the oppressive pre-oil Kuwaiti society, Wasmiyya's drowning is the consequence of her act of evading some of the ideological oppression of that society. Abdullah's act of 'burying' Wasmiyya's body in the sea complementarily constitutes the second stage of the evasion, already initiated by the heroine with her escape into the sea. With Abdullah and Wasmiyya's mothers' cleverly concocted lies and solidarity to protect their honour, the author's devised chain of women's evasion of the Kuwaiti patriarchal oppression is thus complete.

By constructing the various acts of female defiance, evasion and subversion of the Kuwaiti patriarchal authority, and by creating a non-conformist heroine who acts and rebels against patriarchal authority, al-'Uthmān, in this novel, qualifies as a feminist writer. The author has worked "within the patriarchal literary tradition", but she has worked tirelessly "to subvert it."[26] *Wasmiyya takhruj min al-baḥr* neither

merely reflects nor condones the reality of women's oppression. Rather, it criticises the society it depicts.

Notes and References

1. Laylā al-'Uthmān, *Wasmiyya takhruj min al-baḥr* (Kuwait: Sharikat al-Rubay'ān li-l-nashr wa-l-tawzī', 1986, 1st edition). For another study of this novel, and some other fictional texts by al-'Uthmān, see Barbara Michalak-Pikulska, *al-Turāth wa-l-mu'āṣira fī ibdā' Laylā al-'Uthmān*, trans. (from Polish) Hātif al-Janābī (Damascus: Dār al-madā li-l-thaqāfa wa-l-nashr, 1997).
2. Sabry Hafez, "Women's Narrative in Modern Arabic Literature: a Typology" in Roger Allen *et. al.*, (eds.) *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi Books, 1995), pp. 154-174.
3. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their own: From Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing,* (London: Virago Press, 1982, revised edition).
4. See *Ibid.*, p. 13.
5. Hafez, *op. cit.*, p. 162.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. Laylā al-'Uthmān, *al-Mar'a wa-l-qiṭṭa* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'arabiyya li-l-dirāsāt wa-l-nashr, 1985).
14. See Laylā al-'Uthmān's review of these novels entitled "al-Khurūj min baḥr al-kitāba" in *al-Qabas*, no. 8968 (9/6/1998), pp. 30-31.
15. See, for example, Chandra T. Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres (eds.), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 34-38.
16. *Ibid.*
17. See Haya al-Mughni, *Women in Kuwait: the Politics of Gender* (London: Saqi Books, 1993), pp. 44-45.
18. Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics*, first published in 1971, (London: Verso Press Limited, 1977), p. 33.
19. *'Ishā'* is the name of the late-evening, Muslim daily prayer.
20. There have been a lot of debates among feminist critics over the issue of 'women and madness'. Women writers and critics have tried to explore and discuss this issue from different theoretical points of view, especially psychoanalysis. One basic fact, as emphasised by critics like Phyllis Chesler and Elaine Showalter, is that "There is no inherent link between femaleness and insanity [...]." See Showalter: *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987); and Chelser, *Women and Madness* (London: Allen Lane, 1974), in Sara Mills *et. al.* op. *cit.*, p. 217).

    Al-'Uthmān's *Wasmiyya* cannot be said to be a 'women and madness' text; madness is not a theme extensively explored in this novel. What we have is something relating to 'men and madness': the hero's (Abdullah's) moment of hallucination that leads to his drowning under the illusion that he is seeing Wasmiyya as she 'emerges' from the sea. As noted in the body of this chapter, al-'Uthmān's uses the word 'mad' simply as an explanation for a wilful act of defiance of the patriarchal social order by an individual who is aware of the consequences of such act. An example of 'women and madness' fictional narratives by Kuwaiti women is *al-Nuwākhidha* by Fawziyya S. al-Sālim (Damascus: al-Madā, 1998).

21. See Millet, *op. cit*., pp. 31 *ff.*
22. The Arabic word used here is *aghṭisu* (derived from *ghaṭasa*) meaning "to dive". But I have translated it to be "jump into the water" as the heroine lacks the skill to dive. Please note the typographical error in the spelling of the word *aghṭisu* in the first edition of the novel used for this study: what was printed in the quotation under discussion here is *ughasṭisu*, instead of *aghṭisu.*
23. See 'The Marxist-Feminist Literature Collective', "Women's writing: Jane Eyre, Shirley, Villette, Aurora Leigh", *Ideology and Consciousness*, vol. 1, no.3, (Spring 1978), pp. 27-28
24. Al-Mughni, *op. cit*., p. 47.
25. *Ibid*., p. 28.
26. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p.73, in Sue Spaull and Elaine Millard, "The Anxiety of Authorship" in Sara Mills, *et. al.*, *Feminist Readings/Feminists Reading* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p.129.

CHAPTER FIVE

RACE, CLASS, WAR AND GENDER IN ṬAYYIBA AL-IBRĀHĪM'S *MUDHAKKIRĀT KHĀDIM*

Introduction

Whereas Laylā al-'Uthmān's *Wasmiyya takhruj min al-baḥr*, discussed in the preceding chapter, treats the themes of love, class and gender in pre-oil Kuwait, Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm's[1] *Mudhakkirāt khādim* [A Servant's Diary] explores the same themes as obtained in post-oil or contemporary Kuwait. A novel of two parts, *Mudhakkirāt khādim*, hereafter referred to as *Mudhakkirāt,* was published in Cairo in 1995.[2] As shown in its title, it is a novel in diary form – a very rare mode of writing in the Kuwaiti literary tradition in general. *Mudhakkirāt* qualifies as a socialist and feminist text. The novel treats the systemic exploitation and segregation of immigrant workers in post-oil Kuwaiti society, and the problems of the underrepresented Kuwaitis, commonly called "*bidūn jinsiyya*" or '[people] without nationality'.[3] It is much more concerned with exposing how the Kuwaiti hierarchical social system has continued to be discriminatory against and oppressive to women in the post-oil era.

In *Mudhakkirāt*, al-Ibrāhīm depicts how the patriarchal culture which has served to make Kuwait a segregationist society in the post-oil era has affected class/racial and gender interactions. Combining social and historical realisms, the novel expansively follows the life of the heroine for more than a decade before linking it with the events of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (it covers a period of fourteen years, 1977-1991). This shows that it is not a mere war narrative meant only

to document the ghastly experiences of Kuwaitis during the Iraqi occupation. *Mudhakkirāt*, specifically Part II, is one of the most detailed literary representations of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in a single fictional volume. It is remarkable for presenting a single vision of the war, and for treating the development of its events with some details and historical accuracy, from invasion in August 1990 to liberation in February 1991. Most other writers, women in particular, have treated the invasion in their respective stories disjointedly; they have fictionalised different aspects of the war and its effects on Kuwait and its citizens as individual events, not as general events of a single war.[4]

Mudhakkirāt has two narrative levels. The main story, largely narrated using the first person, confessional mode, is contained in a diary, written in English, by an unnamed domestic servant, presumably from the Indian Subcontinent.[5] Because the servant-diarist – referred to in this chapter as 'Indian', even though he might also be Bengali or Sri Lankan – is not literate in Arabic, the author claims that what we are reading is a translation from English into Arabic. The narrative of this diary, usually termed the 'secondary narrative', is embedded in the 'primary or frame narrative', which is 'focalised'[6] and narrated by the translator, a Kuwaiti man and friend of the family around which the story revolves. In his introductory remarks that could be regarded as a 'prologue', the translator notes that he has been asked by the central female figure in the diary to change all the real names of persons and places that appear in the diary before publishing it (57). But, instead of replacing the names with other ones, the translator reverses their linear arrangements in such a way that the reader could easily recognise them;[7] thus making the story easily identifiable with Kuwait, its people, and its social and political history in recent times.

The broader argument of this thesis is that the selected texts portray their heroines who represent the pre-oil generations of Kuwaiti women—born before or in the first half of the twentieth century—as resistant and/or revolutionary figures, contrary to the common notion of their passivity and compliance. Being a novel about contemporary post-oil Kuwait, how does *Mudhakkirāt* fit into this argument? Al-Ibrāhīm's specification, in the novel, of the age of the heroine in particular, as a woman in her thirties in the late 1970s, is very illuminating. It shows that Madam Sāra belongs to the generation of contemporary women born in the late 1940s or early 1950s before the efflorescence of the oil-influenced, modern civilisation in Kuwait. It is Madam Sāra who is portrayed in the novel as revolutionary, rather than, for instance, her daughter, Hudā, who belongs to the younger (1970s-1980s) generation. Unlike the younger generation, Madam Sāra's mid-twentieth century generation of Kuwaiti women remained, to a greater or lesser extent, victims of the Kuwaiti conservative past. The 1940s/50s generation of women did not benefit much from the Kuwaiti government's policies of equal education and job opportunities, which only began to take effect from the late 1960s.

To what extent has al-Ibrāhīm succeeded in portraying the heroine of *Mudhakkirāt* as a resistant and revolutionary figure? With this question in mind, this chapter proceeds to examine the novel's representation of the relationship between race, class and gender in post-oil Kuwait; and how that relationship has been affected by the Iraqi invasion of the country. After the plot summary, the chapter is divided into two broad sections (each with several subsections): 'Race, Class and Gender in Post-oil Kuwait' and 'War and Female Subjectivity'

Plot Summary

A middle-class Kuwaiti family employs an unnamed man from the Indian Subcontinent as domestic servant. Though already a married man and a father of several children, the servant soon develops an inordinate passion for his "lovable" mistress but is unable to voice it. Consequent upon the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the class/racial discrimination that had hitherto constituted a barrier between servant and mistress is eliminated, making it possible for the servant to have his way. Part I opens with the servant's and his family's happiness about the news of his success in securing a visa to go and work in Kuwait. In spite of all odds – the jealousy-inflamed grudges between the servant and his mistress' (Madam Sāra's) husband, as well as several of his misdemeanours against the family – the servant's initial contract is renewed for a second, permanent term. He is even permitted to bring his wife with him on this occasion. All of these are done for him in recognition of his acclaimed sincerity, loyalty and dedication.

Part II covers the events in Madam Sāra's household from the commencement of the servant's second term. Encouraged by the sudden death of Madam Sāra's husband and the woman's declared interest in a second marriage, the servant continues to surreptitiously pursue his ambition to be his mistress' lover. He takes several chances and exploits people – including using his unsuspecting co-servant wife as an informant – in order to achieve this. With the events of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the servant foresees for himself a great opportunity to achieve his goal. To this end, he decides to send back home to their country his traumatised wife who might constitute a barrier between him and achieving his clandestine ambition.

Falling victim to several forms of Iraqi aggression, Madam Sāra and her (extended) family decide to seek asylum in Saudi Arabia. They set out on the journey using three cars: Madam Sāra, her daughter and son-in-law, Hudā and Nāṣir, with their own daughter also named Sāra all in Nāṣir's car; Murād, Madam Sāra's son, and his family in Murād's car; and the servant alone is asked to follow them driving Madam Sāra's personal car. But, while attempting to escape to Saudi Arabia, they are affected in various woeful ways by the occupying forces' militarisation of all roads leading to neighbouring countries. In horror, Madam Sāra watches her daughter, Hudā, killed by her own husband, Nāṣir, who is trying to avoid his wife being raped by Iraqi troops. Nāṣir himself eventually dies of the injuries he has sustained from his own gunshots; the servant, Murād and his family are missing; Madam Sāra herself turns psychotic; her granddaughter, also named Sāra, is lost, untraceably.

After ten days of wandering and suffering in the desert, the critically ill and psychotic Madam Sāra is brought to Saudi Arabia by a group of people. Meanwhile, the servant has been loitering around, in anxiety and distress, at the Saudi border, to where he has escaped while riding alone in Madam Sāra's car. On his re-union with his mistress, the servant does everything to single-handedly help Madam Sāra recover. He secretly keeps her in his custody, gives her psychotherapeutic treatments, and, as soon as her conditions improve, he arranges his 'mutually consented' marriage to her. With the commencement of the war by the international community for the liberation of Kuwait, Madam Sāra recovers completely by regaining her memory. She is soon re-united with her son, Murād, who has been living in the

United Arab Emirates. Murād's vehement antagonism to his mother's marriage to their former servant, and his order that she divorce the man, are met with resistance and defiance from Madam Sāra, who has earlier validated her conjugal relationship with the servant. After liberation, the couple return to Kuwait; the servant dies shortly afterwards.

Race, Class and Gender in Post-oil Kuwait

Whereas in the pre-oil era (up to 1950s) the class dichotomy was between the upper and lower class strata of Kuwaiti society, the post-oil era is characterised more by the citizen-immigrant dichotomy than by any clear-cut class difference among the Kuwaitis themselves. This section argues that even before her overtly deviant, societally inhibited marriage with her Indian servant consequent upon the Iraqi invasion, Madam Sāra has been demonstrating some degree of non-conformity to some Kuwaiti patriarchal social conventions. What is the heroine's role in keeping the problem of class/racial segregation and discrimination in Kuwait to the minimum in peacetime? To what extent can it be said that Madam Sāra has been revolutionary-minded, even before acting revolutionarily?

I shall attempt to answer these questions by focusing on Madam Sāra's thoughts, actions and attitudes to intra-family issues, as well as the levels of her interaction with the two categories of immigrant workers in Kuwait. Under the subsection 'Kuwaiti women and immigrant workers', the relationship between race, class and gender in the post oil era is discussed; under 'Autocratic patriarch *vs.* democratic matriarch', the discussion centres on gender roles within the post-oil Kuwaiti family structure, with a view to revealing the contrast, illustrated by the

author, between Kuwaiti men as autocratic, patriarchal heads of the family, and their female counterparts as democratic, non-domineering matriarchs.

Kuwaiti women and immigrant workers

In *Mudhakkirāt*, al-Ibrāhīm illustrates not just how class/racial segregation has been the hallmark of cosmopolitan, post-oil Kuwaiti society, but also, how that has affected gender interaction, most specifically, the interaction of Kuwaiti women with non-Kuwaiti men. There are two categories of immigrant workers in Kuwait: the skilled and the unskilled, the latter working mostly as domestic workers, or office messengers. Two major characters in the novel, Mr Nabīl and the servant, respectively represent these two categories of immigrants in post-oil Kuwait.

Starting from the first 'ship episode' at the beginning of the novel to the last page, *Mudhakkirāt* is largely a treatment of the most delicate form of class/race and gender relationship in post-oil Kuwait. That is the interaction of Kuwaitis (of both sexes) with their immigrant domestic servants, who are mainly non-Arabs. Whereas in pre-oil Kuwaiti society, domestic servants used to be lower-class women among the Kuwaitis themselves, that system has been reversed in the post-oil era. Domestic servants are no longer Kuwaitis, just as they could be male or female, thus complicating the level of interaction between the sexes of both classes – masters/mistresses and servants.

Because of its form as a diary, the novel maintains, to a large extent, the conventional, chronological unfolding of events; hence, the narrative of the heroine's initial conformity to the status quo foregrounds that of her latter deviation from certain societal norms. While marking the point in the text where the reader's

attention is shifted almost entirely from the servant, as the diarist and narrator, to the heroine, the narrative of his experience on the day he joins Madam Sāra's service vividly reflects that segregation is systemic and holistic in post-oil Kuwait society.[9] The narrator informs us that, as a servant, he is given a room in an annex, detached from the building in which Madam Sāra and her family live. Though put in an uncritical way, his comments – that the room is sparsely furnished and equipped, and too tiny – give an impression of the prevalent exploitation of domestic workers in the country. His graphic description of the location of the one-bedroom annex shows that, conventionally, domestic servants, especially male, do not live under the same roof with their Kuwaiti employers.

Though far from the narrative focus of the novel, Madam Sāra's relationship with Mr Nabīl, a non-Kuwaiti Arab engineer, is no less significant to the plot. A married man of undisclosed nationality (probably from Egypt, Syria, or Lebanon), Mr Nabīl becomes Madam Sāra's business partner, when she establishes a trading company, having retired as a teacher and after the death of her husband (58). Captured through the points of view of both the servant, as the main narrator, and Mr Nabīl's wife, the narrative of Madam Sāra's suspicious relationship with Mr Nabīl serves to underpin the author's portrayal of the heroine as a Kuwaiti woman who does not conform to the government-backed, societal inhibition of Kuwaiti women's marriage to non-Kuwaiti citizens, Arabs (especially men from outside the Arab Gulf States) and non-Arabs alike. From the level of her interaction with Mr Nabīl, the servant/reader realises that Madam Sāra does not racially discriminate when it comes to love and marriage.

A kind of relationship often determined by social class affiliation, rather than racial factors, the heroine-Mr Nabīl relationship symbolises Kuwaiti women's relationship with skilled immigrant workers. That the heroine's dealing with the servant (before the Iraqi invasion) is based on class rather than racial difference is corroborated by the fact that the former's interaction with the latter is restricted to domestic affairs; it is a mistress-servant relationship. This is contrasted with the way the heroine relates with Mr Nabīl. As a non-Kuwaiti partner in business, Madam Sāra deals with this man on intellectual level. This is evidenced by the fact that it is Mr Nabīl, rather than the servant who is much closer to the woman, who is aware of Madam Sāra's feminist consciousness and intended activism (114).

Autocratic patriarch *vs.* democratic matriarch

"Had thunder descended on me from the heaven today, it would have been less painful than what I saw this morning" (21). This is how the narrator announces the arrival on stage of Madam Sāra's husband, an unnamed man in his forties. Whereas the servant often describes his mistress as pretty, cool-headed and sociable, her husband is portrayed as an ugly, hard-hearted, and unfriendly man (20-24).

Madam Sāra's husband is an example of a category of Kuwaiti men who lack chastity and not only exploit but also abuse the subalterns. Even before revealing the character of the heroine's husband, the author has alluded to this. Filtered through the point of view of a male companion, whom the narrator meets in the first ship episode as he travels to Kuwait for the first time, the text portrays some Kuwaiti men as people who sexually abuse their female domestic servants (6). This is contrasted with

the novel's expansive treatment of some Kuwaiti mistresses' (represented by Madam Sāra's) treatment of the servant in particular. As we shall see, Madam Sāra treats the servant (and other non-Kuwaitis working under her) with respect, dignity and honour. While her husband flirts around with women, the heroine remains chaste and self-restraint (25).

A theme that permeates almost every aspect of the novel, jealousy[10] provokes an uneasy tension between the servant and Madam Sāra's husband. Just as the servant feels threatened by the presence of the husband, the latter, too, begins to exhibit some fear and suspicion over the presence of the former, who always portrays himself as more deserving of being Madam Sāra's lover/husband in terms of physical qualities, good character, and for being of the same age group with her (16).

With the presence of Madam Sāra's husband, we begin to see the exercise of patriarchal controls on women and the entire household. The husband begins to prove domineering, not least as evident in the fact that he succeeds in shifting his wife's attention exclusively to himself. This generates some tension between the man and his six-year-old daughter, Hudā, on the one hand. On another hand, the dejected servant is also affected in the sense that Madam Sāra, already a "faithful" and self-restrained wife, is now compelled to be cautious in exchanging pleasantries with the servant, as she used to do (22).

It is within the context of the Kuwaiti traditional social system and the heroine's husband's autocratic dispositions that the significance of Madam Sāra's manner of handling issues within the household could be seen as revolutionary. With the sudden death of her husband – he dies from a heart attack (134) – Madam Sāra becomes the sole head of the household. As matriarch, the heroine neither dictates to

her children, nor forces them to do anything against their wishes, as her husband, had he remained alive, would have done. This is evident in the narrative of Hudā's divorce plan, which serves to illustrate how Kuwaiti family law is discriminatory against women, and how the women, represented by Madam Sāra and her daughter, are advocating change.

In his introductory notes that precede the unfolding of the debate over Hudā's divorce proposal, the narrator tells us that, having lived in Kuwait for over a decade, he has become fluent in the Kuwaiti colloquial Arabic (59). While addressing us directly as readers, he informs us that he commits several "criminal" acts against his mistress, the most serious of all being that he spies on her (63). Out of jealousy and an extraordinary passion, the servant wants to know every bit of Madam Sāra's movements, speeches and actions, within and outside the house. "In order to achieve [this]", the servant confesses to the reader, "I recruited my wife.. some of my mistress' relatives, and [other] servants." "None of those people was aware of this fact, of course" (65), he declares. Apart from these categories of human informants, the servant also taps information about his mistress through electronic means. Turning to a 'secret intelligence officer', he begins to use an audiotape recorder in order to be able to access his mistress' privacy.[11] All of these serves to strengthen the reliability of the servant as a narrator.

It is in one of the major events in the novel, recorded through the audiotape, that Madam Sāra's democratic attitudes, and her criticism of Kuwaiti legal provision on divorce, are reflected. In this tape-recorded episode, we find Madam Sāra and her two now grown-up and married children, Murād and Hudā, meeting to discuss some

urgent family matters. Madam Sāra's second marriage plan, which features first in this family meeting, is overshadowed by the latter issue, Hudā's divorce proposal.

Signalling the point in the novel where both Murād and Hudā begin to graduate from minor to major characters, this radio-drama episode is significant for illustrating some of the revolutionary characteristics of the heroine. Playing the role of a third person 'reflector' – as he listens to the cassette, he transcribes what he hears and, at the same time, comments intermittently on the purported speeches and actions of the respective characters involved – the servant tells us that Madam Sāra approaches the issues at stake here in her characteristically "democratic spirit". By contrast, her children behave "dictatorially" on the issue of their mother's personal interest (96).

That Madam Sāra is an unautocratic matriarch is evident in her statement: "I have not a single objection to any decision you think is best for your life" (*Ibid.*), with which she begins her parental advice for Hudā. As mother, Madam Sāra does not conform to the patriarchal conventional system of the rule of force in handling matters like this. From the point of view of the novel, the heroine's late husband, as Hudā's father, would not have made such a democratic pronouncement, for instance.

The problems of gender discrimination and women's oppression in the post-oil Kuwaiti social and legal systems feature significantly in this episode. Portraying Murād as an emerging patriarchal figure is the fact, not that he is the one who introduces the issue of his sister's agitation for divorce, rather than the affected Hudā herself, but that when Murād does, he acts as a bullying patriarchal figure. Referring to his sister, Murād says addressing their mother: "She's crazy.. you've spoiled and

pampered her. She is insisting on getting a divorce" (94). Moreover, Murād and Nāṣir, Hudā's husband, who is being accused of disloyalty,[12] seem to have formed a kind of patriarchal solidarity. This is evident in the fact (noted by Murād) that as soon as the dispute between the couple erupted it was Murād whom Nāṣir contacted, rather than his mother-in-law. This suggests that Madam Sāra is being discriminated against as female head of the family, and Murād is so recognised, instead.

Though acting rather childishly, Hudā, defending her right to divorce at wish, attacks Kuwaiti family law as "man made", and unfair to women (98). This is in response to Madam Sāra's pronouncement, while enlightening her children over the rights and responsibilities of each spouse in case of divorce, that Kuwaiti law stipulates that the wife can succeed in getting a divorce only with the consent of the husband (97). For Hudā, her husband, Nāṣir, and brother, Murād, are agents of what she calls "the patriarchal logic"; she also claims that, by advising her to be careful and reasonable, her mother, too, has subscribed to that logic (98).

It is in defence of her radical daughter's accusation above that Madam Sāra begins to articulate a critique of the patriarchal world in general, and the Kuwaiti social and legal systems in particular. While enacting a realistic manner of dealing with marital problems, Madam Sāra comments that "[i]n our society women are always suppressed" (104). "It is surely a great humiliation for a woman to find her husband chasing another woman" (*Ibid.*), she adds.

Al-Ibrāhīm's criticism of gender discrimination inherent in the Kuwaiti legal system, as shown above, is put in the heroine's and her daughter's mouths, rather

than in that of our non-Kuwaiti narrator. This underlies the importance of *Mudhakkirāt*, not only as a novel of social criticism, but also, as a feminist text, aimed at exposing the modern form of women's oppression in Kuwait.

War and Female Subjectivity

With its destructive features and effects on mankind, war is represented in *Mudhakkirāt* as a source of the evocation of Kuwaiti women's subjectivity in the post-oil era. The kind of war-engendered female subjectivity depicted in the novel is not that of the forms of resistance subjectively enacted by Kuwaiti women against the Iraqi occupation (as represented in some other stories),[13] but the women's resistance to continued social and ideological domination by their male counterparts. The sequentially unfolding, horrendous events of the Iraqi invasion constitute, as we shall see in the rest of this chapter, the circumstances that greatly affect Madam Sāra's psyche as Kuwaiti, and incite her agency in defiance of the Kuwaiti conventional order. The heroine continues, more deviantly than before the crisis, to voice her criticisms of Kuwaiti patriarchal culture, and to behave unconventionally. Eventually, she defies the 'no-interracial marriage' patriarchal 'order' of the post-oil Kuwaiti authority. This section begins with a cursory look at how the novel has represented Kuwaiti women as victims of the war as well as the Arab traditional concept of *sharaf*. It then proceeds to examine the heroine's assumption of subjectivity (during and after the war) under three sub-sectional headings: 'war and class and gender relations', 'interracial marriage', and '(symbolic) eradication of class dichotomy in post-war Kuwait'.

Kuwaiti women: victims of war and patriarchal ideology

Part of the significance of *Mudhakkirāt* as a war narrative lies in describing some of the awful experiences of Kuwaitis during the Iraqi occupation. The novel is, however, more remarkably important for vividly depicting how some Kuwaiti women have been targeted victims of the war, as well as victims of the perennial practice of 'honour killing' in some Arab societies. The heroine's and her daughter's experiences during the war symbolise the suffering of Kuwaiti women at the hands of both the Iraqi invaders and the conservative elements among their own male counterparts.

In its entry, dated 2nd of August 1990 – corresponding to the real date of the Iraqi invasion – *Mudhakkirāt* begins to turn into a war narrative. Pointing to the multi-vocal nature of the novel, al-Ibrāhīm captures the panoramically presented, initial forms of the Iraqi offensives through the consciousness of Madam Sāra's sister – a minor character whom we never meet directly in the novel. Early in the morning of the day of the invasion, the servant hears the extremely perplexed Madam Sāra, after a telephone conversation with her sister, address Hudā: "[She] was forced back home trekking, .. [I mean] your sister, after [the Iraqi forces] have extorted her car" (122). According to the heroine's sister, the invaders have militarised all major roads, "humiliated most [Kuwaitis] who have gone to work [that] fateful morning", targeted government buildings, banks, oil refineries and so on (122).

Through two expansively treated scenes of how Madam Sāra's family is directly affected by the brutalities of the Iraqi forces, al-Ibrāhīm demonstrates the workings of the Arab antonymic ideologies of *sharaf* (social honour) and *faḍīḥa*

(dishonour). Although women are the actual victims of rape, the attendant shame is usually placed on the entire family. The same applies to cases of women's indulgence in wilful sexual immorality. To protect the loss of a family's social standing is considered the responsibility of the father (or husband, uncle, and brother).[14]

The first occasion when the notion of *sharaf* appears in the novel to refer to the fact that Madam Sāra's daughter, Hudā, could have been victims of rape is captured in the 'house-raid' episode. The second occasion is when the entire family (followed by the servant, but not his wife[15]) are trying to escape to Saudi Arabia to go and seek asylum there. Both of these episodes are significant not for representing how Kuwaiti girls and women have been susceptible to sexual assaults during the war, but for depicting the mentality of Kuwaiti men as regards the concept of *sharaf*.

Before discussing the events of the two episodes of Kuwaiti women's vulnerability to rape during the war, it is important to note that it is in order to avoid the women being subjected to sexual assaults that every member of Madam Sāra's family has agreed to escape to Saudi Arabia. Their decision to get out of Kuwait does not symbolise lack of patriotism. It is based on the wide report that Iraqi soldiers have been violating women sexually through their aggressive house-raids (144). But what Madam Sāra's family is trying to avoid appears inescapable.

Set in Nāsir's house (located at the outskirts of the city, and to where all of Madam Sāra's household has just moved for safety reasons), the events of the house-raid episode are filtered through the consciousness of the servant. The narrator informs us that as they are all preparing to travel to Saudi Arabia in the morning of

the fourth day of the invasion, five Iraqi soldiers, too impatient to wait for the door to be opened, force their ways into the house with powerful gunshots (148).

Peeping from one of the rooms where he, his wife, and Madam Sāra are hiding, the servant recounts that "[t]he Iraqi troops surrounded [Hudā] and her husband from all angles .. Their commander shouted at her: 'why did you prevent him from coming out to us?'" (149). When one of the soldiers asks their commander for permission to "discipline" Hudā for preventing her husband from opening the door for them, Nāṣir quickly goes down on his kneels. Understanding the gravity of what is about to happen to his wife, Nāṣir holds the commander's leg, pleading with him, fervently: "Please, kill me before a hand will touch the [women] in my house" (149). Nāṣir's passionate plea here implies that rape is what the soldiers meant as their method of disciplining a young woman like Hudā. The statement: "[y]ou're a man, you know the value and meaning of what I'm saying .." (*Ibid*), with which Nāṣir continues to beg for leniency, also implies the notion of *sharaf* (honour) not of the woman, but of her husband and the family at large. "You've saved the women with a large amount of gold" (153). This is what the narrator says, consoling Nāṣir, after invaluable pieces of jewellery, belonging to Hudā, have been extorted by the Iraqi soldiers on raid. This remark by the servant serves to underpin the point that Hudā (and, perhaps, every other woman present in the house at the time) could have been victim of rape.

The 'escape to Saudi Arabia' episode portrays the destructive extent to which conservative Kuwaiti men can go to protect, not their women, but their own *sharaf*.

Also pointing to the multi-vocal nature of the novel, as well as the reliability of the narrator for not claiming omniscience in everything he tells us, the reader finds that it is Nāṣir who relates the events of what the servant describes as "the greatest disaster" of his life with the Kuwaiti family. On the day following their departure from Kuwait, the lonely and distressed servant, who has arrived at the Saudi borders while riding alone in Madam Sāra's car, luckily finds Nāṣir in the surrounding desert. The terribly shivering Nāṣir appears to have bled profusely; his clothes are tattered and bloodstained; and his shoulders bandaged, haphazardly (160 *ff.*)

From Nāṣir's inconsistent and non-sequential recounting of their experience on the way to Saudi Arabia, the servant/reader gathers that Nāṣir's car – carrying Madam Sāra, Hudā and her daughter – "was stuck for the third, or fourth time" in a sandy road when an army of the invading forces surrounded them. The soldiers have targeted Hudā in particular, wanting to hold her captive, not willing to accept any ransom. Rather than having his wife subjected to what he describes an "ominous" shame, rape, Nāṣir decided to kill Hudā. Trying to justify his action before the servant, Nāṣir claims that "[death] was the only single solution to prevent [Hudā being raped]" (168). "I [first] fired three bullets onto to my wife's chest in a single release, and turned the remaining to my heart" (*Ibid.*), he admits, unremorsefully.

When Nāṣir stands his grounds that "death is the only protector for [Hudā] in [that] type of situation" (169), the disappointed servant reacts: "I wish you had left her to her fate. Certainly, there is hope in her remaining alive; why did you interfere with her destiny?" (*Ibid.*). Articulating the patriarchal ideology for which he is

simply an agent, Nāṣir retorts: "Don't you know the meaning of *sharaf*?" – implying that he has committed the murder in order to safeguard his and his wife's families' honour. Signifying one of the instances that could identify him with the author, the servant reacts, again: "[r]ather, I know the meaning of life", adding that "[It's] selfishness, which has made you think only about your own self, even at the most crucial of all times" (170). It is this point of men's selfishness that serves to underlie the injustice inherent in the patriarchal practice of "crime of honour".[16]

From a feminist point of view Nāṣir's self-aggrandised act is nothing but brutal exhibition of masculine hostilities against the female body and soul. From humanistic and Islamic legal perspectives,[17] Nāṣir's homicidal act is a far greater evil than resigning himself to Hudā becoming a rape victim. Nāṣir's intention for murdering his wife is evidently a "selfish" way of defending his own honour, not in defence of the sanctity of the female body *per se*. Al-Ibrāhīm does not allude or refer to any Islamic religious position on this issue; hence, one may not want to label this novel an 'Islamic-feminist' fictional text in line with Miriam Cook's definition of the term.[18] Al-Ibrāhīm authorial stance could be deduced from the humanistic perspective of her non-Arab narrator, and the feminist one of her Kuwaiti heroine.

Just as al-Ibrāhīm has put her criticism of the practice of 'honour killing' in the mouth of her non-Kuwaiti/non-Arab narrator – the servant – so too does the author voice a condemnation of the act through the consciousness of her Kuwaiti heroine. Although she was a witness to the events of Hudā's death – she watched, in horror, Nāṣir kill her daughter (168) – Madam Sāra's reaction to this ideologically

instigated, homicidal act is delayed until later in the novel, after Madam Sāra has recovered from psychosis and memory loss and on her re-union with her son.

Featured in the second scene of Madam Sāra and Murād's quarrel over the woman's marriage to the servant, later discussed in detail in this chapter, Murād's vehemence, and his insistence that the marriage is unacceptable provokes the heroine's anger against the Kuwaiti patriarchal authority. Speaking through Madam Sāra in that episode, al-Ibrāhīm specifically mentions the concept of *fadīḥa* as the factor that has propelled the murder of Hudā. Addressing Murād, Madam Sāra laments that "[Hudā] has been made to lose her life in order to protect the honour of her husband" (215). This statement serves to underline the same point of men's selfishness, of which the servant has earlier accused Nāṣir.

Apart from criticising Kuwaiti culture as patriarchal, discriminatory and oppressive, Madam Sāra also articulates the "imaginariness" of patriarchal ideology. The heroine argues that it is because of the imaginary ideology of female inferiority that Hudā has been made "a sacrificial animal", "a ransom" for the so-called honour of her husband (*Ibid.*). Also supporting the servant's earlier attack on Nāṣir's interference in Hudā's destiny, Madam Sāra, confronting Murād, condemns Kuwaiti men's act of surveillance, acting as watchdogs on the lives of their womenfolk. Like most feminist critics, the author, through Madam Sāra, argues that, in a patriarchal society like Kuwait, there is no respect for women's souls. There should be "no human interference in people's destiny" (215), she concludes.

The significance of *Mudhakkirāt* Part II lies, as evident in the above, in representing Kuwaiti women as victims not directly of the Iraqi aggression, but of their own male-dictated, cultural ideology. Even though Hudā's honour-related death is linked to the events of the Iraqi invasion, losing her life at the hands of her own Kuwaiti husband, rather than at that of their Iraqi enemies, is reflective of one of the effects of patriarchal culture on women.

War and class and gender relations

Madam Sāra maintains, to some extent, the status quo of the Kuwaiti traditional system with regard to the level of her interaction with the servant, as discussed under the section 'race, class and gender in post-oil Kuwait'. In this subsection, I shall attempt to examine how the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has influenced class and gender relations in post-oil Kuwait from the point of view of *Mudhakkirāt*. This is with a view to demonstrating how Madam Sāra's character as a revolutionary figure is elicited.

The heroine's initial segregationist attitudes begin to change with the unfolding of the events of the war on Kuwait. Madam Sāra's preliminary elimination of the practice of segregation within her household is set in her house, on the second day of the invasion. As the shootings and bombings, by the occupying forces, continue incessantly and sporadically in the central area of Kuwait City where they live, Madam Sāra, based on safety advice, says, addressing the servant: "Call on your wife .. let's all sit in the passageway" (128). Pointing to the fact that every process of change in human mentality and behaviour is usually gradual, Madam Sāra, as matriarch, still segregates/discriminates at this stage. She asks the couple-servants to

sit at one end of the corridor, while she and her daughter, Hudā (whose rift with her husband, on her divorce plan, remains unresolved) sit at the other end (*Ibid.*).

The above seating arrangement is unsatisfactory to her silent-lover servant. With the declaration of war on Kuwait, he has been thinking of becoming an opportunist. "All I have wanted", he says, "is to sit by her side, (at the moment of) her agony and fear; I have had an excessive desire to embrace her within my arms, so that I can protect her" (129). Thus, with the occurrence of the war, the servant's desire of becoming his mistress' lover has been reactivated – a desire that has been dampened by the woman's interest in two men of higher social status: one Kuwaiti man[19] and Mr Nabīl, mentioned above.

As the events of the scene of this sitting together of mistresses and servants continue to unroll, the servant notes:

> [As] if my wife were diabetic .. I did not notice that until [this] day.. Every moment, she rose and went to the toilet.. But my fearful mistress prevented her from going to the annex where we lived, because of its distance. [Madam Sāra] asked [my wife] to use her private toilet, in the other passageway (129).

The significance of this quotation to the plot lies not in corroborating the novel's portrayal of the servant's wife as often behaving childishly and foolishly (see 128), but in depicting another instance of the eradication of class segregation between the Kuwaiti employers and their Indian employees. In fact, all of them – the narrator and his wife, Madam Sāra and Hudā – use the same toilet throughout the day (130).

A conscious advocate of racial equality, al-Ibrāhīm does not fail to make the narrator comment on this 'kind' gesture by the heroine. "No one among us could be so courageous as to use [Madam Sāra's] toilet before [this wartime]" (129), remarks the servant. For both servants, it is unbelievable that they could ever be allowed to sleep under the same roof, and in a room next to where their employers sleep (132).

"[C]ertain events do make a lot of changes in people's thinking and behaviour" (129), the narrator notes further.

As the servant continues to recount some of the "astonishing" 'positive' effects of the war, the reader is told that even patriarchal figures like Murād and Nāṣir invite the servant and his wife – whom the 'boys' have always treated with disrespect – "to sit and have dinner together with them [...]. Wonderful." What the servant has always described as Murād's characteristic arrogance is here contrasted with his exhibition of respect and brotherly attitudes. During the crisis period, Murād begins to address the elderly servant in the respectable, possessive form: *yā akhī* (my brother) (134 and 135).

The servant's remark that "There no longer exists among us servant and served, or leader and led" (134), signifies the disappearance of class/racial discrimination and segregation in Madam Sāra's household. The above changes, among others, in the mistress/master-servant interaction incite the servant's silently pronounced, socialist proposition: "Let there be equality between masters and servants" (130). Though it sounds too idealistic, the servant's statement here corresponds to the principle of human equality proclaimed by the heroine, as the narrative of her war-engendered deviant expressions and actions progresses.

The servant narrates that, as the events of the Iraqi aggression on Kuwait escalate, Madam Sāra entrusts him:

- I want to request something from you

I said, frightened:

- My mistress, requesting something from me?
- I'm no more a mistress to anyone .. We're all equal in this type of situation [...] My request is that you, please, take care of your son, Murād, and your

daughter, Hudā, in case any incident happens to me [...] They are your children .. Don't forget that you nurtured them with me after the death of their father (137).

Occupying nearly a page in the text, Madam Sāra's passionate speech, part of which is quoted above, is an embodiment of some of the effects of the invasion on Kuwaitis in general, and the heroine in particular. It is a further confirmation of the loss of any sense of superiority and supremacy by Kuwaitis over even their domestic servants. What is most significant to the plot is the point, made by the heroine, that Murād and Hudā are the servant's "son and daughter," "children," and for whom he has served in the capacity of a "father."

The servant is not privileged to take care of his mistress' children, as he has promised the woman consequent upon her request, as explicit in the conversation above. But he feels honoured "to take care of [Madam Sāra]" – being a "pledge" he had made to Murād on the 'boy's' request, as explicit earlier in the narrative of Murād's and Nāṣir's resistance activities (131 *ff.*). The following section examines how well the servant is able to look after his mistress during her ordeals, and how Madam Sāra reacts, in a revolutionary way, to her long-standing servant's love-instigated, intensive care.

Interracial Marriage

Through the characters of the heroine and her son, representing the Kuwaiti female and male, al-Ibrāhīm appears to have argued that Kuwaiti women are more egalitarian and non-racist than their male counterparts. This is what the end part of the novel, set largely in Saudi Arabia, serves to illustrate. From the beginning of her

suffering from severe nervous breakdown, to her arrival in Saudi Arabia where she is secretly kept in custody by the servant, the narrative of the heroine's ordeals is significant for its panoramic depiction of the various experiences of Kuwaitis during the crisis, and for its reflection of the enormous humanitarian services provided by the Saudis. More importantly, this aspect of the text is remarkable for its further representation of the heroine as a defiant and revolutionary figure. What follows is a discussion of how Madam Sāra becomes her Indian servant's wife. This section maintains that the process of her legitimising and proclaiming the societally inhibited interracial marriage defines the heroine's assumption of full subjectivity in defiance of the Kuwaiti societal convention, and in resisting patriarchal domination.

Al-Ibrāhīm's construction of the heroine's agency in defiance of the Kuwaiti patriarchal social order against interracial marriage is of two stages: the heroine's gradual recovery from psychosis, and her sudden recovery from memory loss. The first stage is constituted in Madam Sāra's acceptance – while still semi-psychotic – of the servant as husband. In the analeptically narrated story of the process of her recovery, the narrator tells us that, after his re-union with the mistress, he makes relentless efforts to personally help her recover (182 *ff.*). Because of his ulterior motive, he refuses either to take her to any of the refugee camps provided by the Saudi government, or take her for psychiatric treatments in a hospital. He resorts to psychotherapy, instead: teaching her how to pronounce some words. His first success in this respect comes only after two months of intensive speech learning instruction.

What is interesting is that, on the same day that Madam Sāra begins to pronounce some words, she also "reacts positively" to the psychotherapist servant's joyful attempts to embrace her (*Ibid.*). Receiving this dramatic improvement in the

woman's health with mixed feelings – his happiness about it is contrasted with his fear of being disowned, should Madam Sāra recover fully (183) – the servant swiftly takes the first step towards achieving his goal. He tells Madam Sāra several "lies": that her name is Mira (184), an Indian name; and that both of them have been betrothed since thirteen years, but her "prolonged" illness has caused the delay in their marriage (185). While "accepting" the name "with no objection", the heroine appears indifferent to the marriage proposal. When asked if she desires marriage to the servant, "Madam Sāra did not respond positively, and neither did she decline; as if the matter did not concern her, or it meant both to her" (*Ibid.*). The servant's passionate interpretation of the heroine's indifference as "silence means 'yes'" (*Ibid.*), points to Madam Sāra's consent to his proposal.

Although the heroine is still suffering from memory loss at the time of the marriage, she is not unconscious, as shown in the above paragraph. Corroborating this fact are the parts she plays during the solemnisation of the marriage – an event arranged and conducted secretly, in collusion with few of the servant's friends/fellow countrymen in Saudi Arabia. Summarised in just five lines, the marriage scene features the heroine willingly signing (in her new name, "Mira") and thumbprinting on their marriage certificate (188).

Al-Ibrāhīm does not limit her depiction of the heroine's agency in this interracial marriage to the events of the marriage scene. Through the events that mark the heroine's recovery, not from nervous breakdown, but from memory loss, and those of her subsequent re-union with Murād in Saudi Arabia, the author pursues further her construction of Madam Sāra as a resistant and revolutionary figure. Madam Sāra's conjugal relationship with the Indian servant can be viewed as a

revolutionary act when put within the context of the societal inhibition of marriage between Kuwaiti women and, especially, non-Kuwaiti men from the post-oil-era, disreputable servant-class. Similarly, the marriage is revolutionary in view of the male-dominated, Kuwaiti government's policy that seeks to disapprove and refuse to recognise such relationship.

The Kuwaiti government's policy against interracial marriage is mainly targeted at Kuwaiti women, whose population is almost half that of men. This is supported by the fact that, even though the government tries to discourage both male and female from marrying non-Kuwaitis, it is only the female dissenters who are punished by the government. A Kuwaiti woman who defies this order will have her non-Kuwaiti husband and children denied rights of Kuwaiti citizenship as well as social benefits from the State. The Kuwaiti man married to a non-Kuwaiti woman is exempted from this punishment.[20] While the controversy over this issue – as widely debated in the media and academia (from the 1970s through 1990s)[21] – is not the concern of this chapter, a brief note like the above is essential in order to show how Kuwaiti women are being discriminated against and suppressed in the post-oil era. How does Kuwaiti women's writing constitutes a source of 'oppositional values', as the 'cultural materialist' critic[22] would argue, against the patriarchal oppression of this nature?

Three different forms of women's reaction to societal restriction on their relationships with men of other racial and cultural backgrounds could be perceived in Kuwaiti women's fictional and non-fictional narratives. First, a real life story – covered by a Kuwaiti magazine, *al-Sāʻī*,[23] in 2002 – shows that some Kuwaiti girls, who want to defy this kind of patriarchal conventional order, would rather do it

secretly, by escaping with their non-Kuwaiti suitors. The story is about a twenty-three year old Kuwaiti girl, a university student for that matter, who eloped with her family's Indian driver. Due to societal restriction on gender interaction as well as the traditional practice of women's seclusion, the poor driver was the only man the rich, upper-class Kuwaiti girl had been able to relate with at the domestic level.[24]

There is a second category of Kuwaiti girls/women who would still comply with this kind of patriarchal social convention, even though they are in love with non-Kuwaitis. This second category of women in the post-oil era is represented by Ṭayyiba, the heroine of "Kharīf bilā maṭar",[25] a short story by Hidāya S. al-Sālim. While resisting Kuwaiti patriarchal social and ideological domination by refusing to even marry at all, Ṭayyiba could still be seen as conformist: she lacks the courage to go ahead and marry the non-Kuwaiti, young Arab man she loves.[26]

It is in comparison with the above two forms of Kuwaiti women's reaction to societal inhibition of interracial marriage that Madam Sāra – representing the third category of Kuwaiti women lovers of non-Kuwaitis – can be seen both as a resistant, like the other two categories of women above, and a revolutionary figure. Unlike Hidāya al-Sālim's Ṭayyiba in the above-named story, for instance, who is as equally educated, mature and economically independent of men as al-Ibrāhīm's Madam Sāra, the latter demonstrates women's selfhood, total subjectivity and overt resistance to this form of Kuwaiti patriarchal oppression.

Al-Ibrāhīm continues to portray Madam Sāra as a non-racist and non-conformist Kuwaiti female figure, as the events of the scene of the heroine's regaining of her memory unfold. The narrator tells us that one day, following an

earlier disagreement between him and the heroine, as his new wife, he returns home to pacify her and divert her attention from thinking that she is being alienated from society,[27] and that she is in "captivity" (200). As he is trying romantically to calm the woman down, a series of bombs begin to explode. The explosions are so terrifying that, while embracing each other, the servant inadvertently mentions the commencement of war to the hearing of his traumatised "wife". Hearing the word "war" sparks off Madam Sāra's memory. "'Is it the Iraqi assaults on us?'", the heroine "impulsively" queries (*Ibid.*). "I disengaged from her, instantly", the servant narrates, "and she, too, slipped away from me.. We stood up face to face with each other, exchanging looks with extreme amazement. She was amazed by herself, and I was amazed by her" (200).

Noticing the servant's extreme nervousness, Madam Sāra asks, "maturely and affectionately: what's wrong with you, my dear.. are you afraid of the bomb .. or of something else?" (201). Before the servant could respond, Madam Sāra quickly adds: "I, definitely, will not leave you, whatever happens .. I've lived happily with you for days, don't forget. I just want to know everything .. everything" (*Ibid.*). With her statement here, the heroine thus articulates her sane approval of her conjugal relationship with the servant.

When Madam Sāra begins to weep profusely, having recollected "everything" spontaneously without being told, the servant thinks she is crying because of his domination of her affairs throughout the period of her ordeals. Hence, he declares that she is free to either remain with him as wife, or get divorced. Through the heroine's indifference to this apologetic offer from her servant-husband, the man realises that Madam Sāra is crying, implicitly, not for the "change of

fortune" in her life – mistress turned servant's wife – but for all the calamities that have befallen her family and her country (202). While the heroine's indifference here symbolises the final disappearance of any notion of class and racial difference in her mind, it also reflects Kuwaiti women's patriotism. According to the narrator, Madam Sāra's preoccupation, no sooner had she regained her memory, is to follow with phenomenal obsession, the news about the global moves for the liberation of Kuwait (*Ibid.*). In effect, the heroine is worried not about her circumstance as wife of former servant, but about the foreign occupation of her homeland.

The heroine's character as a revolutionary figure further crystallises when she defies her son, Murād, who reappears towards the end of the novel to play a major role as a Kuwaiti patriarchal representative. Murād's survival of the war is announced in a dialogue involving the servant and his friend/confidant in Saudi Arabia – a fellow countryman in whom he has confided and with whom he colluded to have his marriage with Madam Sāra conducted. In the scene, the reader finds the servant in chaotic moods, engendered by a classified newspaper advertisement in which Murād, now living in the United Arab Emirates, is seeking information about the whereabouts of his mother, and other members of his extended family (193).

The significance of this dramatically treated and humorous scene of the news of Murād's survival lies in further illustrating the notion of class as a factor in determining marital compatibility.[28] The discursive exchange between the two Indian characters in this scene is also predictive of Murād's inevitable antagonism towards his mother's new relationship with their former servant. Set shortly before the scene of Madam Sāra's recovery from memory loss, it is in this scene of the news about Murād's survival that we meet the servant initially refusing to contact Murād (as

advised by his friend/confidant) because he is sure Murād "will definitely work towards taking [his mother] away from [him]" (195). Captured through the interior monologue technique, the servant continues to perceive Murād as the only apparently insurmountable obstacle standing between him and having his new relationship with Madam Sāra proclaimed. The servant sees Murād as symbolising the Kuwaiti patriarchal authority which considers Madam Sāra's marriage to him as "an abominable error for which a woman of her calibre would not be pardoned" (205). "For [the Kuwaitis]", the servant reflects, "Madam Sāra's marriage to me is, no doubt, disgraceful" (206). On his arrival in Saudi Arabia, Murād behaves just as the narrator has predicted.

The two scenes of heated disagreement and quarrel between Madam Sāra and her son (on their re-union) over the heroine's marriage to the servant signify some Kuwaiti women's strength in resisting male dominance and control in the post-oil/post-war era. On the first occasion, captured through the interior monologue technique, the servant narrates that he is on tenterhooks, sitting, with extreme anxiety, at the backyard of his rented apartment, from where he follows the quarrel that soon ensues between Madam Sāra and Murād. In spite of the freezing weather of the night, the servant begins to sweat for fear of what would be the outcome of the mother-son discussion. Pointing to the novel's portrayal of Murād as representing patriarchal authority is the narrator's/author's use of the word *ḥukm* (208) – meaning "rule," "ordinance;" "verdict" "judgement" etc. – to refer to what the outcome of this mother-son meeting is likely to be. In fact, when he hears Murād shout at his mother,

the servant thinks the judgement has been passed: "I thought my happy life has been sentenced to death" (207).

Tactically devised to keep the reader in suspense as regards the heroine's reaction to her son's vehemence and antagonism to her new relationship with the servant, the first, reportorially presented scene of the mother-son quarrel above is inconclusive. It is in the second scene of the quarrel that the reader is presented with 'the physical immediacy' of how the heroine can be identified as a resistant Kuwaiti female fictional character.

Early in the narrative of the first scene, the servant observed that hardly had the war for liberating Kuwait commenced than Murād appeared to have turned back to his characteristic arrogance and masterful attitudes. Seeing the apartment in which the couple live as "unbefitting" for him and his mother, Murād, who has initially refused to even have a seat, passes the night (implicitly) in a hotel (206-207). When he comes back to see his mother in the evening of the second day of his visit to Saudi Arabia, Murād approaches the couple with greater fury.

It appears the author is fond of using the technique of coincidence in order to mark significant events in the novel. Like the occasion of Madam Sāra's recovery from memory loss, described above, this second occasion of the quarrel between Murād is also made to coincide with the occurrence of a series of bomb blasts. (According to the narrator, the blasts are, on this occasion, part of Iraqi offensives against Saudi Arabia for hosting the international coalition of forces in support of Kuwait). A very conscious feminist writer, al-Ibrāhīm, represented by the servant/narrator, describes the coincidence as the simultaneity of two categories of

war: *ḥarb kalāmiyya* (war of words) and *ḥarb ṣārūkhiyya* (war of rockets) (211). Here, the author is rhetorically pointing to the fact that the heroine is fighting an ideological war against male domination, even as the real war, caused by the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, is not yet over. The juxtaposition of these two phrases here serves to support the point that *Mudhakkirāt* as a Kuwaiti woman's narrative of resistance not just to the external (Iraqi) aggression, but also to internal domination by the Kuwaiti male.

"Is it true that you're married to my mother?! Or do you just keep her with you like that?" (212), the angry Murād interrogates the servant. When the old man replies: "God forbid .. how do you think this way, my son?" (*Ibid.*), Murād shouts at him: "I'm not your son" (*Ibid.*). This illustrates how the Kuwaiti young man has betrayed the sense of brotherhood he had earlier instilled in the servant during the crisis period when they were in Kuwait. That Murād symbolises patriarchal authority becomes manifest, moreover, in his declaration – after all efforts by the servant to prove to him the legality of their marriage have failed – that the marriage is "unfortunate," "non-commensurable," and "null and void" (214).

It is in her reaction to Murād's authoritarian nullification of the marriage that Madam Sāra can be most qualified as an overtly resistant and revolutionary figure. Exerting her subjective agency in the interclass and interracial marriage, the heroine begins to display her knowledge of the law to prove to Murād that the marriage is legally valid and acceptable. Confronting her son on the basis of his own argument – that the marriage is invalid because the bride's name is written as Mira, not Sāra

(214) – the heroine affirms that, since she was aware that her name at the time of the marriage was Mira, it refers to her personality. In what sounds as an example of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of the 'signifier' and the 'signified',[29] Madam Sāra argues that "name is but a symbol of a person, not the person him/herself" (214), adding that "it is possible to change a symbol at any time we so desire" (*Ibid.*).

For a Kuwaiti patriarchal figure like Murād, however, the quarrel is not really as regards the legality or not of the marriage. Murād's problem lies in his ideological belief in the "incommensurability", lack of social compatibility, between the couple. "'Mum.. what's wrong with you. Have you forgotten that he's your servant?'" (Ibid), Murād furiously addresses his mother. When he eventually "tear[s] the marriage certificate into pieces", Madam Sāra retorts: "[T]ear it as you like..we're capable of replacing it with another certificate that will be much more official, and will carry the symbol that is identifiable with my actual personality" (214). This statement by the heroine is a further affirmation of her subjective agency in her new relationship with the servant.

With this novel, al-Ibrāhīm aims to depict how the mid-twentieth century generation of Kuwaiti women have utilised the little education and job opportunities they have had to transform, at least, their micro domains and personal lives. A woman in her fifties in the early 1990s, and representing that mid-twentieth century generation of Kuwaiti women who witnessed the period of Kuwait's transition from pre- to post-oil era, Madam Sāra refuses to be controlled by her son, just as she exerts efforts to dispel some Kuwaiti patriarchal ideologies.

As the narrative of the second scene of this mother-son quarrel continues, we meet the heroine voicing a verbal revolt against the gender and racial discriminatory, post-oil Kuwaiti social system (215). Seeing it a shame for a Kuwaiti mistress to marry a poor, Indian servant, Murād threatens to cut any relationship with his mother unless she divorces the man. Through her expressions and actions in this scene, the heroine demonstrates her firmness and decisiveness, as she refuses to be 'interpellated' by what she calls the "imaginary" patriarchal ideology (*Ibid.*).[30] Defiant and adamant, and by way of re-affirming her approval and subjectivity in the interclass and interracial marriage, the heroine, addressing her son, reacts: "[I]n any case, [the servant] is my husband.. and I feel honoured by him, I'm proud of him" (216). This conclusive declaration by Madam Sāra symbolises a defeat for patriarchal authority. Shamed by his mother's rejection of his authority, Murād leaves the apartment, angrily, declaring that his mother will never see him again (216).

Madam Sāra's resistance to male domination, as shown in the above paragraph, signifies some post-oil Kuwaiti women's assumption of self-authority and freedom in the domestic sphere. The moment of the heroine's proclamation of her agency in the marriage is a moment of triumph for the servant, who has been nearly heartbroken for fear that Madam Sāra might not be able to withstand Murād. Marking the aspect of the novel in which the servant finally has his new relationship with his mistress openly proclaimed, it is from this point in the text that the servant-diarist begins to refer to Madam Sāra as "*zawjatī*" (my wife), rather than the usual "*sayyidatī*" (my mistress) (216).

That Madam Sāra's marriage to the servant is represented as a revolutionary act is corroborated by the fact that, after the liberation of Kuwait (February 1991), she returns to the country with him, where they live together as husband and wife till death 'does them part'.[31] The summarily presented and analeptically narrated events of the couple's post-war life in Kuwait is significant for further portraying Murād as an epitome of Kuwaiti patriarchal conservatism, and his mother, that of Kuwaiti women's egalitarianism. Murād refuses, as he has threatened, to visit or contact his mother after the liberation. That Madam Sāra, too, never bothers to ask about her only surviving child – a 'son' for that matter – is also reflective of her independence and subjectivity.

(Symbolic) eradication of class dichotomy in post-war Kuwait

While the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has facilitated the heroine's marriage to her Indian servant, it has also engendered her act of eradicating, with respect to herself, the class/racial dichotomy that is the hallmark of the post-oil Kuwaiti family and social life. This is what the narrative of the heroine's post-Iraqi-occupation life serves to illustrate. Featured in the last entry of the main story constituting the diary – which precedes the 'epilogue' featuring the closing scene, captured through the consciousness of the translator – the servant informs us that, on their return to Kuwait, Madam Sāra begins to live a moderate life. In a gloomy narrative mood and tone, we find the servant, in this last entry, contrasting the heroine's new lifestyle with the flamboyant one of the pre-war era. That "[Madam Sāra] keeps herself away from elements of her past life" suggests the psychological effects of the war on the

woman, which is also reflective of how the crisis has impacted on the entire generation of Kuwaitis who witnessed the "national disaster".

Instead of continuing as the director of her trading company, which has remained untouched by the Iraqi aggressors, Madam Sāra transfers the directorship to her new husband, while she decides to remain a full housewife (217). The servant's conjecture – that this decision by Madam Sāra might be because she is feeling shy of appearing in the public, as wife of former servant (*Ibid.*) – might appear undermining to the author's depiction of the heroine as a revolutionary figure. However, the fact that the couple often go out together – the servant driving their new car, and Madam Sāra sitting by his side (218) – serves to suggest the contrary. Madam Sāra's going out with her former servant as husband, is an act of publicising her new relationship with the man. It symbolises an act of deviation from the Kuwaiti societal expectation, and of overtly defying the patriarchal convention that serves to perpetuate the supremacy of Kuwaitis over immigrant workers as a whole.

The narrative of Madam Sāra's new life after the war is, more importantly, significant for illustrating the empowerment of the narrator, having transformed from a subaltern figure to his Kuwaiti mistress' partner. Already portrayed as a democratic figure, Madam Sāra unreservedly allows her servant-husband to have a say in her personal and domestic life. For instance, she agrees to his suggestion that they should forget about the idea of employing any domestic servant. This suggestion by the servant can be interpreted is different ways. First, it might be that, as a former servant, he does not want to be a master to another fellow countryman/woman to be employed. Second, it might be understood to imply the servant's interest in (or a proposition by the author towards) abolishing such a system, based on the fact that it

is a form of modern slavery, not least because of the exploitation involved. Third, the servant's refusal to have a servant might be interpreted as stemming from 'jealousy': he might want to avoid another male servant, who is also likely to develop interest in the heroine, whom the servant has always described as a loveable and pretty woman.

Conclusion

The middle-class heroine of *Mudhakkirāt*, Madam Sāra, epitomises Kuwaiti women's egalitarianism. She represents the mid-twentieth century generation of women, who belonged to the era of Kuwait's transition from a pervasively male-dominated to an oil-influenced cosmopolitan and progressive society. While not portrayed as a stereotypical Kuwaiti female figure, the heroine maintains the status quo of class and racial segregation in dealing with her Indian, male domestic servant, at the initial stage. Representing war as a cause of female subjectivity in post-oil Kuwait, al-Ibrāhīm expansively illustrates how the events of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait have been influential in the evocation of the heroine's agency in defiance of the Kuwaiti patriarchal conventional order. The crystallisation of Madam Sāra's character as a revolutionary figure is presented in two ways. First, the heroine declaratively dispels the notion of hierarchical superiority on several occasions during and after the war. Second and most important is the heroine's most decisive acts of validating, and then proclaiming her societally inhibited interclass and interracial marriage to the servant.

Al-Ibrāhīm's heroine in this novel overtly asserts her personal freedom through a symbolic confrontation between Kuwaiti women and men, represented by Madam Sāra and her son, Murād. The confrontation is significant for depicting how

Kuwaiti women of the post-oil era have gained voice; this is a feature to which most women of the pre-oil era had aspired but fail, one way or another, to achieve, as shown in the characters of the heroines of the other texts studied in this thesis. While voicing her disagreement with her patriarchally inclined son over the issue of her marriage to their servant, Madam Sāra expressly disapproves some Kuwaiti ideological beliefs; she triumphantly rejects her son's order that she divorce the servant. The heroine's intention in confronting her son is as important a revolutionary feature as her act of approving the servant's secretive marriage to her, arranged and conducted while she was still suffering from memory loss, caused by a prolonged severe psychosis. Madam Sāra's engagement with her son in a heated debate, as summarised above, is not just with the aim of revealing to, but also convincing, a patriarchal figure like Murād that some Kuwaiti social and cultural values and practices are actually discriminatory against and oppressive to women.

Through her distinctive style and narrative strategy, al-Ibrāhīm succeeds in the construction of a prototypical Kuwaiti female figure (Madam Sāra), who is decisively resistant to male social as well as ideological domination. The thoughts and actions of all of al-Ibrāhīm's 'doubles' in the novel – the servant-diarist-narrator, the heroine, her daughter, the translator, and, in some respects, Mr and Mrs Nabīl – serve to confirm *Mudhakkirāt* as a feminist text. It is the heroine, however, who most represents the author, not least because of the fact that they are both Kuwaiti women who belong to the same generation. Like the heroine, al-Ibrāhīm was born in the early 1950s, and educated only up to diploma level, being the level most women of her generation could reach in those days. This is evident in the fact that the author's main critique, thoughts and propositions towards a change in the Kuwaiti

hierarchical social order in the post-oil era are put in the heroine's mouth, rather than in that of the non-Kuwaiti servant, whose voice is dominant.

Note and References

1. Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm, (1952-) is one of the leading contemporary women science fiction writers in the Arab world at large. She has a Diploma in Pure Mathematics and works as a civil servant in Kuwait. She has published more than ten novels and several short stories. *Mudhakkirāt khādim* is one her novels on social criticism. For al-Ibrāhīm's biography and list of her works, see Laylā M. Ṣāliḥ, *Udabā' wa-adībāt al-Kuwayt* (Kuwait: The Kuwait Writers' Association Press, 1996), pp. 173-177. This book is available online: Http://www.althakerah.net/sub.php
2. Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm, *Mudhakkirāt khādim* Part I & II (Cairo: al-Mu'assasa al-'arabiyya al-ḥadītha, 1995). NB. Part I was first published in 1986.
3. The '*Bidūn* question' is, no doubt, one major sociological problem in post-oil Kuwait. The phrase "*bidūn al-jinsiyya*" ([people] without nationality), or as they are commonly called, "*bidūn*" ("have-nots") is used to refer to a category of Kuwaiti inhabitants who are not granted rights of citizenship, even though there are proofs they are originally from Kuwait. In spite of the fact that the *bidūns* have become a social nuisance to Kuwaiti society, and that some human right groups and women's organisations have been making efforts to have the government solve this problem, not least in view of the obvious population crisis in Kuwait, very few Kuwaiti writers have treated 'the *bidūn* question' in their fiction.

   Though featuring as a sub-theme in *Mudhakkirāt*, its representation in the novel situates al-Ibrāhīm as a socialist writer. Captured in a dialogic scene, set in Mr Nabīl's house, al-Ibrāhīm's criticism of the Kuwaiti government policy on the *bidūns* is filtered through the consciousness of Mrs Nabīl (see *Mudhakkirāt*, p. 115). For some of the problems faced by the *bidūns* and their spouses and children in Kuwait see, for example, a collection of interviews granted by some Kuwaiti women and edited by Mut'ib al-Dawṣurī under the title "'I commit no offence, except that my husband is non-Kuwaiti': worries and aspirations of the *Bidūns*" (my translation) in the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Fajr al-Jadīd*, no. 95, (7/8/199); and another by 'Ā'isha al-Jiyār in *al-Siyāsa* newspaper, no. 10634, (3/7/1998).
4. For a list and study of Kuwaiti short stories depicting the Iraqi occupation, see Barbara Michalak-Pikulska, *The contemporary Kuwaiti short story in peacetime and war, 1929-1995* (Krakow: The Enigma Press, 1997), pp. 88 *ff.*
5. From the description of the servant, his country and the nature of his job in Kuwait as a domestic servant, it is very easy to conclude that he comes from the Indian Subcontinent. Indians and Bengalis constitute the largest number of especially male domestic workers in Kuwait; there would also be some Sri Lankan and Nepalis doing this kind of job, but it is hard to find a Pakistani working as domestic servant in Kuwait.
6. On 'primary and secondary narrative levels', 'focalisation' (point of view) and 'narration', see Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, (Basil Blackwell, 1972). For brief explanations of Genette's narratology, see Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: an Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, first published in 1995, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, 2nd edition), pp. 231-247; and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: contemporary poetics* (London: Routledge, 1983), pp.71 *ff.*
7. The names, as they appear in the novel, are put as Tayūk (for Kuwayt), Da'ūs (for Sa'ūd), Harās (for Sāra[h]), Lībin (for Nabīl), Riṣān (Nāṣir) etc. Please, note that the arrangement of these words is better understood in its original Arabic scripts, rather than in transliteration.

8. Haya al-Mughni, *Women in Kuwait: The Politics of Gender* (London: Saqi Books, 1993), p. 59.
9. That post-oil Kuwait is a segregated society is reflected in several aspects of the novel. Racial inequality and the lack of proper integration between Kuwaiti citizens and immigrants are reflected, for instance, in the servant's observation that, due to the general affluence of Kuwaitis, none but foreigners walk a long distance in the street, or use public buses for local transportation (see *Mudhakkirāt*, p. 7).
10. Jealousy is represented in the novel as one of the reasons behind Iraq's annexation of Kuwait; it causes the various degrees of tension between Hudā and her husband, Mrs Nabīl and her husband, and the servant and Mr Nabīl over Madam Sāra.
11. The servant's "docile" and "unsuspecting" wife colludes with him in operating and positioning the cassette recorder in strategic points within the house.
12. Men's disloyalty in marriage is also an important theme in *Mudhakkirāt*. Like Nāṣir's emerging disloyalty in this episode, Madam Sāra's husband's was disloyal for his 'un-solemnised' affair with a non-Kuwaiti 'playgirl' because of whom he had abandoned his wife and children for four years; Mr Nabīl is disloyal for loving Madam Sāra; the servant-diarist exploits and later abandons his wife during the war because of his obsessive passion for Madam Sāra.
13. See for example Kuwaiti women's war stories like Fāṭima Y. al-'Alī's "Dimā' 'alā wajh al-qamar" in *Dimā' 'alā wajh al-qamar* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'āmma li-l-kitāb, 1998); and Wafā' al-Ḥamdān's "Wakāna-l-waṭan ṭiflā" in *al-Ṭayrān bi-jināḥ wāḥid* (Kuwait: Maṭābi' al-khaṭṭ, 1995).
14. See al-Mughni, *op. cit.*, pp. 43, 60.
15. The servant has arranged for his over-fearful wife's journey back to their country through the Red Crescent Society, which has been helping with the evacuation of foreigners from Kuwait.
16. Women are the victims of 'crimes of honour'. It is very rare to see a sexually immoral man killed for bringing 'shame' to the family. See al-Mughni, *op. cit.*, p. 43 *ff*.
17. From the Islamic point of view, murder/homicide is a great sin; see, for example, Qur'an 4:93; 5:32; 6:15. A woman who is raped commits no crime; it is the rapist that should be brought to justice. For a study of rape according to Islamic Law, see Azman Muhammad Noor, "Rape in Islamic Law: Problems of Classification and Adjudication", an unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 2005.
18. Miriam Cooke, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism Through Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 59.
19. It is the unnamed Kuwaiti man whom Madam Sāra had wanted to marry after the death of her husband. Her children object to the marriage in a way that pleases the servant on one hand, and at the same time, serves to demoralise him as regards his own ambition.
20. See, for example, an article entitled "Whither the rights of Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis?" (my translation) by Sanā' al-Ḥamūd (PhD) in the Kuwaiti newspaper, *al-Qabas*, no. 6578 (17/7/1991). See also *al-Fajr al-Jadīd*, *op. cit.*
21. See for instance, Fahed A. Al-Naser's "Attitudes of Kuwaitis Towards the Issue [sic.] of Marriage with Non-Kuwaitis", *Annals of The Faculty of Arts*, Kuwait University, vol. xv, 1995, pp. 11-79. This monograph specifically concentrates on Kuwaiti men marrying non-Kuwaitis. Its findings reflect the influence of patriarchal conservatism with regard to interracial marriage.
22. See Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 184.
23. *al-Sā'ī*, no. 2 (1/11/2002).

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-9.
25. Hidāya S. al-Sālim, "Kharīf bilā maṭar", first published in 1972 and serialized in *al-Majālis* (8/1/2000; 15/1/ 2000; and 22/1/2000).
26. *Ibid.*
27. The servant informs us that, as part of his psychotherapeutic treatment of Madam Sāra, he keeps away from anything that can remind her of the reality of her circumstances. Parts of his 'policy of alienation' over the woman is his refusal to provide any sources of information, like TV and radio sets and newspapers, and all that can let her into the current affairs in the region.
28. The scene is also significant for representing al-Ibrāhīm's engagement with the Freudian theory on human psychology. Speaking through the servant, al-Ibrāhīm specifically refers to and criticises Sigmund Freud and his theory on human motive or intention for doing things. The friend, representing Freud's "generalist" view, thinks that the servant has married his Kuwaiti mistress in order to dispel the pervasive notion of class and racial inferiority between Kuwaitis and their domestic servants. But the servant proves him wrong claiming that he marries Madam Sāra out of genuine love, not just to prove his lack of inferiority.
29. According to the Saussurean concept, the "signifier" is a sound image or its graphic equivalent, and the "signified" is the referent, or concept referred to. See J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1992, 3rd edition), p. 879.
30. Put in the heroine's mouth, al-Ibrāhīm's identification of the cultural ideology with which Kuwaiti society is being governed as "imaginary, .. not representing any element of pristine truth" (215), exemplifies Louis Althusser's concept of the *Ideological State Apparatuses* (ISAs) and their operation through a process of what he terms 'interpellation', as discussed in the introduction to this thesis and in Chapter Three in particular. See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)" in Lenin and Philosophy and other essays, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), pp. 135 ff.
31. According to the translator, in his concluding remarks, the servant-diarist dies before the end of the first year of the liberation of Kuwait (*Mudhakkirāt*, 219).

CHAPTER SIX

CULTURE AND GENDER: SEXUALITY AND FEMININITY IN FAWZIYYA S. AL-SĀLIM'S *MUZŪN*

Introduction

A novel of some 350 pages, written by a contemporary Kuwaiti woman writer, Fawziyya Shuwaysh al-Sālim,[1] *Muzūn* [Muzūn] was published in 2000.[2] *Muzūn* can be regarded as a feminist tract intended perhaps to raise Arabian women's consciousness and represent their perspective vis-à-vis the 'hegemonic' Western feminist discourse. The novel explores several themes of feminist concern which range from femininity and gender socialisation to female sexuality, abortion, mothering, "clitoridectomy", or female genital mutilation, and so on. The story of three matrilineal generations of Arabian women, *Muzūn* is a prototypical Kuwaiti woman's fictional text; its significance lies not only in its content, but also, in its form.

The style, language and narrative strategies adopted in *Muzūn* are extraordinarily noteworthy. This novel is an example of a postmodernist fictional narrative: its modes of narration largely impressionistic – presented using the stream-of-consciousness technique; and its narratives unconventionally fragmented, following the non-chronological unfolding of events.[3] Given a trans-national and transcontinental setting – the story is largely set in Oman, and partly in Kuwait, Zanzibar, Cairo, and Paris, the language of *Muzūn* is lyrical and poetic. The text subverts Arabian patriarchal conventions not only through its choice of a taboo subject (celebration of women's sexual freedom) but also through the use of language. This is evidenced, for instance, in the author's adoption of symbolic names

for her three heroines: Zayāna, Zuwayna and Muzūn; all of these names denote "beauty", and connote "adultery" or "sexuality".[4] Through this novel, al-Sālim thus commences a process of revolutionising the Kuwaiti female literary tradition. She begins to break free from the claustrophobic embrace of the 'chastity' of language – avoidance of the use of vulgar language – that has characterised most Arabian literary works. This is a process al-Sālim pursues, more explicitly, in her latest novel, *Ḥajar 'alā ḥajar* (2003).[5]

Al-Sālim's adoption of postmodernist narrative strategies has aided her design of the novel as a literary deconstruction of patriarchal cultural beliefs and practices that pervade Arabian society. The novel celebrates adultery as "part of a feminist outburst against the institution of marriage as created not in heaven but on earth by unjust, man-made laws."[6] It is the "illicitness" of Zayāna's (the novel's first heroine and most central female character's) commission of adultery – an affair that is to have, from a feminist perspective, positive trans-generational effects – that haunts the entire text of *Muzūn.*

This chapter posits that *Muzūn* portrays Zayāna, representing the pre-oil generations of Arabian women, as not only a defiant and disruptive, but also, a revolutionary female figure. It is Zayāna, despite her lack of education and the pervasiveness of patriarchal culture in her time, who is created to pioneer 'sexual revolution' in the novel, rather than Zuwayna and Muzūn, as Zayāna's daughter and granddaughter, representing latter generations of women who actually belong to the oil-engendered era of modern civilisation in Arabia, beginning from the second half of the twentieth century.

After a summary of the 'complex', multi-layered plot of *Muzūn*, this chapter is divided into three main sections, each having several subsections. I want to consider this novel under two broad themes, "sexuality" and "femininity". Under the section "Culture and Sexuality", this chapter examines al-Sālim's representation of the concept and practice of love and sexuality in the Arabian traditional system, which is contrasted with Zayāna's symbolic and consequential sexual encounter with Yves. This section also incorporates Zayāna's several acts of subverting and evading the Arabian patriarchal society and the institution of the family. Under "Femininity and Gender Socialisation", the chapter focuses on Zayāna's revolutionisation of the conventional pattern of gender socialisation. This is considered through her influence on her descendants, specifically, Zuwayna and Muzūn.

Plot Summary

Muzūn is principally the story of Zayāna, who has been forced, as a teenage girl, to marry Ḥammūd, a man presumably from the rich, upper class in Oman. A mother of two daughters from the husband, Khawla and Mayyā, Zayāna has been abandoned two years earlier by Ḥammūd, who migrated to Zanzibar in East Africa. During Ḥammūd's absence from home Zayāna meets and, after some days of hesitation, falls in love with a Frenchman, Yves Doran, who is on an archaeological research visit to Oman. Zayāna's secret affair with Yves culminates in her impregnation by him; Yves returns to France without being aware of Zayāna's pregnancy. Due to societal restrictions, Zayāna is compelled to conceal her pregnancy as well as the birth and instant abandonment in a nearby bush of the baby

named Zuwayna. Zuwayna is adopted at birth by a humane, rustic woman, Umm Salmān, who is a mother of several children all of who are male. Umm Salmān ensures that the girl is circumcised in the customary way before she reaches puberty.

Zayāna never completely abandons Zuwayna, however. Since the birth of Zuwayna and throughout the eight years of Zayāna's absence from Oman, the latter has ordered that her female domestic servant, Ṣāliḥa, monitor the well-being of the baby in her foster home. As soon as Zayāna returns to Oman from Zanzibar after the death of her husband, Ḥammūd, she, together with Ṣāliḥa, visits Umm Salmān in order to see Zuwayna. After some quarrels with Umm Salmān over the circumcision of Zuwayna, Zayāna begins to work towards taking the now eight-year old girl to her custody. Eventually, Zayāna is able to re-unite with Zuwayna; the former could not proclaim herself as the biological mother of the latter, though.

A victim of genital mutilation, Zuwayna suffers from psychological depression throughout her life. Her somewhat arranged, though not forced marriage with 'Abd al-'Azīz, a Kuwaiti aristocrat, is blessed with a daughter, named Muzūn. Muzūn grows up in Oman in care of both Zuwayna and Zayāna; both Muzūn and Zuwayna always call Zayāna "aunt", believing that Zayāna is Zuwayna's adopted mother. Muzūn is educated both in Oman and in Kuwait. While a student at the Kuwaiti Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in the 1980s, Muzūn meets Khālid, a young Kuwaiti aristocrat, whom she eventually marries. For medical reasons, Muzūn is compelled to abort her pregnancy from Khālid during their visit together to Cairo; Khālid later dies in a car accident three years after their marriage.

Returning to Oman after Khālid's death, Muzūn befriends Dārī, a famous, self-employed Omani theatre director/producer. Thereafter, she meets and befriends

Bernard Martin, a Frenchman who is also the nephew of her secret grandfather, Yves. While Bernard comes to Oman on an official assignment as a TV documentary producer, he also brings Zayāna the news of Yves' death in France. Bernard's arrival in Oman prompts the never-regretful Zayāna to eventually disclose the secret of her affairs with Yves to the always-inquisitive Muzūn, rather than to Zuwayna. Zuwayna's sudden illness, associated with her suffering from life-long psychological depression, leads to her death; Zayāna and Muzūn survive her.

Culture and Sexuality

The text of *Muzūn* seeks to contrast the concepts of love and sexuality between two different cultures; this is evidenced in making each of Zayāna and, much later, her granddaughter, Muzūn, have sexual relationships with men from both Western (French) and Arabian societies. The repression of Arabian women's sexuality is a recurring motif in *Muzūn*; it is explored through the interwoven themes of love and sexuality, which are represented as aspects of human life which Arabian women are conventionally denied the right to explore subjectively. Zayāna is apparently the most important character whose, albeit unproclaimed, subversive lifestyle would most interest the feminist reader of the novel. Zayāna's achievement of self-realisation, her ability to break free from societal gender expectations of female complacency and submissiveness comes, though accidentally rather than by her own machination, from her sexual affairs with the Frenchman, Yves.

Al-Sālim's treatment of the Zayāna-Ḥammūd relationship is minimal: it is represented only as part of the more expansive narrative of Zayāna's much valued and preferred clandestine relationship with Yves. The author seems to have adopted

this narrative strategy in order to evoke the contrast between Arabian traditional norms (that continue, to a greater or lesser degree, to deny women 'selfhood', 'freedom', and 'voice'), and what obtains in the contemporary rather than the pre-"sexual revolution" era which began in the nineteenth century in western societies. In a series of fragmented reflections and evaluative processes, filtered through her retrospective first person narration, Zayāna, having been meeting with her French lover, Yves, tells us about her previous life with her husband, Ḥammūd. Before discussing the Zayāna-Yves relationship, representing the Arab-West sexual encounter, this chapter will first consider the concept of love and sexuality in Arabian tradition, as reflected in the Zayāna-Ḥammūd relationship.

Ḥammūd is portrayed as a stereotypical pre-oil Arabian aristocratic figure. His approach to the Islamically tolerable customary practice of polygamy is described, by Zayāna, as principally wealth-driven, rather than sex-driven. Ḥammūd abandons his wife (and children) at home for several years because of his obsession with and greed for wealth accumulation. Whereas Zayāna had hitherto remained faithful to Ḥammūd, the latter is explicitly portrayed as an unfaithful, unchaste husband (see 85 *ff.*).

Unlike much of the androcentric, or male-centred, literary tradition whereby sexual guilt is often transferred to the female, al-Sālim, in *Muzūn*, puts the blame for Zayāna's commission of adultery on the Arabian patriarchal culture, personified by Ḥammūd. Following Yves' flirtation with her, to be discussed shortly, Zayāna begins to feel that her faithfulness to Ḥammūd is under threat simply because of her

husband's unnecessary long separation from her. She begins to identify her husband's unfaithfulness as symptomatic of patriarchal oppression of women embedded in the transcontinental commercial and occupational activities of the pre-oil generations of Arabian men. "Living abroad .. does change men's character, and their lustful desires [towards their wives]" (85), Zayāna reflects with disgust. Some pre-oil-era Arabian women's dissatisfaction with their sexual repression and oppression through prolonged absence from home by their husbands is represented in another of Zayāna's internal musings:

> [Economic] emigration always takes our men away forever.
> Among them are those who will return [with] half love .. and those who will never return.
> And those who marry other women and so forget [about their wives at home] [...] (81).

While this reflection by Zayāna serves as a subtle critique of men's disloyalty that was commonplace in marital relationships in pre-oil Arabia, its significance lies, more importantly, in supporting Zayāna's argument that her eventual surrender to temptation is caused by Ḥammūd's negligence of her in the first place (83).

It is obvious that Zayāna has never really consciously reflected on her circumstances as an oppressed, marginalized female figure both within her matrimonial home and society in general; as we shall see, she already senses the social injustices imbedded in the Arabian social and cultural practices, though. It is her fear of the possibility of being tempted by Yves' passionate moves should Ḥammūd's absence continue that has incited her to give adequate thought to her objectification both as a daughter (in her parental home before marriage) and as Ḥammūd's wife. Captured metaphorically through the use of the interior monologue

technique, Zayāna presents to us the contrastive features of Arabian and (modern) Western concepts of love and sexuality using both her experience with Ḥammūd and that of the emergent, apparently promising flirtation between her and Yves.

Speaking through Zayāna, al-Sālim expresses some propositions: 1) that love be allowed to develop naturally between male and female; 2) and that it should precede marriage. Both of these two, the author argues, are evidently lacking in the Arabian traditional marriage system. Comparing Yves and Ḥammūd, Zayāna argues that there is nothing like love in her marital relationship with Ḥammūd, for she has been forced to marry him in the first place. That women's objectification is commonplace amongst the Arabian people is reflected not only in Zayāna being a victim of forced marriage, but also, in that at the time of her marriage, she was too young to understand the psycho-social implications of such relationships. Similarly, the objectification of women in Arabian society is reflected in that there was no prior acquaintance, especially through familial relationship, between Zayāna and Ḥammūd. This is an indication of not only the pervasiveness of patriarchal domination, but also, of the fact that there has been a total lack of prior emotional feelings and attachments between the couple. It is implied, therefore, that Zayāna was forced to marry Ḥammūd because of his economic status – as a member of the rich, upper class – a very common marriage custom next only to the practice of endogamy: marriage between cousins.[7]

In connection with her argument that she would not have fallen for Yves were it not for her incessant longing to satisfy what she calls "the hunger of the body" (82, 83) – her persistent sexual urge, the only "lawful" antidote for which is to meet with

the absentee husband – Zayāna begins to describe her sexual affairs with Ḥammūd. Zayāna notes that, in addition to lacking any serious amorous affection (*Ibid.*), her sex life with Ḥammūd is characterised by her experiencing orgasmic pleasure only occasionally. She recounts that previously (before meeting Yves), sex meant violent copulation between male and female:

> It used to be hot and hellish being in bed together with Ḥammūd ..
> The meeting point of a stallion-like male and a disinclined female (84).

Preceded by several sombre recollections, this laconic, non-explicit description of sex is followed by Zayāna's further note that sexual encounters between her and Ḥammūd used to be not only violent, and "loveless", but also, it is often devoid of any form of "foreplay" (*Ibid.*)

While the minimalism of the narrative of Zayāna and Ḥammūd's relationship serves to present the reader with Zayāna's previous circumstances and psychic being, it equally demonstrates how her character has changed from a stereotypically compliant, to that of a secretly transgressive female figure. How does Zayāna become a resistant and defiant, pre-oil Arabian female figure? This is what the next subsection is going to investigate.

Sexual encounter between the Arab world and the West

Zayāna's encounter with Yves symbolises specifically Arabians', and generally Arabs', contact with the West. In *Muzun*, al-Sālim treats the influence of that contact on Arabian women's psyche and sexuality. Unlike some Arab fiction-writers who have represented Arabs' contact with western civilisation in the modern period,[8] al-Sālim presents the effects of the contact from a feminist perspective,

using a seemingly insignificant (not least in the Arabian context), but highly sensitive theme: Arab/ian female sexuality. Also, unlike the common phenomenon whereby such contact often comes through the process of study abroad, or regular visits, or emigration to any given western countries,[9] the contact presented in this novel takes place in the Arab land, and in a much less formal way. The following examines the sexual encounter between Zayāna, an Arabian woman, and Yves Doran, a Frenchman, and the revolutionary effects that such an encounter has on the life of the former.

Love, sex and sexuality are the most significant things that Zayāna admittedly learns from Yves. This is notwithstanding her acknowledgement to herself that she has also learned cultural appreciation from the French people, Vanessa, Yves' sister, and her husband Jean (75-76), with whom Zayāna lived as neighbours in the Omani town of Matraḥ, before meeting Yves himself.

Unlike much Kuwaiti fiction, in which the relationship between race and gender is often represented as being an instance of women's oppression – women as victims of the denial of love/marriage with non-Kuwaiti men, al-Sālim represents culture as a cause of the repression of Arabian women's sexuality. In contrast with her enforced relationship with Ḥammūd, Zayāna begins to notice something natural and rational in her evolving affair with Yves right from day one of her acquaintance with the Frenchman. She begins to observe a big difference between the concept and practice of love in Western and Arabian cultures. An example of such cultural differences is handshaking, a practice that is traditionally less common between unrelated Arab male and female.

However unrealistic it might sound, Zayāna, an uneducated, yet-unexposed woman belonging to pre-oil Arabian society, would not mind shaking hands with an *ajnabī* (a man alien to her both by blood and by marriage). Zayāna informs us, in the present time of the novel, that on her first meeting with Yves, she exchanges a warm handshake with him. That Yves – who has made a lone, surprise visit to Zayāna in her farmhouse on the day of his arrival in the town of Matraḥ – "held [Zayāna's hand] for a while" in his "strong, warm hand" (71-72), while he continues to speak to her, points to the fact that Zayāna has never before experienced such a kind of sensation in a handshake with a man. More importantly, this narrative description by Zayāna suggests al-Sālim's representation of the male-female handshake as an example of those factors that distinguish love and sexual practises in (traditional) Arabian and Western cultures. Couched in a series of figurative terms, Zayāna's unusual sensual feelings following the warm handshake with Yves are predictive of the possibility of her falling in love with the Frenchman.

While it is obvious that Zayāna's relationship with Ḥammūd is utterly unromantic, Zayāna's affair with Yves is characterised by a lot of romance. Romance begins between Zayāna and Yves on the second day of their acquaintance with each other, when the former prepares a special, traditional Omani dish as lunch in honour of her French neighbours' visitor, Yves. Zayāna narrates that after the two households – hers and Vanessa's – have had a nice meal together at the latter's house, Yves begins to give her continual, "provocative" looks (78). Both the facts that when it is time to leave as the sun is about to set, it is Yves, rather than Vanessa as Zayāna's friend, who offers to see her off, and that Ṣāliḥa – Zayāna's often

supportive and cooperative female domestic servant – has quickly taken home Zayāna's little girls, suggest an air of design in the author's construction of Zayāna's chances to fall in love with Yves.

It is in what follows that the reader is presented with the first of the romance scenes in the novel going by both the 'story-order' (chronology of events) and the 'text-order' (the linear arrangement in the text). Depicted pictorially through Zayāna's narrative perspective, the reader is informed that the ensuing romance between her and Yves is initiated by the latter. Zayāna narrates that, as they both reach the gate of her farmyard and are about to part:

> Suddenly, [Yves'] hand gripped mine, firmly..
> I turned round [towards him]; my heart began to beat fast in a repressed excitement and total confusion.
> We stood face to face [...]
> [...]
> All of a sudden he embraced me in his arms .. firmly hugging me to his chest, [I could feel] his extreme heartbeats in my vein .. my body had started betraying me, it could no longer bear me up .. (80).

That she inadvertently surrenders to Yves' sexual appeals on this occasion, offering "her lips for his kisses" because "[her] body had started betraying [her]" and so "[she] could not restrain herself" (*Ibid.*) indicates that Zayāna is a 'passive agent' in the defiance of patriarchal social order at this initial stage of her affair with the French visitor. It also shows that she is "acting" under a raging carnal desire, which she can no longer suppress in the face of Yves's compelling sexual moves.

That she soon cautions herself "hesitantly slipping away from him" and "rejecting him while [she] actually desired [such] sensual moves" (*Ibid.*) suggests the notion of women's "self-contradiction" in the issue of love, that is, women saying "no" when they actually mean "yes." Zayāna's tacit "no" here does not simply reflect the (natural) feminine tactic of suspending 'falling for' a man. Rather, it stems from

what she often sees as societally imposed restrictions on her body: that as a married woman she must refrain from extra-marital love and sexual affairs. Whereas her still-being-suppressed growing love for Yves, and her "body hunger" (sexual lust) already incited by the Frenchman has made her desire him very seriously, Zayāna's social circumstance as a married woman restrains her at the same time.

Zayāna's initial fidelity and faithfulness to her absentee husband, Ḥammūd, is reflected in the narrative of the beginning of her affair with Yves, under discussion here. We find Zayāna, after kissing Yves for the first time, expressing a seemingly sincere wish that Ḥammūd could send for her, or return to Oman at the "most critical moment" in her life (*Ibid.*). This is a moment which can be described as that of Zayāna's transition from an 'immanent' to a 'transcendent' Arabian female figure. Zayāna's effort to maintain her marital fidelity is demonstrated, more vividly, in her evasive tactics on meeting with Yves again. She refuses to visit her French neighbours for three days following the event of her first, brief but impetuous romance with Yves, described above.

Through the character of her first heroine in *Muzūn*, Zayāna, al-Sālim advocates social change especially in the traditional Arabian marriage system. This is explicit in Zayāna repeatedly informing the reader that she has begun to feel a change in her perception of the love relationship between the two sexes, no sooner has Yves begun to flirt with her. Unlike her male-enforced relationship with Ḥammūd, Zayāna admits that she, too, has been naturally amorously attracted to Yves for his handsomeness, lovable character, profound sociability and high intellectual standing. Her special sensual feelings towards Yves, even before finally

accepting his proposal, are not only admittedly inexplicable, but also, they are something she has never previously experienced with a man (75). Using various figurative expressions to stress her perception of both the timeliness of the Frenchman's visit to Oman and the symbolic changes her acquaintance with him are going to make in her life, Zayāna declares to the reader that her pathological sexual feelings towards Yves are a good omen (83).

Al-Sālim's advocacy for radical change in the traditional Arabian concept and practice of love and sexuality is reflected, more significantly, in that Zayāna also repeatedly tells us that, no sooner had she had her first sex experience with Yves (described below), than she concluded that Yves had completely "displaced" Ḥammūd in her mind. This is stated on at least two main occasions in the novel. In the first place, immediately after her first sexual encounter with the Frenchman, Zayāna remarks: "henceforth, things will never be as they were previously" (90).

The idea of Yves displacing Ḥammūd is, secondly and more explicitly, expressed in Zayāna's internal musings: "The second man [Yves] has displaced the first [Ḥammūd]" (314). This is a decisive contemplation filtered through a series of Zayāna's panoramic, reminiscentially narrated nostalgia for her secret affair with the Frenchman, which pre-occupy the narrative of her eight years in Zanzibar with the unsuspecting, business-obsessed Ḥammūd. Describing her indifference to what she describes as Ḥammūd's indiscreet practice of polygamy juxtaposed with that of her nostalgia for Yves – a 'faithful,' 'monogamous' lover with whom she is still hoping

to be re-united – Zayāna reiterates that, though Ḥammūd still legally possesses her body, it is Yves who is endeared to her (311).

Al-Sālim's interweaves the treatment of the concepts of 'freedom' and love and sexuality in *Muzūn* in a way that situates the novel as a feminist tract suitable for women's advocacy for sexual revolution in Arabian society. Through this novel the author advocates girls'/women's right and freedom to love and to choose whom to marry, as opposed to the conventional imposition of husbands on girls, a practice still obtaining in some quarters of Arabia up to the present time. Exploring the themes of racial and cultural differences, the novel juxtaposes two conflicting concepts of individual 'freedom': (traditional) Arabian and Western. This is evident in an extensive dialogue between Zayāna and Yves, which constitutes part of the very first mutually agreed upon 'romance episode' in the novel, as their meeting on this occasion is at the instigation of Zayāna. Set in Vanessa's (or Yves') home, and captured largely through Zayāna's monologic 'angle of vision' (or point of view) often interspersed by the lovers' dialogic communion, this episode is one of the most significant aspects of *Muzūn* from a feminist perspective. It is here that the author articulates some of her overt critiques of the Arabian patriarchal tradition, put in Zayāna's mouth.

Having promised to meet with Yves the day following his societally tabooed gestures – calling on Zayāna loudly and in an affectionate manner, as explained above – Zayāna goes alone to see Yves in his hosts' place. That Vanessa and her husband, Jean, are away from the house at the time of Zayāna's visit further suggests an air of design in the author's bid to create a perfect environment for Zayāna's evolving transgression of societal norms. Created by the author to act as

representative of (modern or contemporary) Western values which serve as a source of Arabian women's enlightenment, we find Yves, in the ensuing dialogue between the two, 'de-interpellating' Zayāna.

Although Yves serves as the cause of the assertion of her subjectivity and agency, as we shall soon see, Zayāna is already conscious of women's subordinate status in Arabia. Comparing Arabian and Western cultures and in response to Yves' proposal for her hand in love and marriage, we meet Zayāna, at the beginning of the episode in question here, voicing women's outburst against their objectification in Arabian culture:

> We're [a people] whose traditions are deep-rooted. Our conventions and customs are much more firm and rigid .. we live much more in accordance with these conventions than in compliance with our own wishes and desires..
> We live by the logic of the public not by the logic of the individual ..
> [...]
> We accept it as an 'invisible' law, by which we are governed, and under the sovereignty of which we live ..
> We cannot contravene it .. or else we offer our souls for fatal destruction (88).

Muzūn situates al-Sālim as a literary 'social reformist'. The author seems interested not in merely reflecting and subtly critiquing the imbalances embedded in Arabian cultural practices, but in making a proposition towards the emergence of a progressive, egalitarian society. This is explicitly expressed through the consciousness of Yves, whom the author represents as a symbol of the "free" Western culture. "You are free in your love for me .. free in choosing me as your lover" (88), Yves says to Zayāna in a democratic spirit, as opposed to the love-by-force manner of the latter's marriage to her husband, Ḥammūd. "[Loving you]", Zayāna replies Yves, "will cost me my life, and disgrace and total loss of my family's honour." "If a married woman loves another man, thus betraying her husband, her punishment is nothing but stoning to death" (*Ibid.*), she adds, signalling

not her refusal of Yves' proposal, but her interpellation by both Arab cultural ideology of *sharaf* (social honour), and the Islamic doctrine of capital punishment for adultery.

Yves' notion of individual 'freedom' (in matters of love and marital relationship in particular), while it is not strange to Zayāna, contravenes her own cultural belief. Whereas for her "freedom" is determined and dictated by society, for the Frenchman it is "personal," it should stem from within someone's mind, not be imposed from outside (88-89). This conceptual discord on 'freedom' between the two characters exemplifies what a contemporary social scientist, Peter Manicas, has identified as the confusion of 'human freedom' with 'agency,' and which he has tried to clarify:

> Freedom regards what agents are able to do and this depends upon their 'resources.' Freedom which presupposes agency, is disturbed very unequally; agency is not. A person faced with but two disastrous alternatives is not very free; but that person remains an agent.[10]

As a female member of the pre-oil Arabian society, Zayāna is "faced with but two disastrous alternatives," as far as her emerging relationship with Yves is concerned.

Zayāna is torn between remaining as a compliant and conformist woman, and committing the life-threatening "crime" of adultery. She is, therefore, "not very free" with regard to defying the Arabian patriarchal social order by engaging in extra-marital affairs. What Yves describes as Zayāna's 'freedom', going by Monicas' definition above, can thus be understood rather as the issue of the woman's 'agency.' If, based on her social circumstances, Zayāna's freedom has been "disturbed", she still "remains an agent", who is to decide whether or not to violate patriarchal values.

That Zayāna is apparently convinced by Yves' claim that she is "free" to offer her body and spirit to anyone she chooses is evidenced in her surrendering

herself, wilfully and wholeheartedly for the first time, to Yves' sexual advances that ensue. Previously a passive agent in her bourgeoning affair with the Frenchman, Zayāna, I will argue here, does not become an 'active' agent in defiance of patriarchal orders until after her first sex with Yves. In spite of the fact that she was the one who fixed the day and time of this romantic episode, Zayāna does not really make up her mind to break free from societal restriction on, and repression of, her sexuality until after making love with Yves for the first time.

The first sex scene involving both lovers is filtered, as usual, through the consciousness of Zayāna. Though, as usual, non-explicit, the narrative of Zayāna's first-of-its-kind, pleasurable sexual encounter with a man is expressed in a highly romantic language that serves, primarily, to reflect the wide difference between Western and conventional Arabian sexual practices. Zayāna tells us that, unlike Ḥammūd, Yves' approach to sex is tender, it is preceded with highly arousing foreplay. Also, unlike her husband who used to rush into her in a somewhat violent, non-pleasurable manner, Yves approaches her "magically"

> through his gentle, pleasurable and enjoyable ritualistic method that will stimulate and arouse all parts of the body .. it will ignite and revivify them .. inciting in them holistic excitement and carnal appetite.
> He is neither hasty as to always be eager to get at the end [of the intercourse] .. nor does he make it boring .. He is naturally sexy.. libidinous, perfectly mastering the accurate and exact timing [for ejaculation] (92).

This description of an Arabian woman's experience of sex with a westerner continues with Zayāna's admittance of having learned about love, sex and sexuality from her French lover.

A point to be reiterated here is that Zayāna's realisation of the repression of female sexuality in Arabian society stems not through her enlightenment by Yves, but rather, through the process of pleasurable sex with him. After their first sex

together, Zayāna says to herself: "Never .. will things be as they were before, henceforth" (90); this indicates not only the eventual loss of her marital fidelity, but also, the beginning of her assumption of total subjectivity in further exploring her long-repressed sexuality, while she exploits her circumstance as a lonely wife.

Al-Sālim depicts enjoyable sex act as having 'transcendent' capability, as not merely a source of bodily pleasure but one that evokes female self-realisation and self-fulfilment. For Zayāna, her first sex with Yves is an eye-opener, having being blindfolded by restrictive Arabian cultural values. Zayāna describes herself, before her sexual encounter with Yves, as being 'docile' and 'submissive' "like Vanessa's domestic animals" (93). The period of her life before meeting with the Frenchman, she says, is characterised by total "darkness". "With Yves there are different meanings [to issues]" (*Ibid.*), she reflects, referring to how his enlightening her as well as his teaching her about sexuality has changed her sensibility.

Sex with Yves further provokes Zayāna's resistance to male ideological domination. As noted in passing above, even though she has wilfully given in to sex with Yves on the occasion of their first sexual encounter, discussed above, Zayāna has never before given her indulgence in an extra-marital affair any serious contemplation. Using the metaphor of "entangled snake" and "entrapped fly/bird" to portray women's status in Arabian society, we find Zayāna, in her internal musings after the above sex scene, reflecting:

> I must cast off my slough, and set free the butterfly of my soul.
> That I should believe in myself first, so that I can free my mind from myself ..
> That I should take the first step toward freedom (93).

Zayāna's agency – "the capacity to act in realizing [her] genuine interests"[11] – evolves from her understanding of Arabian traditional mores as sources of constraints against women's freedom, thus perpetuating their objectification with

regard to love and sexuality in particular. It is not until the moment when Zayāna reflects on the necessity of acting in realising her "genuine interests" that Zayāna's 'active' agency in resisting male domination is evoked.

Zayāna: subverting and evading patriarchy

The text of *Muzūn* illustrates the 'religious', and/or 'cultural' ideologies constituting part of what Louis Althusser calls the *Ideological State Apparatuses* (ISAs), by which people in any given society are governed. As explained in the introduction to this thesis, Althusser's conception of 'ideology' is that it is "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."[12] And, explaining his concept of ideology further, he defines 'imaginary', which appears in the above definition, as "constitut[ing] the failure of individuals to recognise that the ideological forces by which they are interpellated are neither real nor inevitable," noting that such individuals "are thus victims of social relations that they perceive to be natural and determinate, but which are imposed upon them by the State."[13]

In the character of Zayāna, al-Sālim constructs the processes of an Arabian female fictional character's 'mis-recognition', and later, 'recognition' of the evitability of the ideological forces by which she has been interpellated. Zayāna has begun to subvert the Arabian patriarchal social order even before she is de-interpellated with the efforts of Yves. This subsection will examine several actions, expressions and thoughts that represent Zayāna not only as a defiant, but also, a subversive and disruptive pre-oil Arabian female figure.

An example of Zayāna's initial interpellation by cultural and religious ideological beliefs that pervade Arabian society is reflected through the recurrent terrifying image of the *zāniya* (adulteress). For instance, when, after hours of sleeplessness consequent upon her first impulsive kissing with Yves discussed above, Zayāna eventually falls into "a brief, horrible sleep" (81), she dreams of a woman she had seen in her childhood, who was put in a well and then stoned to death for committing adultery (*Ibid.*).

The haunting image of the stoned adulteress keeps occurring in Zayāna's subsequent thoughts during her clandestine romantic affair with Yves and, most especially during her pregnancy with, and after the birth of, Zuwayna. With the help of Yves as earlier noted, however, Zayāna is able to realise the "imaginariness" of various patriarchal ideologies with which Arabian women in particular are being 'interpellated' (93). Hence, such horrifying image has little or no effect on Zayāna's psychical being, especially at the later stages of her subversion of the patriarchal social system.

A conscious feminist narrative written evidently to subvert patriarchal social and cultural values, *Muzūn* exposes the logic behind the circumscription of Arabian women's public appearances and interaction, as protective measures against women losing their chastity. Al-Sālim turns such values against themselves. She representationally undermines the effectiveness of this restrictive mechanism on women's social life by making it the actual medium through which Zayāna's subjective agency is elicited.

An instance of the occasion when Zayāna disrupts "patriarchal logic" is presented first, in a dialogic scene in Chapter Two, entitled the "Chapter of Love",

where much of Zayāna's personal defiance of patriarchal society is featured. Zayāna tells us that she had feigned sudden sickness in order to avoid Yves, consequent upon her first sensuous kissing with the Frenchman (discussed above), thus trying to prevent the reoccurrence of any act of betrayal of Ḥammūd. After three days of Zayāna's self-imposed seclusion, Yves – an alien who is perhaps ignorant of Arabian traditions (or is it that he is intentionally contravening them?) – decides to go to Zayāna's farmyard in order to verify the reality of her sickness. Standing at the gate in front of Zayāna's compound, he calls her name, loudly. Having been taken unawares by Yves' loud call on her name, Zayāna fearfully rushes out to meet him in the "garden before he would repeat the call, thus making other people apart from [herself] aware of his presence" in her compound in the dark hours of the evening (86). This serves to suggest that it is her fears of Yves' 'illicit' intention with her being known to the public that indirectly 'encourage' Zayāna's meeting with him in secret.

The story of Zayāna's several ways of subverting the Arabian social order is set during the World War II years. Zayāna relates that with the escalation of the war (between 1941 and 1942), Ḥammūd's hypocrisy as regards his promised early return to Oman from Zanzibar is fortified, as it becomes risky for him to embark on any intercontinental journey. In like manner, it becomes dangerous for Yves to return to France, his home country (which had fallen under Nazi Germany's control by the early 1940s). The more the war escalates, the closer they get to each other. As they both become too obsessed with each other's love and the war continues, Zayāna begins to accompany (under various guises to be discussed below) her secret lover in some of his archaeological research tours of nearby Omani villages and towns.

The significance of the narrative of Zayāna's deviation from the societal expectations of women's modesty and chastity constructed against the backdrop of the development of the events of the war lies, therefore, in showing some of the factors that facilitate the woman's transcendence of the restrictive Arabian social system. What is 'deconstructive' here is not only Zayāna's secret travelling and outings with Yves, but also, more importantly, her utilisation of the difference in the traditional Arabian dressing code for the two sexes to her own benefit. Zayāna often disguises like a man, dressing in traditional *dishdāsha* – a long loose garment – and other pieces of clothes associated with Arabian men (105 *ff.*)

Al-Sālim represents Zayāna's indulgence in an extra-marital affair, or adultery, as a form of women's protest against patriarchy. The author makes Zayāna admit to the reader that "[the] revolt of the body had freed [her] mind and thoughts" (93). For Zayāna, her bodily revolt or self-given sexual freedom is tantamount to a "transgressive, rebellious disruption" of patriarchal culture (*Ibid.*). Zayāna's defiant sexual acts, nevertheless, represent the inchoate phase of 'sexual revolution' in Arabian society. Zayāna is aware that her self-given sexual freedom remains at a very secret and personal level, as yet incapable of proclaiming, or openly demonstrating, such freedom. But as a conscious, now non-conformist female figure, she expresses the fact that her success in her secret relationship with Yves would be potentially subversive of patriarchal culture. "If I succeed [in my relationship with you], I've violated the social order" (108), Zayāna says addressing Yves on one occasion. Actually, Zayāna does succeed. Her love and sexual affairs with Yves are consequential. After Yves' departure from Oman, Zayāna continues to subvert

patriarchal society; in fact, she evades societal chastisements and capital punishment to which an adulteress is liable, as discussed in the following subsection.

Evasion of physical and social destruction

Al-Sālim utilises non-conventional, non-sequential ordering of the narrative of events to subvert patriarchal convention in a rather subtle but highly 'deconstructive' way. Rather than presenting first the story of Zayāna's initial defiance of patriarchal social authority contained in chapter two ("Chapter of Love"), the author makes Zuwayna's secret birth episode open the novel in order to attract the reader's attention to her seductive 'legitimisation' of both Zayāna's "adultery" that presupposes Zuwayna's birth, and the latter's right of existence as a legitimate child.

Zayyāna launches a process of "sexual revolution" in the Arabian society depicted in the novel. In her *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millet hypothesises that "A sexual revolution would require, perhaps first of all, an end to traditional sexual inhibitions and taboos, particularly those that most threaten patriarchal monogamous marriage: homosexuality, "illegitimacy," adolescent, pre- and extra-marital sexuality [...]"[14] In the character of Zayāna, al-Sālim constructs a female figure who silently flouts some Arabian societal sexual inhibitions and taboos.

Having revolted against her oppression and objectification by patriarchal representatives (father and husband) by having extra-marital sex, Zayāna further protests against the entire patriarchal society by insisting on Zuwayna's right of existence as a human being, her 'legitimacy' as a product of the "semen of a genuine but forbidden love" (197). Through several of Zayāna's thoughts and actions, al-

Salim argues for the eradication of the notion of "illegitimacy": labelling as 'illegitimate' children who were born as a result of adulterous or un-solemnised sexual encounters.

Just as the Zayāna-Yves affair was characterised by unsurprising fears and secrecy, so too, does Zuwayna's birth take place amid extreme fears, anxieties, and 'top' secrecy. It is through the perspective of Zuwayna-the-infant that the author first presents to the reader Zayāna's post-Yves (after Yves' departure from Oman) subversion of patriarchal social order. Al-Sālim makes Zuwayna narrate her own predicament as *bint ḥarām* (an 'illegitimate' child).

Zayāna's thoughts and actions regarding the birth of Zuwayna represent the former as a 'deconstructive' figure: at Zuwayna's birth, Zayāna again turns patriarchal discourse against itself. Firstly, as she had done during her romantic love affair with Yves, Zayāna uses the dressing code for women (wearing a long, loose garment that covers all the parts of a woman's body, and using the veil) to conceal her pregnancy with Zuwayna from the public. Secondly, Zayāna's silence – her not publicly confessing – about her adultery, which could be proved by her pregnancy with another man's baby in the absence of her husband, constitutes the woman's other way of avoiding the stoning-to-death punishment. Rather than delivering Zuwayna the "illegitimate" child at home (as customary in pre-oil Arabia) Zayāna, with Ṣāliḥa acting as midwife, delivers Zuwayna on a mountainside, in a bush located halfway between their home town of Maṭraḥ and the village of Jabal, where the family that later becomes the baby's foster parents reside (12).

Baby abandonment is a common problem in most societies. Al-Sālim represents it in *Muzūn* as an "abominable act"; but she seems to argue that the blame for its regular occurrence should be transferred to patriarchal society rather than be put on the women who do it. Zayāna commits this 'non-humanitarian act' in order to avoid a major humanitarian crisis: so as to save her own life and that of the baby, to safeguard the honour of both mother and daughter. Hence, Zayāna's negative action is for a positive end.

There appears to be some contradiction between Zuwayna's initial narrative of the story of her birth, and Zayāna's version that is characteristically meant to complement it. The discrepancy here is as regards Zayāna's reason for protecting the life of her baby in spite of all anxieties and the dangers involved. According to Zuwayna-the-infant – when expressing the idea that her existence in life has been predetermined (9-10) – her still culturally interpellated mother, Zayāna, "had [initially] attempted several times to abort" her pregnancy with Zuwayna (10).

Zayāna's thoughts and reflections on this issue, however, portray her as an agent in refusing to abort the pregnancy. In what is indicative of her further defiance of Arabian patriarchal authority despite the terrifying image of the stoned adulteress of the well that keeps haunting her, we find Zayāna – when and after taking a thorough post-natal bath – reflecting that "What would keep me alive .. should also keep the seedling [baby] from my (womb) alive, too" (19). Zayāna contends: "Why should I eliminate it, while I could neither create it, nor is it within my rights to abort it", adding that "[pregnancy] is the medium for human procreation, and so I have no moral right to eliminate it" (*Ibid.*). Both of these expressions by Zayāna serve to point to the fact that, although she is capable of (and might have initially attempted)

eliminating the pregnancy, she has refused to do so in order to subvert patriarchal society.

Zayāna refuses to abort her pregnancy with an "illegitimate child" simply because it is against what she sees as the essence of humanity: procreation. It is thus in the character of Zayāna that we find a female figure that 'deconstructs' the pervasive Arabian cultural belief which considers not only the adulteress, but also, the product of her adultery as taboo 'objects'. Through Zayāna's fictional perspective on this issue, the novel interrogates and exposes Arabian traditional mores as contravening one of the supposed essences of humanity.

The above contemplations by Zayāna on the legality or illegality of abortion situate al-Sālim, in *Muzūn*, as a kind of woman writer whom Miriam Cooke has labelled "Islamic feminist". In her *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism Through Literature*, Cooke defines an "Islamic feminist" as an Arab/Muslim woman writer/activist with "a difficult double commitment: on the one hand, to a faith [Islamic] position, and on the other hand, to women's rights both inside the home and outside."[15] Al-Sālim presents "abortion" in this novel not as human right but as God's right that will become women's right only when justifiably necessary.

Al-Sālim enunciates, through the consciousness of Zayāna, the view that human reproduction/procreation is a divine process and that mankind should not tamper with God's creation except for special, humanly 'legitimate' reasons. This kind of Islamic feminist discourse of 'conditional abortion' is in contrast with the Western feminist discourse that advocates women's 'unconditional' right to abortion as part of the struggle for women's liberation. "[F]eminists have opposed", writes Michele Barrett in her *Women's Oppression Today*, "the reduction of women to

breeding machines. This argument underlies one of the women's movement's most frequently articulated demands – the right to control our own bodies – [to control, among other things] women's reproductive functions."[16]

As an Islamic feminist writer, however, al-Sālim represents in this novel two perspectives on abortion using two different circumstances of the affected female characters. They are: Zayāna's anti-abortion stance under discussion here, and Muzūn's medically recommended abortion of her pregnancy with Khālid's supposedly male baby (pp. 61-63). Arguably, the author represents these two female stands against and for abortion for both (Islamic) religious and feminist/humanistic ends. In both instances the women's decisions on whether or not to carry out abortion are used to expose the oppressive patriarchal culture, and to protect the female body and soul.

The kind of women's subversion and evasion of patriarchal social order constructed in this novel is more sophisticated than what have thus far been discussed in this chapter. That the author works towards providing women's alternatives to the traditional hierarchical social system becomes more and more evident in the character of Zayāna. Through the theme of marriage, the author illustrates Zayāna's revolutionary disposition as a matriarchal family head, as discussed below.

'Evasion' of the institution of the family

In their study of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte[17] and some other nineteenth-century British women novels, the critics constituting the 'Marxist Feminist Literature Collective' note that "Some texts refuse to reproduce contemporary

economic and ideological determinations; instead they represent a systematic evasion or interrogation of the law of these determinations."[18] Invoking Louis Althusser's argument (regarding his notion of the *Ideological State Apparatuses* (ISAs)), that: "the Law cannot be 'ignored' by anyone, least of all by those ignorant of it, but may be evaded or violated by everyone [...]" the ten woman, self-proclaimed Marxist-feminist critics "argue that this 'evasion' of the law occurs in the [selected] texts in the interrelated areas of social class, kinship and Oedipal socialisation."[19]

In *Muzūn*, al-Sālim evades the conventional hierarchical structure of the institution of 'the family'. The novel represents three categories of Arabian aristocratic homes: Ḥammūd's (Omani), 'Abd al-'Azīz's, Khālid's (both Kuwaiti) as Zayāna, Zuwayna, and Muzūn's matrimonial homes, respectively. But al-Sālim refuses to let any of her heroines (including Zayāna, of course, for she is an almost completely lone parent) belong to the normative Arabian family structure, where the father/husband would frequently exercise total restrictive controls on their daughters/wives. Even the avoidance of constructing any modern western-styled home, with Yves possibly as its head, and Zayāna and Zuwayna as his wife and daughter, suggests the author's tactical avoidance of any typical, male-headed home for her heroines.

Zayāna, having been partial victim of the conventional family structure, radically devises an unconventional matrimonial home for her special daughter, Zuwayna. Zayāna persuades 'Abd al-'Azīz to allow Zuwayna remain with her in Oman, rather than have her live with him in Kuwait after their marriage (225). This schema by Zayāna thus provides the opportunity not only for a very strong female

bonding among the triad, but, more importantly, for Zuwayna and Muzūn to escape patriarchal domination.

Al-Sālim's construction of Zuwayna's evasion of any form of patriarchal control enshrined in conventional marriage institution constitutes an "interrogation" of its necessity as a social institution. If the essence of marriage, as conventionally believed in Arabian society, is procreation, or childbearing, then Zuwayna's story reflects the evitability of the institution of 'the family' as a necessary medium for ensuring the continuity of human procreation. Zayāna asks her son-in-law, 'Abd al-'Azīz, to visit and cohabit with Zuwayna each time he comes from Kuwait to Oman on his regular business trips (225). Thus Zuwayna never experiences the total control of her husband; still she procreates.

We have seen from the above how Zayāna has graduated from a passive and conformist to an active and defiant Arabian female figure. The Zayāna-Yves relationship – which has been the focus of our discussion so far and symbolising, among others, sexual encounters between the Arab world and the West – has intergenerational effects. The next section will examine al-Sālim's treatment of the social and cultural construction of femininity in traditional Arabian society. It is through this broad theme that the author reveals Zayāna's continual revolutionisation of society at domestic level.

Femininity and Gender Socialisation

Muzūn adopts a minimalistic narrative approach as regards the process of socialisation of Zayāna: the novel is almost completely silent on her childhood and girlhood. However, it is implied that Zayāna had not escaped the conventional sex-

role socialisation that was prevalent in pre-oil Arabia. This is evident not least in Zayāna's objectification through the traditional marriage system: she is a victim of forced marriage, as shown under the section 'culture and sexuality'.

Al-Sālim, by contrast, makes the processes of the socialisation of both Zuwayna and Muzūn, from childhood through womanhood, the central narrative focus of the novel; it occupies almost three-quarters of the text. The less expansive story of Zayāna's love and sexual affairs with Yves, when the entire novel is re-constructed chronologically, thus constitutes the background to the author's construction of Zayāna's character as a revolutionary figure. Whereas both Zayāna (implicitly) and Zuwayna are victims of the discriminatory, male-empowered pattern of gender socialisation, Zayāna ensures that all the female children under her custody are made to escape the stereotypes of gender socialisation. Focussing, specifically, on Zayāna's influence on Zuwayna and Muzūn as her secret daughter and granddaughter and as al-Sālim's second and third heroines in the novel.

De-interpellating the interpellated: Zayāna on Zuwayna

Although it is the narratives of Zuwayna's socialisation and Zayāna's effort in re-socialising her that are presented more expansively in the text of this novel, al-Sālim demonstrates that Zayāna's revolutionary moves against patriarchal traditions begin with her two daughters from Ḥammūd, Khawla and Mayyā. Zayāna's influence on Mayyā in particular will be noted later as this section proceeds. But some notes on Zuwayna's life under the guardianship of Umm Salmān are necessary here for a deeper understanding of Zayāna's immense efforts towards remedying the effects of patriarchal culture on women's social and psychical being.

Al-Sālim unequivocally demonstrates that Zuwayna's psychical retardation and social backwardness are emblematic of women's internalisation of the effects of patriarchy. Umm Salmān, a "rustic", stereotypically compliant, elderly female figure who becomes Zuwayna's foster mother, ensures that the girl is socialised in the conventional way. Already eight years old at the time the reader meets her again in the novel – we first met her at the beginning of the novel in the scene of her birth in the "Chapter of Birth" – Zuwayna re-appears again to inform us about her childhood socialisation and marriage in the "Chapter of Love". She narrates that Umm Salmān inculcates in her the ideology of female domesticity. Umm Salmān frequently emphasises to the small girl that "a woman's place is but her [parental or matrimonial] home", that "A clever woman is the one who is jealously mindful of the proper care and protection of her [matrimonial] home [...]" (141).

For Umm Salmān, the outspokenness and physical agility, which Zuwayna has begun to manifest at childhood, are emblematic of the "licentious and devilish female" (120), a common perception of every non-compliant, ungovernable woman in patriarchal society. Umm Salmān is worried that Zuwayna is behaving "like a boy rather than a girl" (122).

In the character of Umm Salmān, women's complacence and complicity, their collusion in the perpetuation of their own oppression, is personified. In fact, perhaps very unusual of Kuwaiti women's writing, al-Sālim, in this novel, reverses the construction of a patriarchal 'representative'. Rather than Sālim ibn Mas'ūd (Umm Salmān's husband) being the typical 'father figure' who will be authoritatively controlling, and directly oppressing the women within his household, it is Umm Salmān who treats Zuwayna in accordance with societal norms. This is

reflected in several of Zuwayna's unpleasant descriptions of the most elderly female figure in the novel: for example, that "[Umm Salmān] is always a reprehensive and unkind woman [...] (120). It is Umm Salmān who acts as the father figure for Zuwayna. Rather than any of the male members of her family, it is Zuwayna's (foster) mother who often exercises repressive controls and maintains discipline with regard to the girl's socialisation.

It might be unfair, nevertheless, to conclude that Umm Salmān is temperamentally aggressive, violent and wicked, as she appears to be in the novel. On the contrary, a feminist analysis of the character of Umm Salmān might want to focus on the woman's usual manifestation of female kindness, sacrifice and humanitarianism, for she has voluntarily adopted Zuwayna in the first place (20-21). Similarly, that Umm Salmān often "prays" for Zuwayna's future prosperity and success (120); that she often defends her 'highhandedness' on the premise that she is training the small girl so that the latter can become "a good housewife" in future, so that "[Zuwayna's] husband will be happy with her and he will not curse us [mothers] for our deficiencies in giving [her] a proper (domestic) training" (142), all imply the fact that the elderly woman is acting on behalf of patriarchal authority. Umm Salmān is just an "innocent" agent of patriarchy, therefore.

This elderly woman's refusal to query Sāliḥa's and Zayāna's extremely suspicious love, affection and over-generosity towards herself and other members of her family because of Zuwayna, is suggestive of Umm Salmān's collusion in Zayāna's evasion of both physical and social destruction. Umm Salmān's silence, ignoring the very possibility of any blood relationship between Zuwayna and Zayāna

(203), also implies solidarity (direct or otherwise) as the oppressed women's strategy of survival in the face of the pervasive patriarchal dominance.

It is with regard to the issue of Zuwayna's circumcision that Zayāna becomes an 'informal' women's liberation activist in the novel. Featured in a dialogic scene set in Umm Salmān's house, the narrative of Zayāna's first meeting with Umm Salmān and Zuwayna since the birth of the girl is filtered through the fragmented points of view of the eight-year-old Zuwayna and, later, Zayāna.

Zayāna informs us that no sooner had she seen the girl for the first time since their separation at birth, than she noticed some abnormalities in Zuwayna's outlook and behaviour. Zayāna's observation here is contrary to the impression Ṣāliḥa, who has been monitoring Zuwayna's well-being in her foster home, has previously given her: that Zuwayna has been very "cheerful", "active" and "talkative". When Zayāna becomes impatient with Zuwayna's reticence, her unusual silence (202), and therefore ask what is amiss, Umm Salmān mentions that perhaps it is because of Zuwayna's recent experience of the operation of circumcision.

Representing the Arabian patriarchal tradition, Umm Salmān, in the scene of the women's quarrel over Zuwayna's circumcision, puts forward a defence of the customary practice. Quite understandably, the elderly woman sees the "horrifying practice" of female genital mutilation as a way of 'taming' women, of keeping them under control, of making them "submissive and compliant" to the patriarchal social order (146).

Put in Zayāna's mouth, al-Sālim launches a vehement verbal attack against the practice of clitoridectomy. Zayāna's outright condemnation of the practice before the female patriarchal representative, Umm Salmān, reflects the global women's

movement's advocacy for the eradication of the practice. "I descended", Zayāna says, "on [Umm Salmān] with blames and reproof out of my grief and surprise, my regret and fear, oblivious of the quiddity of the apparent [resemblance] between me and [Zuwayna], and her total right over [the child]" (203). Even though Zayāna is cautioned by Ṣāliḥa to "swallow" her "extreme fury" (204) and act calmly, Zayāna continues, through the stream-of-consciousness technique, to articulate (modern) women's antagonism to the practice of female genital mutilation.

In an extemporaneous determination, Zayāna begins to think about how to "repair the damage already done" (204). Zayāna's explicit intent on preventing her "lost" daughter from continuous patriarchal oppression and subjugation, expressed in these and similar of her furious contemplations, marks the beginning of her moves to solve Zuwayna's psychological problems. Zayāna sees the amelioration (*iṣlāḥ*) of the depressed Zuwayna's psychical being as an obligation upon herself: "I must atone (*yajib an adfa' kaffāra*) for my mistake [of abandoning the child in the first place]" (204), she says to herself for example.

Through several of her ploys,[20] Zayāna is able to realise her plan to "adopt" Zuwayna, thus reclaiming the girl. "At last .. I achieved my goal .. I brought my little daughter back into my life and my being [...]" (207), Zayāna tells us. Having achieved this goal, Zayāna makes every effort to re-socialise and de-interpellate Zuwayna. Zayāna's contribution towards the liberation of Zuwayna from patriarchal oppression, real and ideological, is first presented in the text through the consciousness of the latter. Zuwayna reflects that "but for [Zayāna] I would have [remained] entwined in mountains of fear and horror." "Without [Zayāna]", She continues, "what could I have become? She changed Zuwayna the mentally deranged

(*al-mamsūsa*), the psychologically depressed .. who was being haunted by demons and elves" (231). Whereas Zuwayna had been socialised to be submissively immanent, to see the home as her 'proper sphere' and marriage as the essence of her life, she gratifyingly notes that "With Zayāna's [compassion] and companionship life began to reveal [its] other side ..", "[My] horizons began to broaden and widen", "[Life] appeared far beyond [cattle rearing] and beyond the farmyard itself; it became wider and farther than the realm of imagination and dream" (231).

Zayāna's reformation of the stereotypical pattern of gender socialisation is illustrated in her efforts to encourage formal education for girls, in contrast with the norms of the first half of the twentieth century in Arabia. On Zuwayna, for example, Zayāna had proposed taking the eight-year-old into her custody using the latter's stark illiteracy and lack of Qur'anic education as an excuse before Umm Salmān. In an ensuing dialogue between the two women, filtered through the consciousness of Zayāna, we find Umm Salmān rejecting the idea of the necessity of Zuwayna's literacy and Qur'anic education. Umm Salmān argues, as usual, that: "[...] a girl has no place other than her home" and that "knowledge is but a waste of time and money" (207), thus echoing the notion of the uselessness of women's education.

Al-Sālim represents literacy and religious (Qur'anic) knowledge as women's weapons for overcoming some of their male-engendered social and psychological problems. "The best of Zayāna's gifts to me", Zuwayna reflects "is [that she makes me] learn how to read [and write] .. and to be able to memorise the Qur'an with which I dispel my [imaginary] fears" (232). This is another instance in the novel that portrays al-Sālim as an Islamic feminist writer, who is neither attacking Islam, nor is she, in Cooke's words, "question[ing] the sacrality of the Qur'an."[21] What al-Sālim is

apparently doing in this novel, however, is "engag[ing] with and interrogat[ing] the norms and values of Islam as a cultural and religious practice and discourse."[22] It is the Arabian cultural values and practices often attributed to and confused with Islam that *Muzūn* critiques as oppressive. The reflections of both Zuwayna and Zayāna about the efficacy of Qur'anic knowledge in Zuwayna's improvement as well as Zayāna's perception of the illegality of abortion as discussed above, situate *Muzūn* as an Islamic feminist fictional text.

Whereas Zuwayna's childhood socialisation was in consonance with the stereotypical norms of female passivity, submissiveness and immanence, her sisters were socialised according to Zayāna's western-influenced policy of gender equality that accords girls social and intellectual development in a way similar to boys. Zuwayna admittedly realises that she is in no way comparable with her half sisters, Khawla and Mayyā, in terms of being articulate and sociable (234). This reflection by Zuwayna is suggestive of the difference in their respective socialisations.

Zuwayna further notes, for instance, that it is Mayyā who, following Zayāna's way of life, changes her perception of femininity. It is Mayyā who acts as matchmaker between Zuwayna and her Kuwaiti husband, 'Abd al-'Azīz (237). Unlike Mayyā, with whom Zuwayna experiences girlhood and adolescence at almost the same period of time (the former is only three years older than the latter), Zuwayna is always ashamed of discussing or exposing anything relating to her growing sexuality, like menstrual blood, the size of her breasts, love making and so forth. Zuwayna displeasingly notes that "Mayyā never feels morally guilty like myself" about discussing about female sexuality, but "Rather, [Mayyā] always shamelessly celebrates her femininity" (235). These reflections by Zuwayna serve to

underscore Zayāna's achievement in inculcating self-pride and self-esteem in her girls.

As matriarch, Zayāna reforms Arabian marriage customs in several ways. She maintains a 'no forced marriage' policy for her daughters and granddaughters. This is evidenced in Zuwayna's marriage, which is reflected more expansively in the novel than those of Khawla (215) and Mayyā (221). Zayāna's non-patriarchal approach to her daughters' marriages – they meet or choose their husbands by themselves. Zayāna's act of not dictating whom to marry let alone what to collect as her daughters' *mahr* (bridal gift) implies women's discontent with their objectification and economic oppression that are characteristic of the traditional Arabian marriage system (238). It also serves to demonstrate women's alternative to the male-dictated customary practice of forced marriage in Arabian society. As matriarch, Zayāna eradicates women's objectification in matters of social life depicted in the novel.

Zayāna instils in her girls the spirit of selfhood and human (inter)subjectivity (239). Following the revolutionary spirit of her now succeeding secret relationship with Yves, Zayāna disapproves the socially constructed notion of female as the weaker sex. Zayāna's radicalisation of the pervasive pattern of gender socialisation is most successful in the character of her secret granddaughter, Muzūn, as we shall see in the following section.

Attaining female self-realisation: Zayāna on Muzūn

The story of Muzūn, the youngest of the novel's three heroines, is presented very explicitly as a quest story. Muzūn embarks on two separate but coterminous quests: on the one hand, her experience of conflicting childhood socialisations from

both Zayāna and Zuwayna compels her to ask: 'why the contrast between the two older women, and what informs "aunt" Zayāna's special love for and interest in her life?' On the other hand, Muzūn-the-adolescent embarks on an "identity" quest. The kind of female identity quest, represented by al-Sālim in this novel, is that of a female quest for self-realisation in a male-dominated society. It is a kind of quest for what Jane Flax has described as "a positional self always in the process of becoming, a 'deep subjectivity' that is informed by critical social relations."[23] Put simply, it is more, in Sally Robinson's words, "of a 'doing' rather than a 'being'."[24]

Explored more expansively in Chapter Three ("Chapter of Awareness/Self-Identity") than in any other chapters of the novel, the female search for self-fulfilment in a patriarchal world is one of the notable themes of this novel. It is only Muzūn who can be said to have really been consciously intent upon embarking on a quest for self-fulfilment. For Zayāna, it is an unsolicited achievement; and it is an opportunity which, according to Muzūn, Zuwayna utterly "misses" throughout her life (305). Notwithstanding Zayāna's accidental attainment of this kind of self-identity through her sexual relationship with the Frenchman, Yves, it is on the pattern of her lifestyle as well as on her philosophy on a "well-lived female life" that Muzūn fashions her own lifestyle, too. It is Muzūn's deviant, non-sexist pattern of socialisation received from Zayāna that constitutes the cornerstone of the former's mental development, and the process of self-consciousness (29). It is within the context of Zayāna's tremendous contribution towards Muzūn's attainment of feminist consciousness and self-realisation that this section also focuses heavily on femininity and gender socialisation rather than on "identity".

The speciality of Zuwayna to Zayāna informs the latter's obsession with Muzūn. Zayāna's tactical refusal to allow Zuwayna live in Kuwait with her husband, 'Abd al-'Azīz, as noted above, makes it possible for Zayāna to collaborate, rather domineeringly, in bringing up Muzūn. Zayāna's influence on Muzūn begins at birth.[25] In the section entitled 'Between Two Opposing Poles' (in "Chapter of Birth"), al-Sālim reflects how Muzūn as a female member of a male-dominated society, is torn between being influenced by two representatives of Arabian female precursors: Zuwayna and Zayāna.

Through several expressions of "binary oppositions" (as characteristic of the style of the novel in general), al-Sālim describes the contrasting characters of Zayāna and Zuwayna. The author portrays, through Muzūn's perspective, two categories of women: the passive, submissive, and immanent woman, here represented by Zuwayna; and the active, non-conformist, rebellious woman, represented by Zayāna (27). These two representative women engage in a kind of ideological "war of influence", struggling with each other over whose opinions should hold sway on their beloved child and 'grandchild', Muzūn.

Muzūn's feminist consciousness arguably has its root in Zayāna's immense efforts in ensuring that the former is deviantly socialised. Muzūn gratifyingly acknowledges that it is Zayāna who instils into her a sense of female "rational" and "transcendent" potential and capabilities. Muzūn notes that if in any day the psychologically depressed, self-confident lacking Zuwayna "infuses fear into [her mind], Zayāna will dispel it the following morning" (*Ibid.*). Further, Muzūn reflects that it is Zayāna who often 'dislodges' any form of indecision and lack of self-determination that sometimes affects her, and which are symptomatic of women's

internalisation of the effects of patriarchy. "[V]ictory is often Zayāna's watchword" (28), she remarks.

Through Zayāna's influence on Muzūn's character and disposition, al-Sālim deconstructs the androcentric, 'Enlightenment discourse', personified in the characters of Zuwayna and Umm Salmān, of "consign[ing] women to the 'private' realm of feeling, domesticity, the body, in order to classify a public realm of Reason as masculine."[26] Zayāna inculcates in Muzūn the sense of and the necessity for contemporary Arabian women in particular to struggle for "agency, personal autonomy, self-expression and self-determination"[27] in a male-dominated world.

Just as Zuwayna used to be as active, vocal and intelligent as any of her male childhood peers, so too does Muzūn begin to manifest some qualities that serve to evince physical and mental equality between the two sexes. Reflecting on her problematic childhood socialisation, Muzūn narrates that she, Zuwayna, Zayāna and Ṣāliḥa do visit her so-called "grandmother", Umm Salmān, in the countryside. Each time she wants to join her male peers at the village in order to go and play, Zuwayna often inculcates in her a sense of otherness, saying: "Come back, Muzūn .. come back, girl .. you aren't a boy" (32).

That whenever Zuwayna ties down Muzūn to prevent the latter from playing outdoors, it is Zayāna who "undoes the chain of this captivity .. and sets [Muzūn] free to go into the expanse of fields where [she] could flap [her] wings and fly" (*Ibid.*), serves to underscore Zayāna's significant role in Muzūn's deviant socialisation. Whereas Zuwayna instils in Muzūn the sense of female inferiority, Zayāna imparts in the girl that of male-female equality. Just as Zayāna became very impatient with Umm Salmān's strict compliance with patriarchal conventions as

regards Zuwayna's socialisation and so she shrewdly reclaimed Zuwayna from the foster mother, so too does she (Zayāna) refuse to allow both Umm Salmān and Zuwayna to influence Muzūn's process of socialisation.

As she continues to describe Zayāna's distinctively deviant way of thinking and radical approach to issues, and their impact on her own make-up, Muzūn also narrates that as soon as they arrive at the village on one occasion, she is invited by a group of friends in the neighbourhood to attend an entertainment session by the *ghajar* (gipsy) – a group of Bedouin Arab tribe who perform various forms of entertainments, including magic and soothsaying (33). The significance of 'the gypsy episode' lies not in Zayāna's overruling that Muzūn is allowed to participate with the boys in attending the *ghajar*'s entertainments in the woods. Nor is it the fact that Muzūn does pleasantly compete with the boys in all physical activities they embark upon like running, jumping and swimming in the *falj* (a pond, or lake), which are indicative of her physical and mental equality with the boys. What is much more noteworthy here, however, is contained in the dialogue that ensues between all the women, consequent upon Muzūn's lateness to return home until it was dusk. All have been worried for her lateness; all, but Zayāna, are so seriously devastated that they could not even utter a word on the girl's return. Muzūn narrates:

> Zayāna asked why we were late, and I replied that we were so engrossed in swimming in the lake, that we were not conscious of the passage of time until it was dark.
> [...]
> My grandmother, Umm Salmān, said: "*Girls don't swim in the lake.*"
> Zayāna replied:
> - *There is no difference between girls and boys.*
> - Strange [idea]!! How can girls and boys be equal in this era? *What is suitable for male, can never be suitable for female .. or else, this world would become topsy-turvy* (38, my italics).

That al-Sālim is very conscious of language structure is evident especially in the emphasised Zayāna's statement above. Zayāna/al-Sālim mentions "girls" before "boys" in the sentence, which is very much unconventional in the so-called man-made language, written and oral. The dialogue here exemplifies two things. On the one hand, it reflects the patriarchal concept of 'biological determinism': the belief "that physiological difference between men and women determine social roles" and on the basis of which women are denied "full expression of their potential."[28] On the other hand, al-Sālim articulates, through Umm Salmān, a kind of "patriarchal anxiety": that proclaiming and asserting the notion of gender equality, as Zayāna is doing, is potentially subversive and disruptive to patriarchal hegemony and social order.

Zayāna equally makes efforts to ensure that Muzūn is not interpellated by patriarchal ideology embedded in the Arabian cultural beliefs, which has already been imbibed by Zuwayna through Umm Salmān. Having participated in an interesting but horrifying excursion organised by her primary school to Muscat Castle, Muzūn returns home terrified. Muzūn is specifically appalled by "the groans of the *al-zāniya* (adulteress) in the depth of a well .. wailing over her commission of adultery .. having been [reportedly] stoned the previous night" (45). As she recounts her experience in the castle in the presence of Zuwayna and Zayāna, Muzūn curiously interrogates her mother: "My mother, who is *al-zāniya*?!" (*Ibid.*) Rather than answering the question, Zuwayna silences her daughter: "Shut up, Muzūn! This is not a matter for girls to discuss" (*Ibid.*).

Muzūn's insistence, both on knowing why girls are not allowed to talk about the issue of *zinā* and, implicitly, who precisely is *al-zāniya*, provokes Zuwayna's

expression of the Arabian cultural ideology of *faḍīḥa* (dishonour). *Faḍīḥa*, a notion which has been discussed in virtually all the chapters of this thesis, signifies the devastating loss of women's social standing in case they happen to be the victims not only of forced sexual encounters, but also, if they are engaged in any unsolemnised, voluntary love and sexual affairs. When Zuwayna replies to Muzūn, it is that "[Talking about who *al-zāniya* is] is just impermissible .. it's utterly a shame to pronounce that word .. [*zinā*] is greatly unlawful" (*Ibid.*). Zayāna's efforts towards changing the ideology of no-sex-education ingrained in the traditional Arabian culture are vividly represented in what then follows.

Muzūn continues to narrate that Zayāna intervenes in "a calm, cool and gentle manner" saying that "*al-zāniya* is a woman .. who had genuinely loved .. but could not restrain [herself from expressing] her sexual desires .. and so people stoned her, fatally" (45). Through this definition by Zayāna, al-Sālim here, implicitly, criticises the injustice of the practice of forced marriage, and the oppression of women within marriage, claiming that it is the cause of women's commission of adultery.

Zayāna's definition of *zāniya* above implies a kind of feminist perspective on the imbalances embedded in the manner of executing the capital punishment for *zinā* in some Arab/Muslim societies, whereby it is only the *al-zāniya* (female) excluding the *al-zānī* (male) who is often held liable to the punishment. That the word for a male who commits adultery/fornication, *al-zānī*, is never used in the text of *Muzūn* suggests the prevalent existence of this form of sexual politics in Arabian society in particular. Her refusal to use the word *al-zānī*, points to the fact that the word has much less currency in the Arabian society than its feminine form, *al-zāniya*.

From an Islamic feminist perspective, presenting only the gruesome image of the stoned *al-zāniya* in the ancient castle of Muscat without that of the *al-zānī* is symbolic of a kind of superimposition of patriarchal values over those of religion. To punish the *al-zāniya* (female) to the exclusion of the *al-zānī* (male) is contravening to the very explicit, most specific Qur'anic injunction that both the adulterer and the adulteress be liable to punishment of equal magnitude: "The woman and the man guilty of adultery and fornication, flog each one of them with a hundred stripes [...]".[29]

That Muzūn's socialisation, under Zayāna's guardianship, is too deviant from the norms is demonstrated in a lengthy dialogue involving Muzūn and her half sisters with whom she lives in Kuwait (when she is studying for a degree in Journalism and Dramatic Arts). Unlike her sisters who were socialised in the conventional way, Muzūn believes in equality between the sexes, in female empowerment, self-esteem and, above all, in the concept of 'sexual revolution'. She believes much more in her profession (planning to become a TV producer, writer, dramatist) than being a "dedicated housewife". According to Muzūn, marriage often constitutes the chief avenue for the perpetuation of male domination over female, for the suppression of women's intellectual capabilities and professional development (160-167). Zayāna's divergent method of socialising Muzūn alienates the girl from the circle of her siblings (167). This suggests the fact that feminist ideology of gender equality at every level of human existence is yet to pervade Arabian society during the contemporary period when Muzūn's story in the novel is set.

Zayāna's final radicalisation of Muzūn's psyche in the novel is reflected in the effects of the former's disclosure of her "Great Secret" to the latter, featured in

the last part of the "Chapter of Awareness/Self-Identity". The Arabic word *ma'rifa*, after which the novel's chapter three is named, contextually refers both to Muzun's awareness/recognition of Zayāna as her biological grandmother, and her attainment of self-realisation. It is Muzūn's recognition of the reality of Zayāna's relationship with her and her mother, Zuwayna, that provides answer to her first quest: 'why does Zayāna specially and preferentially love and care for her and Zuwayna over even Zayāna's so-called biological children and grandchildren?' Her second quest for self-fulfilment is engendered by the attainment of the first, as I shall try to show below.

In the section tellingly entitled, "*Mi'rāj al-raḥma wa-l-khilāṣ*" (The Ladder of Mercy and Relief), Muzūn narrates how she eventually realises the two quests. The arrival in Oman of Bernard Martin, who brings the sad news about the death of Yves to Zayāna, engenders the latter's confession of her secret love and sexual affairs with Yves to Muzūn (287). Bernard's arrival constitutes a "relief" (288) not only for Zayāna, who was still awaiting the return of Yves, but also, for Muzūn, who has been searching for her identity as regards love and sexual relationships. Just as Zayāna had found in Yves her true soul mate, so too Muzūn, following her grandmother's lifestyle, soon finds in Bernard's personality the perfect soul mate she has been looking for. Admittedly, it is the achievement of self-satisfaction in the love relationship embodied in her emerging relationship with Bernard that was missing in Muzūn's earlier relationships with the two Arabian men: her late Kuwaiti husband, Khālid, and her Omani lover, Ḍārī.

Both Zayāna's courage in asserting her subjectivity as regards the control of her body and mind, and her bravery in disclosing the secret to Muzūn, provoke the latter's further exhibition of sexual freedom. Just as Yves had "displaced or

replaced" Ḥammūd in Zayāna's mind, so does Muzūn decide to abandon Dārī because of Bernard (303-304). Both Zayāna and Muzūn's acts of replacing their Arabian husbands or lovers in favour of their Western lovers symbolise women's rejection of the widespread traditional concept and practice of love and sexuality in Arabia.

While there is a big contrast between Zayāna and Zuwayna's love affairs, and Zuwayna and Muzūn's, the story of Zayāna's romantic love with Yves parallels that of Muzūn and Bernard. Apart from the fact that Zayāna was uneducated and unexposed to foreign cultures by the time of her encounter with Yves, whereas both Bernard and Muzūn are academically and intellectually compatible, and that the Zayāna-Yves relationship remains secret, while Muzūn-Bernad's is proclaimed, the stories of Zayāna and Muzūn's romantic love share some degree of similarity. Both love stories are romanticised, set against the background of romantic descriptions of the idyllic landscape of (ancient and modern) Omani cities, towns, and tourist attractions. Like Zayāna who voluntarily accompanied Yves in several of his anthropological research tours of Oman, Muzūn, too, offers to give both moral and professional support in his research visit to Oman.

It is Zayāna's belief that the achievement of female self-fulfilment, self-realisation is linked with women's realisation of sexual freedom, and their identification of their sexual identity. Following Zayāna's philosophy that "satisfaction lies but in satisfying the body" (304), Muzūn, too, expresses the belief that satisfaction of one's sexual desires is essential to human existence (*Ibid.*). Hence, she emulates her defiant grandmother in abandoning her Omani lover, Ḍārī, for the Frenchman, Bernard.

Muzun's proclamation of her sexual freedom can be regarded as symbolising the era of sexual "permissiveness" which, according to the novel, began to evolve in Arabian society, from the 1980's onward. I would like to argue here, on the other hand, that Muzūn's achievement of sexual freedom stems, not from the fact that the contemporary Arabian society is less restrictive, but from Zayāna's significant influence on Muzūn's social and psychic being.

Conclusion

That women's oppression through marriage and other social and cultural institutions, values, and practices in Arabian society is not transhistorical and transgenerational is evidenced in the respective stories of Zayāna, Zuwayna and Muzūn, as demonstrated above. The novel depicts modern Arabia as a dynamic society, where social change is happening, even if relatively slowly. Al-Sālim demonstrates that the first and second quarters of the twentieth century (Zayāna's generation) were the most conservatively pervasive periods in modern Arabia. The third quarter, roughly from 1950s (Zuwayna's generation) and characterised by the beginning of regional modernisation and urbanisation as a direct result of sudden economic fortunes generated from oil, was an era of cultural conflicts, a transition to a less conservative, less repressive patriarchal society. Finally, through the story of Muzūn, al-Sālim portrays the last quarters of the twentieth century as an era of 'feminist progress', a period of 'sexual permissiveness' in Arabia when forced marriage in particular becomes less prevalent and when women's education become widespread. The contemporary period, to which Muzūn belongs, is a period during

which boys and girls could meet and fall in love with each other in higher institutions, places of work and, in most recent years, via the Internet.

Zuwayna is a character to be empathized with; she is a victim of genital mutilation and she suffers from psychological depression. Zayāna is one to be envied, at least by an inclined feminist like Muzūn. Though a victim of several forms of patriarchal ideological and social oppression, Zayāna later assumes subjectivity and agency evoked by her sexual encounter with the Frenchman, Yves. As we have seen in the last section above, al-Sālim makes every effort to 'incarnate' the character of Zayāna in that of Muzūn.

Whereas Zayāna committed adultery because of sexual deprivation, Muzūn remains faithful to her own husband, Khālid, until death separated them. Muzūn's subsequent flirtations with men constitute a protest against patriarchal culture only in that it is an exhibition of female sexual freedom in defiance of the societal restraint on women's sexuality even in contemporary Arabia. Muzūn's assertion of her sexual freedom is portrayed chiefly as a means of achieving self-fulfilment through sexual identity that is satisfactory both to the female body and mind.

While al-Sālim could be identified in the characters of all her three protagonists, Zayāna, Zuwayna and Muzūn, it is in the character of Muzūn that the author's double can be identified. Like al-Sālim, Muzūn is a Kuwaiti; they both are educated up to higher institution level. Muzūn, like al-Sālim, is a creative writer in the novel, and becomes a widow at young age. But, in spite of being uneducated and less exposed to Western cultures and civilisation than Muzūn, Zayāna's thoughts and ideas are often expressed in a discursive, rhetorically philosophical manner that makes the reader identify her voice as authorial, and her actions and thoughts as

representative of those of the author. Zayāna's inability to proclaim her own sexual freedom suggests not her failure as a revolutionary figure, but the fact that her generation is fully entrapped within the confines of the Arabian patriarchal traditional social order.

Notes and References

1. Fawziyya Shuwaysh al-Sālim (1949-) began by writing poetry and short plays before changing to the novel. Before the publication of *Muzūn*, she published *al-Shams madhbūḥa wa-l-layl mahmūs* (1997) and *al-Nuwākhidha* (1998), both novels of social and historical realisms.
2. Fawziyya S. al-Sālim, *Muzūn: wardat al-ṣaḥrā'* (Beirut: Dār al-kunūz al-adabiyya, 2000). Except for some changes, the first section of my analysis of this novel, "Culture and sexuality", remains as it was presented at the British society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) Annual Conference held at SOAS, University of London in July 2004. I hereby acknowledge the comments made by members of the panel where the paper entitled, "Male Domination and Women's Revolt: Love and Sexuality in *Muzūn* by Fawziyya S. al-Sālim", was presented.
3. For an introduction to literary postmodernism and its narrative strategies, see Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: an Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, 2nd edition), pp. 91-94.
4. I would like to give a note here on the significance of al-Sālim's use of language as regards the names of her heroines and the Arabic word for adultery. The necessity of explaining this here will become clear as this chapter progresses. The words *zayāna* and its diminutive, *zuwayna*, simply means "beautiful" and are used as women's names. The word *muzūn*, or its singular form, *muzn,* is also a woman's name; it denotes "beauty" as well. *Muzūn* (pronounced with "u" after "m" also means "clouds of rain"; while *mazūn* (with "a" after "m" is an old name for Oman, the country where the story of the novel is largely is set. *Muzūn* as the title of the novel and, *wardat al-ṣaḥrā'* (Desert Rose) as its subtitle, are used contextually in the novel to serve to link women and nature (99, 103).

   Al-Sālim's advertent adoption of these names suggests a profound ambiguity, given their linguistic and contextual relations with the characters of the respective female figures that bear the names. Etymologically, the nominal words, *zayāna* and *zuwayna*, derive from the verbal root *zāna* (to beautify, ornament, decorate, adorn etc.), or the verbal noun *zayn* (beauty, prettiness); their other derivatives are *zīna, zayān, ziyāna, zayāna, zuwayna* etc. (For the meanings and various derivations of *zayn* and *muzn* see Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, vol. 13 (Beirut: Dār ṣādir, n.d.) pp. 200-203; 406-407; see also J. M. Cowan (ed.), *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, (New York: Ithaca, 1960).

   Juxtaposing these words connoting women and 'beauty' with the Arabic word for adultery, *zinā*, and its verbal root *zanā*, and its derivatives like *zāniya*, *zuwayniya*, feminine verbal nouns (see Cowan, *op. cit*., for example), exemplifies what in Arabic Rhetoric is called *jinās*, or assonance: words that sound similar but are/may be different in meaning. The pun here is specifically in the use of *zayāna* and *zāniya* with both of which the text of *Muzūn* is replete. According to the novel, the first heroine, Zayāna, is *zāniya* (an adulteress); the second, Zuwayna, is *bint zinā* (a product of an adulterous relationship); and the third, Muzūn, is not only *bint bint zinā* (granddaughter of an adulteress) but also a sexually free female figure. It is obvious, therefore, that linguistically and contextually the names Zayāna, Zuwayna and Muzūn are not only symbolic, but also, connotatively deviant from the norms. Al-Sālim gives her central female figures somehow societally 'acceptable' names, but which an analysis of the novel might interpret as connoting much deeper unacceptable meanings in the Arabian context. Just as the author's use of word play is evident in the frequent occurrence of these names and the words *zinā* and *zāniya*,

so too are there elements of pun in several other aspects of the novel's language (See *Muzūn*, pp. 9, 22, 46 etc.).

5. Fawziyya S. al-Sālim, *Ḥajar 'alā ḥajar* (Beirut: Dār al-kunūz al-adabiyya, 2003).
6. Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1977), p.154 quoted by Sue Spaull in 'Gynocriticism' in Sara Mills *et. al.*, *Feminist Readings/Feminists Reading* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 86.
7. See Haya al-Mughni, *Women in Kuwait: the Politics of Gender* (London: Saqi Books, 1993), p. 44.
8. Examples of Arabic novels that depict love and sexual encounters between Arabs and Westerners are Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's *'Uṣfūr min al-sharq* (1938), Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī's *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* (1944), Suhayl Idrīs' *al-Ḥāyy al-Lātīnī* (1954), and Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ's *Mawsim al-hijra ilā al-shamāl* (1969). Unlike al-Sālim's *Muzūn* under discussion in this chapter, the Arab-Western sexual encounters depicted in all of the above texts take place in Western countries (France and England); and the encounters happen between Arab men and European women. For more general information on the cultural implications of the Arab-West encounter depicted in the above-listed four texts see Issa J. Boullata, "Encounter Between East and West: A Theme in Contemporary Arabic Novels" in Issa J. Boullata (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature (1945-1980)* (Washington, D. C.: Three Continents Press, Inc., 1980), pp. 47-60.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Peter Manicas, "Agency and Recent Philosophy of Social Science" in http://www.libstudy.hawaii.edu/Manicas/pdf-_files/unpub/AgencyAndRecentPhilosophyOfScience.pdf. 1994 p. 5. This site was accessed on 18 May 2005.
11. This is a part of Bhashkar's definition of 'freedom/agency' cited in Peter Manicas, *op. cit.*
12. Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISAs) (in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, (trans.) Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), p. 152.
13. Louis Althusser, *op. cit.*, cited in Sara Mills *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
14. Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics*, first published in 1971, (London: Verso Press Limited, 1977), p. 62.
15. Miriam Cooke, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 59.
16. Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: the Marxist/Feminist Encounter* (London: Verso, 1988, revised edition), p. 46.
17. Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1847, 2nd edition).
18. The Marxist-Feminist Literature Collective, "Women's writing: Jane Eyre, Shirley, Villette, Aurora Leigh", *Ideology and Consciousness*, vol.1, no.3, (Spring, 1978) p. 29.
19. *Ibid.* Reference is made to Althusser's article on "Freud and Lacan" in Althusser, *op. cit.* p. 195.
20. Zayāna's ploys here are that she takes the advantage of Ṣāliḥa's earlier good relationship with Zuwayna's foster family to manipulate her ways so that she can be re-united with Zuwayna. Zayāna ingratiates Umm Salmān with money. Now a rich woman, having inherited from her late aristocratic husband, Ḥammūd, Zayāna establishes some trading companies in the Omani capital, Muscat (where she is based since her return from Zanzibar), and puts Umm Salmān's all-male biological children in charge (*Muzūn*, pp. 205-206).
21. Cooke, *op. cit.*, p. xii.

22. *Ibid.*, p. xx.
23. Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 210, cited in Marilyn Marxwell, *Male Rage, Female Fury: Gender and Violence in Contemporary American Fiction* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), p. 95.
24. Sally Robinson, *Engendering the Subject: Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York, 1991), p. 11), quoted in Maxwell, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
25. It is Zayāna who names the baby "Muzūn" shortly after the baby was delivered in an hospital in Muscat. At the time of Muzūn's birth, it is only the reader who can comprehend Zayāna's allusion to the reason why she has given what, according to the doctor who acts as midwife to Zuwayna, sounds as a very "strange" and "uncommon name for [Omani/Arabian] girls". Indirectly playing her role as the secret biological grandparent of Zuwayna's baby, Zayāna has given "Muzūn" as the baby's name in order to 'immortalise' her clandestine relationship with Yves (see *Muzūn*, p. 26).
26. Patricia Waugh, 'Modernism and Postmodernism, Gender: The View from Feminism' in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (eds.), *Feminisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 206.
27. *Ibid.*, 208.
28. See Maggie Humm (ed.), *Feminisms: A reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), "Glossary", p. 404.
29. Qur'ān 24:2. N.B. As evident in this Qur'anic verse stoning to death is not mentioned as punishment for adulterer and adulteress. Because it is not explicitly stated in the text of the Qur'ān, there is a divergence of opinion over this kind of capital punishment among Islamic scholars and jurists.

CONCLUSION

"Male Domination, Female Revolt: Race, Class and Gender in Kuwaiti Women's Fiction", as noted in the introduction, aims to contribute to the study and popularization of Kuwaiti women's fiction through the medium of English. This thesis maintains that some Kuwaiti women's fictional texts constitute a feminist 'literature of resistance' to male social, political and ideological domination. The selected fictional texts are particularly interested in representing some Kuwaiti and, by extension, Arabian women of the pre- and the first half of the twentieth century as resistant and non-conformist, and therefore, 'revolutionary', from the viewpoint of this thesis. This is in spite of the pervasiveness of patriarchal culture in the period in question, which is often referred to as the pre-oil era in Kuwait in particular.

We have seen in chapters three through six that Kuwaiti/Arabian women have suffered from several forms of social injustice under the Arabian patriarchal traditional system. The marginalisation of Kuwaiti women, which was much more prevalent in the pre-oil era than in post-oil Kuwaiti society, is treated in four of the five texts selected for this study. They are Hayfā Hāshim's short story "al-Intiqām al-rahīb" (1953), Laylā al-'Uthmān's short story "Min milaff imra'a" (1979) and novel *Wasmiyya takhruj min al-baḥr* (1986), and in the stories of Zayāna and Zuwayna in Fawziya al-Sālim's novel *Muzūn* (2000). This marginalisation, needless to say, has been part of the results of the traditional practice of women's seclusion.

While male domination in both the pre- and post-oil eras is usually ideologically sustained through the process of 'interpellation', it also sometimes involves the rule of repressive force. This suggests why the theme of 'gender and violence' features prominently in three of the texts considered in this thesis namely,

Hāshim's "al-Intiqām", al-'Uthmān's *Wasmiyya*, and Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm's *Mudhakkirāt khādim* (1995). "Al-Intiqām" and *Wasmiyya* present the most common form of gender and violence in Kuwaiti/Arabian society: male brutality and aggression against female. Lu'lu'a, the heroine of "al-Intiqām", is beaten to a coma by one of her older brothers for breaking seclusion rules when she defiantly goes out of the family house without the knowledge and permission of her brothers and without being in the company of any of her relatives. In *Wasmiyya*, the heroine of the novel, Wasmiyya, is subjected by her brother, Fahd, to serious beatings on several occasions for showing love and affection for Abdullah, the hero of the novel. Al-Ibrāhīm's *Mudhakkirāt* demonstrates how a husband, Naṣir, kills his wife, Hudā, in order to avoid the young woman becoming a victim of rape.

All the above forms of brutality are perpetrated by Kuwaiti male figures who claim to be preventing the occurrence of *faḍīḥā*, or social dishonour, to their respective families. As explained at various points in chapters three to six, *faḍīha* – the terrible loss of a family's social standing – is incurred through the involvement of a female member of the family in an un-solemnised, whimsical or forceful (through rape), sexual activity.

Al-'Uthmān's other story "Min milaff", studied together with "al-Intiqām" in chapter three, conversely presents another form of gender and violence: female aggression against male. The unnamed heroine of "Min milaff" – a fourteen-year old girl forced by her parents to marry a seventy-year old, sexually inactive man – kills her husband. A much less common form of gender and violence in Kuwaiti/Arabian society, female aggression against male is portrayed by al-'Uthmān in this short story

as a form of protest not only against the practice of forced marriage but also against the Arabian hierarchical social order as a whole.

Class is a determining factor in the perpetration of some forms of women's oppression in Kuwaiti society. For instance, it was only the upper-class women who were reduced to total seclusion in the pre-oil era. For economic reasons, the lower and middle class women from the poorer family backgrounds in the pre-oil era were not completely secluded. Examples of these two category of pre-oil Kuwaiti women are found in al-'Uthmān's *Wasmiyya.* Whereas both Wasmiyya and her mother represent the upper/merchant-class women of that era, Abdullah's mother who works outside her home as domestic assistance to several rich families represents the lower/middle class women of the pre-oil era. Furthermore, it was only the lower/middle class Kuwaiti girls of the mid-twentieth century who were denied by their families the right to be educated even up to primary level. This is reflected, for example, in "al-Intiqām" (discussed in chapter two) in the narrative of Lu'lu'a's forceful withdrawal from school before the completion of her second year primary education. The upper/merchant-class Kuwaiti girls of the middle of the twentieth century in particular were the first to be educated to university level. As noted in chapter three, before the establishment of Kuwait University in 1966, some of them had to go abroad to study in Egypt and Britain, as noted in chapter two.

This thesis acknowledges the fact that not all Kuwaiti women's fictional narratives portray women as defiant and non-conformist. But it is important to stress, at the same time, that not all Kuwaiti and Arabian women have been passive and submissive. The selected texts have been tagged the Kuwaiti "feminist revolutionary

texts" because they represent female resistance to patriarchal social and ideological oppression.

Lu'lu'a, the girl in Hāshim's "al-Intiqām", resists particularly her physical oppression by her brothers through a suicidal destruction of the family's compound. Al-'Uthmān's unnamed heroine of "Min milaff" perpetrates a murderous rebellion against her family-imposed, aged husband. Engaging in a defiant secret love affair, and breaking several seclusion rules are the forms of defiance and resistance to male domination exerted by Wasmiyya, the heroine of al-'Uthmān's *Wasmiyya.* In *Mudhakkirāt*, al-Ibrāhīm's Madam Sāra resists several efforts by her patriarchally inclined son to make her conform to the class and racial discrimination ideologies prevalent in post-oil Kuwaiti society. The most significant form of Madam Sāra's resistance to patriarchal hegemony is her engagement in an interracial marriage with her male Indian servant. Moreover, the most notable form of female defiance depicted in Fawziyya al-Sālim's *Muzūn* is Zayāna's – the first heroine of the novel's – indulgence in an adulterous relationship with a westerner, Frenchman Yves.

One thing to be noted in the kind of agency constructed by the authors of the selected texts concerns Kuwaiti/Arabian women's gaining of 'voice'. Most of the pre-oil Kuwaiti/Arabian female figures, who are representationally able to exert their freedom and resist their oppression, lack voice. Thus, even though each of the heroines of "al-Intiqām", "Min milaff", *Wasmiyya* and, in the case of *Muzūn*, Zayāna, subjectively defies the Arabian patriarchal social order, they all lack voice. Their inability to speak out against their oppression points to the pervasiveness of Arabian patriarchal conservatism in the pre-oil era and up to the middle of the twentieth century.

'Sacrifice' is, moreover, another notable feature of the kind of female agency the revolting Arabian woman of the pre-oil era might want to assert. Both Lu'lu'a (in Hāshim's al-Intiqām) and Wasmiyya (in al-'Uthmān's *Wasmiyya*) sacrifice their lives in their respective ways in order to escape further patriarchal oppression. But, rather than resorting to 'self-sacrifice', each of the unnamed killer-heroine of al-'Uthmān's "Min milaff" and Zayāna in al-Sālim's *Muzūn* enacts a strategy of survival in her respective way. The former eliminates her husband. The latter silently engages in several acts of subversion and disruption of Arabian traditional social order which include Zayāna's secret indulgence in an extra-marital affair, giving birth to and raising (indirectly and, later, directly) an illegitimate child (Zuwayna), and working against the further interpellation of her all-female descendants by the socially constructed notion of female inferiority.

A Changing Society: Class and Gender, Love and Sexuality in Post-oil Kuwait

Some of the changes that have happened in the situations of women in post-oil Kuwaiti/Arabian society are depicted in the characters of Madam Sāra and Hudā in al-Ibrāhīm's *Mudhakkirāt*, and in the story of Muzūn in al-Sālim's *Muzūn*. As discussed in chapters five and six, these two novels demonstrate that women's participation in the public sphere is commonplace in post-oil Kuwaiti society in particular. The use of the veil, which has continued in some quarters of Kuwaiti society, no longer constitutes a barrier to women's aspirations in terms of education and attainment of economic independence.

Class might constitute a factor in the continuous practice of strict seclusion in some sections of contemporary Kuwait as some women from conservatively

traditionalist families are still reduced to seclusion. But seclusion is no longer a reason for women's denial of education and job opportunities. Regardless of their class affiliations and religious persuasions – whether belonging to the progressive or conservative elements in society – Kuwaiti women of the contemporary period could attain to any level of education as well as of civil and public services. In the present-day Kuwait, where 85% of its adult population (15 years and above) are literate, women constitute 67% of its university graduates.[1] Kuwaiti women, 77.50% of whom are literate,[2] have held and continue to hold a lot of high-ranking positions in government and private organisations and institutions.

Al-Ibrāhīm's Madam Sāra and al-Sālim's Muzūn typify the post-oil Kuwaiti women who are not only educated and enlightened but also members of the working-class. Madam Sāra works as a schoolteacher with her Diploma certificate and, after her retirement, establishes and personally directs a trading company in Kuwait. Muzūn holds a degree in Dramatic Arts from a higher institution in Kuwait, and moves on to work as a TV producer in Oman.

Women's gaining of voice is one of the hallmarks of the post-oil era. Whereas the uneducated pre-oil Kuwaiti women – represented notably by the unnamed heroine of al-'Uthmān's "Min milaff", Wasmiyya (in al-'Uthmān's *Wasmiyya*), and Zayāna (in al-Sālim's *Muzūn*) – lack voice as explained above, Madam Sāra and her daughter Hudā (in al-Ibrāhīm's *Mudhakkirāt*), and Muzūn (in *Muzūn*) all represent the post-oil Kuwaiti women who have gained voice. Madam Sāra, Hudā and Muzūn are respectively portrayed as the feminist-inclined modern Kuwaiti women who are able to speak out against patriarchal social and ideological

domination. Each of them openly acts in contradiction to the Arabian traditional conventional order as explained in the last two chapters of this thesis.

'Race' has become a serious determinant in the definition of 'class' in post-oil Kuwaiti society. One point to be further clarified here is that race and nationality mean almost the same thing in the context of post-oil Kuwait. Kuwaiti women are especially discriminated against in the issue of marriage if their husbands are non-Kuwaitis. Regardless of the race to which a man belongs – Arab, Asian, white or black – a Kuwaiti woman married to him will be discriminated against not really by the generality of the Kuwaiti people, but by some of the policies of the male-dominated Kuwaiti government.

Ṭayyiba al-Ibrāhīm's *Mudhakkirāt* is an example of Kuwaiti women's fiction that treats the interplay of class and race in the perpetration of the modern forms of women's oppression in Kuwait. The late Hidāya al-Sālim's short story "Kharīf bilā maṭar" (1972), discussed briefly in comparison with *Mudhakkirāt* in chapter five, is another example of Kuwaiti texts that reflect how racial (or nationality) discrimination is affecting gender relations in the post-oil/post war era. Whereas *Mudhakkirāt* depicts racial discrimination as it affects a Kuwaiti woman's relationship with her Indian male servant, "Kharīf bilā maṭar" explores how a Kuwaiti woman is 'compelled' to forgo her love for a non-Kuwaiti Arab man.

'Forced marriage', which is one of the major forms of women's objectification in Arabian society in general, continues to be less prevalent in the post-oil era. (The pervasiveness of this practice in the pre-oil era is reflected in al-'Uthmān's "Min milaff", and in the story of Zayāna in al-Sālim's *Muzūn*). That

marriage is becoming less pervasive is portrayed in al-Ibrāhīm's *Mudhakkirāt* and al-Sālim's *Muzūn*. While it is not clear whether or not the heroine of *Mudhakkirāt*, Madam Sāra—a woman born in the mid-twentieth century—is herself a victim of forced marriage, the novel explicitly states that Madam Sāra as matriarch does not force her daughter Hudā to marry Nāṣir (Hudā's husband). Similarly in *Muzūn*, even though she is a victim of forced marriage – she was forced to marry her husband, Ḥammūd – Zayāna as matriarch does not conform to this conventional practice with regard to the marriage of daughters, Khawla, Mayyā and Zuwayna, and granddaughter, Muzūn.

Both *Mudhakkirāt* and *Muzūn*, moreover, depict the emergence of elements of 'sexual revolution' – women claiming their sexual and marital rights – in post-oil Kuwaiti/Arabian society. We have seen in chapter five how al-Ibrāhīm's Hudā is prepared to seek divorce from her husband on the basis of the latter's alleged disloyalty. This is irrespective of whether or not the ground on which she is seeking divorce is acceptable under Kuwaiti family law. Portrayed as a radical minded would-be feminist figure, Hudā's expressions and actions in the novel suggest that some contemporary Kuwaiti women would rather seek divorce than allow their husbands to practice polygamy, a practice that was more commonplace in the pre-oil era.

In al-Sālim's transgenerational novel *Muzūn* we have a complete picture of the process of the emergence of some level of 'sexual revolution' in specifically Kuwaiti and Omani societies. (*Muzūn* arguably combines several elements of every other Kuwaiti women's fictional text considered in this thesis. Just as *Muzūn* contains elements of the experiences of Kuwaiti and Arabian women of the pre-oil

era (reflected in al-'Uthmān's "Min milaff" and *Wasmiyya*) and the much more conflicted mid-twentieth century (depicted in Hāshim's "al-Intiqām"), so too does it incorporate elements of the post-oil Kuwaiti/Arabian life).

Like al-Ibrahīm's *Mudhakkirāt*, *Muzūn* depicts the social status of the 'partially-emancipated' Kuwaiti/Arabian woman of the last quarters of the twentieth century. In *Muzūn*, al-Sālim reflects how the co-education system (as practised in countries like Kuwait and Oman for example) has become an avenue for girls and boys to meet and befriend each other. It is through this avenue that Muzūn meets and later marries her Kuwaiti husband, Khālid. The work place is also another important avenue through which contemporary Arabian women could meet their prospective lovers/husbands. This is represented in the narratives of Muzūn's flirtations with men after the death of her husband, Khālid. While working as a TV producer in Oman, Muzūn meets and befriends the Omani Ḍārī, and later the Frenchman Bernard Martin.

The induction of women into the public sphere through education and employment has lessened the degree of the suppression of Arabian women's love and sexual expressions. Even in the so-called most conservative of the modern Arab Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, there have been some changes as regards the status of women in society in general.[3] From the 1990s to date, Kuwaiti/Arabian women have the opportunity of expressing their love and sexual desires to an unimaginable degree even right from their homes. This has been made possible by the introduction of two ultra-modern technologies – satellite television and the Internet – into the social and economic systems of the region. Through these new technologies, a great many of Arabian women have been exposed to the world beyond their restrictive

environments. Through satellite, rather than the always-censored state-controlled television, interested Arabians in general and women in particular now watch a variety of western films having love scenes.

The Internet has made possible online dating. While in Kuwait between December 2002 and March 2003, I personally logged on to a website of this nature. The website, which will be rendered anonymous here for security reasons, is run presumably by a US-based Islamic organisation concerned with the problems of marriage in Arab communities at home and abroad. I found that the percentage of Kuwaiti and Arabian girls who subscribed to the website and were seeking love and marital relationships through this medium, was far higher than that of their male counterparts.

The higher level of Kuwaiti/Arabian women's interest in online dating corroborates what was reported in an article in *Saudi Gazette* of the 7th of November 1999 that "[Saudi] women are the ones spending the most time at their computer terminals, and the trend is increasing."[4] Miriam Cook cites this article in her *Women Claim Islam* while explaining the role of information technology on the growing awareness (feminist and political consciousness) among women in the Arab and Muslim worlds in general and in Saudi Arabia in particular. She mentions some of the ways through which some Arab and Muslim women around the world have been connecting one another very easily, and the implications which the revolution in information technology is having on Arab/Islamic feminist activism. In the book, published just in 2001, Cook notes further that "It is too early to know what the cultural outcome will be, but the fact that this radically new form of connection among the most disconnected section of the [Saudi/Arabian] population has caught

on so widely is suggestive." "Sex segregation", she concludes "seems to have enhanced networking among women [...]"[5]

This thesis would argue, however, that the revolution in information technology has been having some cultural implications in Kuwait in particular and Arabian society in general. Those cultural implications are not only as regards the process of the radicalisation of the mentality of Arabian female youths, but also as regards their perceptions of love, sex and sexuality. It appears that Arabian girls/young women spend the most time on the Internet not only for the purpose of friendship and comradeship in the face of continual patriarchal domination in the region, but also for making connection with prospective male lovers.

Another thing I noticed in the contents of the 'advertisements' placed by the Kuwaiti female subscribers to the online-dating website has to do with the issue of race and nationality, which is a major theme in al-Ibrāhīm's *Mudhakkirāt* discussed in chapter five and briefly explained above. For example, one Kuwaiti female seeker of a male for marital relationship stated that the most essential thing (*ahamm al-shay'i*) she requires in the prospective husband is that "he should be a *khalījī*", or a national of one of the oil-rich Arab Gulf countries (excluding the impoverished Yemen). This suggests that there has been a shift in the societal inhibition of Kuwaiti women's marriage with non-Kuwaitis. That shift, as suggested in the above quotation, is still discriminatory, though. And the discrimination is not only against Kuwaiti women's marriage with people of other races, but also against Arabs of other nationalities outside the oil-rich Arab Gulf countries.

The Future of Kuwaiti Women's Fiction: Islamic Feminism and Postmodern Debates

This study perceives a promising future for Kuwaiti women's fiction. As noted in chapter two, there has been an upsurge in the number of women writing and publishing fictional works is the present-day Kuwait. This has been due largely to Kuwaitis' experience of war during the Iraqi occupation of their country in the early 1990s. On the threshold of the twenty-first century, Kuwaiti women's fiction is apparently in another transition period. Some Kuwaiti women writers have started engaging in postmodern and postcolonial debates. While one recognises the fact that the issue of literary post/modernism and postcolonialism in Kuwaiti women's fiction would require another research of its own and wider in scope than this thesis, some notes would be necessary here to suggest that the postmodern movement in the Kuwaiti female literary tradition has already been launched.

Of all the texts studied in this thesis, al-Sālim's *Muzūn* appears to be the one that best represents Kuwaiti women's fiction in the literary postmodern debate. As noted at several points in chapter six, *Muzūn* has several elements of what Miriam Cook has called the 'Islamic-feminist' discourse. In addition to engaging in a dialogue with the 'hegemonic' Western feminism, this novel subtly appropriates elements of the modern and contemporary Islamic discourse.

Islam, needless to say, has had a tremendous influence on the Arab culture in general over the centuries. This perhaps informs the usual confusion, or lack of a clear-cut distinction between Arab customs and traditions and Islamic values. Certainly, few references are directly made in most Kuwaiti women's fictional works (including the selected texts) to Islam's position on issues of gender relations and gender roles in society. It is always implied in those texts, however, that the Arabian

hierarchical social order is contradictory to the teachings of Islam in line with which the former claims to be operating.

While the other selected texts assume that the problems facing Kuwaiti/Arabian women are engendered by patriarchal culture and, therefore, they make no connection between cultural practices and Islam, *Muzūn* reflects the mixing up of Islamic religious beliefs and values with Arabian traditional customs. Even though *Muzūn* itself does not quote directly from the Qur'ān, it makes numerous allusions to different Islamic jurisprudential viewpoints on especially issues like adultery (*zinā*), child illegitimacy, abortion, human and sexual rights some of which were discussed in chapter six.

With the publication of *Muzūn* in 2000, the history of Kuwaiti women's fiction thus appears to have taken a new dimension. *Muzūn* can be classified, in terms of its 'experimental' narrative strategy and its discursive and interrogative content as discussed in the last chapter, alongside the postmodern and postcolonial Arabic novel.[6]

By situating their fiction within the socio-cultural and historical contexts in which it is produced, as this thesis has tried to do, we can see the type of egalitarian society, free, specifically, from gender discrimination and patriarchal oppression that Kuwaiti women writers propose. Raising their voice through every possible means including literature (as evidenced in the selected texts covering a period of nearly half a century, 1953 –2000), Kuwaiti women continue to fight against their patriarchal social and political marginalisation. The month of May 2005, marking the completion of this research, is a historic month in the history of Kuwait. It also marks the passing of a Kuwaiti parliamentary bill granting Kuwaiti women's suffrage. Both

the granting of Kuwaiti women their long overdue political rights to vote and to become members of the Kuwaiti parliament, and the appointment of the first Kuwaiti female cabinet minister in June 2005[7] signify a 'feminist progress'. Perhaps, this will engender the evolution of a new trend in Kuwaiti women's literature in particular.

Some areas of further academic research might be to focus on the sociology of Kuwaiti women's fiction. For example, one might want to consider the consumption, or reception, of fictional works in Kuwaiti society; and to ask what impact, if any, have literary representations had on women readers in particular. It might be worthwhile to compare the representation of 'gender' in Kuwaiti men's and women's fictional writings, or compare fictional narratives by Kuwaiti and other Arab women writers, or Kuwaiti and Western women writers. While acknowledging the fact that several of Kuwaiti women's works have been translated into foreign languages notably Russian, Yugoslavian, Polish and English, more efforts in this regard might also be worthwhile.

Notes and References

1. See Kuwaiti Information Office (USA) website: http://www.kuwait-info.org/country_profile.html. (This site was last accessed on 11/8/2005).
2. *Ibid.*
3. For more on the changing status of women in contemporary Saudi Arabia see Saddeka Arebi, *Women and Words in Saudi Arabia: the Politics of Literary Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); and Miriam Cook, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism Through Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. xvi, 2, 115-118.
4. Cook, *op. cit.* p. 116.
5. *Ibid.*
6. For more on the postmodern and post-colonial novel in the mainstream Arabic literature see Muhsin J. al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: E J Brill, 2003); and Stefan G. Meyer, *The Experimental Arabic Novel: Postcolonial Literary Modernism in the Levant* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).
7. For more information on the passing of the bill granting Kuwaiti women's suffrage and the appointment of the first female minister see, for example, ArabicNews.com website:
   http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/050613/2005061320.html

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