

Feminist Discourse Strategies of Estrangement and Transcendence in the Modern Qatari Story

استراتيجيات الاغتراب والتعالي في الخطاب النسوي في القصة القطرية الحديثة

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the feminine narrative discourse (short story) in Qatar by employing the concept of discourse as a cultural practice. These stories aim to reflect female perspectives parallelly in numerous contexts to deconstruct a dominant society in which female writers practice their craft. Firstly, they focus on the representation of women—the body and soul—because this strategy aims to stress female existence. As the female presence is incomplete, this encompasses personality, the social perspective, and functional roles. A second strategy involves presenting limited communication, as the majority of female–male relationships are incomplete in most stories. Thirdly, these stories criticise community values that besiege the female existence. All three strategies include the stories as a textual context and disclose some themes (e.g., the stories' content), but they possess another discourse function that is associated with the confrontation between the female configuration and society's values.

Keywords: Narrative discourse, feminism, short story, society, Qatar

ملخص البحث:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى اكتناه الخطاب النسوي القصصي في قطر، عبر الالتقاء على مفهوم الخطاب بوصفه ممارسة ثقافية. إذ لوحظ بأن الخطاب النسوي القصصي يعكس بوضوح منظور المرأة، وموقفها ضمن سياقات ثقافية متعددة، إذ يتقصّد عبر اللجوء إلى نماذج قصصية فكفكة الهيمنة المجتمعية الذكورية خطابياً من خلال ثلاث استراتيجيات: أولاً إقامة نوع من التمثيلات الخاصة بالأنا الأنثوية بما يشمل ثنائية تعالي الروح والجسد من منطلق مواجهة مفاهيم أو مقولات تتعلق بنقص الوجود الأنثوي أو النسوي على مستوى المضمون والشخصية والمنظور، كما الأدوار الوظيفية. ثانياً إبراز انحسار قيم التواصل مع النموذج الذكوري، ومحدوديته، ولا اكتماله، وأخيراً نقد بعض السياقات المجتمعية، وقيمها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخطاب السردى، النسوية،

القصة القصيرة، المجتمع، قطر.

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Introduction

A prominent phenomenon in the literary scene in Qatar involves an increase in female writers; a story is a form of expression that hoists and reflects issues related to women and their location along the social structure. The discourse of the Qatari story has produced many strategies that maintain a feminist existence of body and mind apart from the possession of a patriarchal society even in the event that it is owned or controlled by order. The female mind remains impossible to possess; there is an apparently legitimate rejection of the idea of dominating and owning women as objects or subjects or looking at their bodies and existences in total as sins¹.

Our methodology has been heavily based on short stories and references during the last quarter of the 20th century and the first quarter of the 21st due to a period of development in the region, specifically in Qatar. We will apply a cultural approach to the subject at hand by analysing relevant Qatari stories. In these stories, the woman refuses to be subordinate, which requires that she isolate or seclude herself. There exists no communication or well-connected relationship with society or with men, as the woman in most stories prevents the ownership of her body and soul because she considers both sacred or forbidden objects. The Qatari story attempts to achieve some goals, the most important of which involves criticising society in general; this criticism includes men and the institution of marriage. This attitude poses side effects because it guides a female rebel who is often antagonistic towards and wishes to be rid of her body, which prevents her from being a free human.

At the beginning of the 20th century, women were prohibited from the right to obtain an education or participate in public life. By the middle of the 20th century, circumstances began to improve along with the emergence of women's movements and

the development of Arab societies. At the turn of the 21st century, what was achieved was still considered insufficiently inadequate due to cultural reasons². However, a set of customs and traditions have facilitated the dominance of masculine features in society, thus giving men areas or spaces of freedom, power, and additional options. These privileges are not available for women, who suffer from the derogation of many of their rights regarding employment, education, and emotional values such as love, relationships, and marriage.

This article aims to investigate women's attitudes that go against the grain of androcentric social practices. Stories narrate the isolation and exclusion of the female soul and physical existence, the lack of communication between women and men, and relationships to the community in some contexts. This paper applies a feminist discourse analysis based on Sarah Mills's representations of groups. She stresses themes that are linked to women and discuss hegemony and power, which are not limited to topics such as class, race, sex, or the position of women in daily life—referring to their caring for children and doing domestic chores as political rather than personal issues³. Mills refers to society's representations that categorise women as psychiatric patients when society imposes bodily forms and behaviours that force them into developing anorexia and/or depression. Moreover, this is combined with representations that demean women through particular stereotypes.

Society produces the 'dominant masculine' as a cultural value, and this forces women to write against the hegemony that affects the female existence. Women have begun seeking to respond via narratives—or patterns in discourse—such as short stories that enable them to express their attitudes towards these dominant values in a society that often does not tolerate female behaviour based on self-

esteem and freedom. This article investigates the feminist short story discourse in Qatar through feminist representations in existence—namely body and soul—within the manifestations of the social role, which include family, marriage, love, and human relationships.

There exists an assumption that women's writing in Qatar is adopting a sort of exclusion—a contravention of societal values and male domination—by excluding the female body and soul and considering these two elements as a forbidden issue that should be maintained. This leads to estrangement and exclusion against the patriarchal community system. Regarding that, we noticed that there exists no communication or connection within most relationships in narratives that reflect the cultural attitudes we will examine through some samples from authors including Kaltham Jabr, Nora Al-Saad, Huda Al-Nuaimi, Bushra Saleh, Hessa Al-Awadi, and Noura Faraj, among others. However, we will juxtapose a section that examines male representations of women to reflect and understand the image of women in masculine writing. In addition, this article seeks to answer the following related questions:

- Is there a feminist discourse involving discussion of the duality, body, and soul in the contemporary Qatari story?
- What representations do the Qatari stories depict of the body and the mind?
- How does a woman perceive her body and female existence?
- What are the strategies feminist writings use to resist social values?
- Does there exist an apparent female attitude as a reaction to the power and dominance of male society?

To capture women's representation in the Qatari contemporary narrative discourse, the authors applied a cultural perspective that, as a tool, is more efficient in reflecting the attitude present in feminine writing. The authors will examine women's troubled

relationship with society through a series of narratives that both act as a discourse based on the principle of order to substitute empowerment and aim to determine clear statements regarding the representation of the female existence through the body and soul in parallel with women's position in society's narrative, which possesses a different conservative attitude.

Feminist question: Body and mind

Feminist themes appear in the overall narrative discourse in Qatar due to the abundance of women's voices in the field of narrative writing. There exists a phenomenon of feminine writing in Qatar due to a large number of female writers or authors residing in Qatar⁴; this phenomenon supports a drafting pattern that deals with feminist themes, focuses on female existence, and necessitates that we examine the representations of women's collective body and mind in the culture because many stories have noticed that society perceives the female body as an object and something of lower rank—at times a detraction—and considers a woman as a body without a soul or mind.

Some cultures view the female body as inferior or subordinate, and here we use the opinion of Salman al-Oadah, a Muslim preacher who enjoys expressing an Islamic perspective through broad media coverage. He announced the dualism of the mind and body, asserting that 'The body is subservient, and the soul is in charge'⁵. He emphasised the value of beauty that both elements enjoyed but stressed the relationship that makes the soul the leader and the body the subordinate⁶. We find the same discussion or pattern in the classical cultures:

*Dualism in the body in traditional religious philosophy is understood through dialectic with the soul; it represents a material, he was always the second in the existential hierarchy, the wrong in the moral authority, and the relative in the aesthetic hierarchy*⁷.

Some other cultures perceive the female body as separate from the mind; while men belong to rational creatures, women do not fall into this category⁸. The Stanford Philosophical Encyclopedia discusses this dualism based on body and mind. We can identify clear signs of rejecting the view that renders women an object (Lennon, 2014), which brings us to many questions that are discussed in Western expressions of the body's representation, such as perceptions of possession and pleasure as well as the body as value that is owned by others⁹.

Feminist movements have contributed to the emergence of currents and groups seeking to undermine this perception specifically in Western culture, including the rise of the women's movement after World War I that attempted to reject and resist these representations by recalling sexual equality and by rejecting control and possession of the female body¹⁰. Thus, transformations in the Western model transcend the dominance of society or masculinity that considers the female body as a lower type, which is essential for evaluating the female presence by an intellectual and mental formation beyond the body theme.

Abdullah Al-Guthami believes the female body in Arabic culture is stuck in the space of language, history, and perceptions created by men. The female body is excluded, and it becomes an object that excites men's minds as an ideal object¹¹. Al-Mernissi repositions the body not only in some historical and sociological interpretations of epistemology subjects¹², but also from the minds of those who hold power¹³. Al-Mernissi delineates the boundaries of the body and spirit horizon within the word *Al-Hareem*—meaning exclusion and siege—which is the antithesis of *Halal*. The concept of *Hareem of the family*, from this point of view, means the place organised and protected by his law¹⁴.

This siege requires that women search for a horizon of freedom and salvation despite their flying through the wings of dreams¹⁵. There exists no doubt that the sign of flying on a dream's wings acts as a metaphor that leads us to imagine that women may achieve salvation or perhaps an opportunity to escape the constraints of society or undermine the male component. Moreover, feminine writing works as an area of destruction in representations that create a counter image.

The Qatari story: Writing as an undermining field

Women's status and conditions have produced a pattern of imagined writing that guides us to emphasise the imagination as an area that cannot pose any consequences in real life. It comes, however, as a reaction against practices such as a woman's inability to travel without concession to choose her partner or lifestyle. A woman is always under a man's control, and thus, her world is very limited. From this principle, imaginative stories were written that vexingly express women's attitudes and suitable actions in this limited world. Female writings have begun removing this feminine body and soul from man; there is no connection between men and women, and thus, in addition to isolating the body and mind, it remains limitedly related to society.

In social traditions, women, including their bodies and souls, are often perceived as private property. For that reason, in these writings, there occurs an absolute refusal to reduce the body and consider it as an object owned by the husband or men in general. This leads female writings to consider a woman's body and soul as forbidden or even sacred, and thus prompts these writers to perceive themselves as human beings with emotional value rather than as mere objects. We noticed that most of Qatar's stories were written by women who draw a negative image of marriage or refuse an arranged

marriage without considering the women's choice. In addition, they reject any practice of confiscating a woman's right to work and become educated through a parallel exploitation of the woman's body. As soon as a woman grows old, she is replaced—namely when her husband's economic conditions change because of wealth, which thus allows him to replace that female body with a younger one without paying attention to the former's feelings.

Many stories condemn and denounce the ignoring of women's choices. There exist many cases of forced marriage as a result of social circumstances (e.g., traditions) that are linked to the appearance form or structure. A hidden pattern or form of resistance prevents the man from exploiting the woman—especially her body and soul—even though marriage is not based on free choices, but rather builds upon society's requirements and beliefs.

Many female characters in the analysed stories express their rejection as a critical behaviour in response to this situation, which leads us to determine that there is, indeed, a grave problem. This image or representation of the female body and soul exists in many cultures, yet it is placed under the light, and many changes are occurring in regard to this issue. The current context is that feminine writing in Qatar began realising and consequently began criticising this problem. Women in Qatar became involved in the female movement; they began fitting with the global context by realising feminine existence in their local society¹⁶. In addition, they are attempting to criticise some values, but they do not possess options such as breaking the rules and becoming more open by choosing partners or forming relationships of any kind due to many reasons—the most important of which being religious and/or moral. As a consequence, women have opted to isolate their bodies and souls even if they are married; however, as we noticed in many stories, their minds and feelings remain free.

Masculine writing with a female as the object

To understand the strategies of feminine writing in Qatar, we must recall the images of women in masculine writing by examining some sample female stereotypes that reflect the image of women as human beings. We noticed that most stories draw women through bodily representations, not through their minds or feelings. Ahmed Abdul Malik (2013), in 'Window No. (4)', refuses to consider the relationship as a tool for testing the husband's sincerity. In the story, which deals with the values of sex education¹⁷, the author refers to the disconnected communication between a husband and his wife as a result of the spouse's reluctance that resembles a farmer who does not understand the sadness of the fruits' survival on their branches without picking them—especially the first one¹⁸. This leads us to highlight men's respect for the female body through masculine writing, which undoubtedly leads to greater stress on the physical representation of women. Women become objects that should be benefited from before they expire. In the same story, the wife feels happy when she leaves the country and goes shopping in London. We notice the stereotype of a woman who does not possess any significant matter apart from shopping and having a good time; she is shallow and naive, as she is fifty years old and realises that her body has become old and is no longer fruitful.

Al-Guthami discusses this discipline—the impact of time on the female body—as some societies and cultures observe women through their bodies rather than their minds¹⁹. This attitude forces a woman to safeguard her body from a man, as she is reduced to just a body, a fruit whose powers will expire someday. The man always wants a woman with a young body to maintain his feeling of virility.

Pivoting around the female body can be found in some stories of Hazzaa Khalifa

(2013), especially in his book *Same Faces*. However, through an ironic tone centred on women from the male society's perspective, events and a plot are fabricated. Many coincidences weaken the structures of stories that focus on the female body as a subject. The story 'Strange Love' discusses marriage difficulties due to dowry size for both traditional reasons and reputation. The act of asking for an excessively high dowry essentially objectifies women. For this reason, men prefer marrying Indonesian women because their dowries are smaller than are those of local women. This perspective brings us to the overall idea that some—not all—men want merely a body, not a mind. A woman is looked upon as a value or commodity that can be cheaper in some places than in others.

Men's thinking is linked to a critical representation related to an ethnic issue, although we can identify another aspect of this attitude wherein the man pursues a woman from a different ethnicity or race due to miscommunication with the local women. We observe the same concept in Mohsen Al-Hajri's stories²⁰, one of which—'Uncovered Women'²¹—exhibits a female character working as a dancer. She is trying to create a business and then develop it to meet modern technology, which creates stress on the female body as a tool; this accompanies many representations in several stories that try to present female models who are talkative, nervous, superficial, naïve, and sceptical.

Strategies of Isolation and Exclusion

Feminist discourse: An initial split

The first schism against masculine structure moved to analyse community practices that reflect a negative culture regarding women. In her first attempt to write stories in Qatar, Kaltham Jabr, in her book *You Are the Forest of Silence and Hesitation*²², discusses a man's negativity

weakness in front of the community wherein he cannot rid society's control of namely old traditions and customs; therefore, he is silent, hesitant, and unable to challenge the values of a conservative society. As a result, we find a condemnation of society and its values in addition to men, meaning a system deals with women using negative practices. In this story, the same man expresses his love and commitment to his woman, but when he returns to his country (called 'The land of the sun', as a metaphor), he stops revealing his love in public; rather, he becomes silent and forgets his commitment²³. This occurrence highlights the pattern of lacking communication between women and men due to the established norms and fear of society's judgement. In general, there exists a crisis in society in regard to dealing with love, which is linked to society's direct criticism that lightly and unappreciatively deals with women and their feelings. Moreover, in this story, the society worked as an incubator and protector of negative male attitudes against women.

Another aspect of disconnection between the woman and man is represented by the man's negativity due to his compliance with society's values. In another story, 'Except That He Was a Dwarf'²⁴, the man marries the woman who was chosen by the family rather than the woman he loved. The dwarf represents a man with a weak personality who is deemed a coward for giving up the woman he loves to follow his family's order. This plot is similar to that of another story, but from a different aspect; women who refuse to marry have a different perspective than men had in the past, as men anticipated women as bodies, or as a prohibition, a sin, and/or an evil being, thus reflecting that a full society has been and is currently being fed concepts based on heritage and traditional conception.

We identified the same strategy that criticises the social and masculine order in Nora Al-Saad's stories. In her book,

'Paranoia', Al-Saad presents a crisis regarding the relationship between women and society—namely men with attitude—and, for that, she criticises both or places them in a net. She is trying to prove some facts while deconstructing some others. First, men cannot acquire a woman with her body and soul. Second, a woman can be independent and happy without a man. Third, society is involved and participates in conquering women, destroying their spirit, and rendering them troubled. In her story, Al-Saad is looking to reflect a traditional attitude based on the invisible woman as discussed by Fatma Al-Mernissi (1998) in her general work and as explained in the beginning of this paper.

In Nora Al-Saad's story, after Wadha (one of the characters) discovers an ethical violation occurring between the manager and a female employee, the man often exploits Wadha to prevent her from exposing him. This reveals the fall of society and its siege on women in specific contexts. Women are subject to an accusation that she senses and whose purity she exposes, thus labelling it and resorting herself from society, which is polluted by its male, evil character. The society is male regarding its thinking and behaving, and therefore, Wadha's relationship with her husband is incomplete and petrified. The two are living in different worlds although they are together in the same house, meaning Wadha's body and soul have become a prohibited value because she is not valued as a human being.

Most characters in Nora Al-Saad's stories suffer from hallucinations, anxiety, and mental disorders resulting from society. Al-Saad's book *Paranoia* refers to society's paranoia that besieges a female character in 'Sara Bent Meehsen' and forces her to give up the hope of connecting with any man after becoming a widow and being forced to marry another man. After this occurs, she gives up all men and wants to keep her body safeguarded²⁵. This attitude leads us to understand how women act against society,

as Sarah bent Mohsen married her husband as a deal—a reconciliation of two tribes in which the social order sacrifices women for its benefit.

In some stories, there are merely two representations of the female: she is beautiful and sexy, or she is ugly and defeated or troubled—a woman stuck between two images. Nora Al-Saad attempts to make her character clear and represent an attitude accompanied by an ideology context. Therefore, society perceives these women as people with mental health conditions or as crazy, corrupt, immoral, and/or disrespectful beings. Due to her rebellious actions against societal controls, the character does not birth a child; she is a pariah female. This image accommodates a political and historical background that depicts the Arab countries' defeats in the war against Israel that are labelled with political weakness, which thus makes the text acceptable for different readings.

Most stories succeed in creating discourse fights against society's old values, as in the concept of a subordinate explained by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, within whose studies the case of women becomes a cultural issue²⁶. Sarah bent Mohsen tries to eradicate this labelling; she is not subordinate, but rather she refused to remain at home for a specified period following her husband's death, which is a direct violation of society's traditions:

*There has been a time that one should not seek to separate himself from the rest of the whole, it is not allowed to do so. Because the person has to rest and be absorbed into the spirit of the masses to the minds of the herd, the gift of a prize, to encourage one to join and to participate in a group of ideas or group, to secure himself. He has to be subordinate to find the shadow of a deceptive feeling of reassurance and protection as if one had to borrow the eyes of others. Otherwise, it would be vain to stare alone in the void!*²⁷.

The story of Sarah bent Mohsen is the same as that viewed from a different

perspective by another character: a young boy who grows up watching Sarah. Perhaps he loved her without knowing, and perhaps he considered her a woman or an icon of freedom. This position forces us to investigate whether this strategy involved exploring the ambiguous relationship between masculinity and femininity or deconstructing masculinity and the difference as the male transcends and excels beyond the female due to their physical differences²⁸. These differences drive the woman's desire to take possession, as demonstrated by Fatima bent Mohsen when she mocks the sign of masculinity and says to the young boy 'If I had a piece of meat between my legs, I would not waste my life in the alleyways'²⁹.

Nora Al-Saad's stories represent women that refuse to be subordinate due to physical differences or look to women as a phenomenon that indicates a social hierarchy. The same context reappears in another story, 'Qlesa',³⁰ which involves a young girl who stays with her family that includes a domineering mother-in-law and a negative father. This atmosphere forces Fatima to fall into daydreams, illusions, and depression, and she lives as an isolated individual or pariah. Moreover, she chooses to stay in the university accommodations although the university is located in the same city as is her family. Fatima prefers to not live with her parents and family, and she visits them as minimally as possible (e.g., for vacations)³¹.

Fatima represents the female as an invisible, lonely person. No one notices her, and even when someone does—another university student named Tariq—Fatima does not look to him as a man or human, but rather as a tool with which to escape her miserable life. This young man is neutralised and is prevented from reaching her soul and mind; even when she considers marrying Tariq, it is merely a trick for improving her miserable life wherein the marriage is exclusively a social appearance.

Tariq may have obtained her body, but her soul remains out of reach:

*Qlesa wanted to please him, she always sets her sights on appeasing others and flattered them to achieve her acceptance and interest. She cannot see Tariq as an opportunity for love. He is a funny person, and he does not raise her interest or what to do to keep it in her hands. She knows that no one in this world wants her, you do not trust Tariq if he wants her and that he will continue with her*³².

Despite Fatima's perceiving Tariq as a person that can help her, he, however, behaves as any other male does; he is part of society, and thus he looks at the female through her body. Tariq is a funny person who attempts to break into Fatima's room and assault her to show off in front of his friends, which highlights the male's vanity through society's lens that perceives women as objects.

A woman is a lonely person in the dark unknown; these representations continue in Nora Al-Asad's stories. In 'The Secret Life of the Butterfly'³³, Buthina is looking for love. Although she is a married woman, this behaviour originated from her refusal to be owned as property of her husband, who did not see her as human or female, but rather as a mere piece of furniture (³⁴, 2013, p. 167). In the semiotic analysis, the butterfly possesses many connotations, including tenderness, freedom, transformation, weakness, punishment, and suicide³⁵. Buthina lives in a cocoon but possesses a secret life that helps release her negative feelings. This secret life namely involves her use of the internet, where men are generally more understanding and show appreciation towards women, which, in other words, is linked to a psychological disorder in society. A woman isolates and hides her body and soul, severely limiting her connection with men—a behaviour that has become very common in modern society.

Criticising society and the way it looks at women is one of the most common themes in Qatari stories. Hissa Al-Alwadi is one of the female writers who attempts to discuss female questions. In her story 'Copy of the Holy Quran', she aims to draw how society judges women in addition to its inability to forgive; a woman remains captive to her past, and she is always guilty or sinful. In the story, one woman meets a new female employee at work who is not religiously committed, does not wear a hijab, and is addicted to drugs; no one talks to her, and she is isolated. Her female colleagues give her a copy of the Holy Quran³⁶, and, to start a new life, one of the men asks to marry her; however, when he learns about her past, he withdraws his proposal and begins ignoring her. He only believed her when she swore that she had changed.

We may perceive how society always judges women according to their behaviours and pasts, as Eastern or Arab societies seem more tolerant of men's pasts. As a result, the change must be linked with a superpower, as this story meets a critic's strategy to society, culture, and his values. In another story titled 'The Mask', the mask works as a metaphor in which everyone, especially women, must cover their faces to survive in this specific society. A woman must be a person other than herself—a hypocritical or false representation of herself—or, perhaps the mask is a metaphor for the hijab. The main character removes the mask to be true to herself because society ignores her and/or does not recognise her³⁷.

The tone of protest becomes quieter in Noura Faraj's stories, wherein she criticises society and male behaviour by looking to the female existence as a human existence. Stress is unacceptable behaviour as an attitude against man and community domination. In 'Almarjam' stories,³⁸ the girl is slapped by her dad because she tried to explore or read a classic book that discusses a prohibited subject. The book is a symbol of the past, and the father represents the

world, the family, and the tribe. Thus, the dad, in psychological studies, refers to the icon of power authority or the patriarch regime.

Feminine writing: Concealment of the male

In Huda Al-Naimi's stories, we detected a different strategy; she chose to isolate the feminine existence, body, and soul in a waiting area and keep the man in an absence formula. Al-Naimi's writing is less vocal and less direct. In one of her stories, 'The Rest of the Captain'³⁹, the captain is absent because he does not exist; he left and will not return, which represents the absence of the man, the lover, the husband, and the friend. The captain is linked to the sea because most men dream to surpass everything, look to adventures, and keep their women behind them.

Absence and waiting make an appearance in 'Waiting for Case'⁴⁰, which explores a woman waiting for a man and the isolation of the feminine existence in body and soul both on hold and absent of communication or connection. In this story, the woman dissolves a piece of sugar in a cup while waiting for a man, thus postponing or delaying her femininity. The sugar is the objective correlation, which becomes even more apparent by the monologue that explains women's reflections. The woman is beautiful, and she desires to become more beautiful; however, while waiting for a man, she begins losing her charm and youth. The feminist period is very limited and short, taking on another aspect when dependent or associated with the presence or absence of a man; the feminist period dissolves as does sugar. This story showcases the disconnection between women and the male world. In her stories, Huda Al-Naimi still believes in hope, but she does not refuse or fire the man from her world. She is often fed up with waiting for a man, and we encounter many words that represent both fear and waiting in most of her stories. She uses vocabulary such as

waiting, butterfly, fears, faces, and masks similarly as do other authors, including Bushra Nasser and Nora Al-Saad. The vocabulary, according to feminist studies, represents a context similar to that capturing the psychiatric patient:

I did not know that I hide my fears that are born with me in my bride dress, my mother gave me this dress waiting for the day of my wedding. I kept the dress in silence; I am not a sister of madness, I am not a reader of the past, without faces and butterfly, I am terrified ⁴¹.

Revenge and exclusion as a metaphor

Feminine writing portrays a sincere and intense desire to avenge man and the values of masculine society, as demonstrated by Noura Faraj in stories such as 'Revenge' ⁴². This story represents this feminine desire based on ancient rites in which pins are stuck in a potato piece that, according to wizards, becomes someone's toy with which to torture another person. This symbolic attitude leads us to understand women's perspective of men and society's practices, which is met with actions taken from such feminist writing representations as Cupid, who creates love in one of Faraj's stories and becomes the 'Archer of Black Arrows' as a metaphor for hatred and the destruction of love.

The revenge in Faraj's stories continues in 'Beautiful Night' ⁴³, wherein one character named Anees resembles the toy Chucky and is meant to represent the man's subconscious; the character is bleeding, which embodies a sort of catharsis or atonement of sins but is certainly a symbol for revenge.

Feminist writing is involved in an attack practice to keep the body and soul safeguarded, isolated, and out of man's reach, as these writers did not evaluate the female existence or values. Therefore, the woman wants extract herself from a subordinate role. We also encounter revenge

in Huda Al-Naimi's stories; in 'After the Third Millennium' ⁴⁴, the historical characters Shahrazad, Azza, and Laila transform from victims to executioners. These women acquire power, become rulers, and begin excluding and controlling men. This attitude is translated into action in the story, wherein they cut off the head of the slave Surour, who cuts off girls' heads in 'Arabian Nights'. These acts continue through characters (e.g., Cleopatra) who are called upon to signify this revenge. This type of writing is linked to structural functionalism that is related to feminine understanding. For example, they want to modify the right to divorce, which is always attributed to the man. Shahryar has the power to divorce Shahrazad, and although he becomes a humble man, the power to divorce remains in his hands, as a right is acquired by the law, religion, and custom ⁴⁵. This inequality is again noticed in 'Distinguished Lady', wherein the woman is married to a very important man. After his death, she is not allowed to marry again; rather, she dies as a woman, and her femininity is buried alongside her deceased husband. This occurrence reminds us of the old Sati practice in the Indian culture as discussed by feminist scholars, wherein the widow is burned following her husband's death ⁴⁶.

Marriage representations

The tense institution of marriage is reflected by the relationship between the female society and the masculine society. Many stories draw a bad image of men as husbands. In her stories, Hessa Al-Alawdi (2012) maintains women's refusal of men's control. Her female characters do not want their bodies and minds to be disrespected, unappreciated, or neglected upon entering into marriage. She criticised this institution as a tool of female humiliation, and most of her characters are divorced, lonely, single, and/or desperate.

In 'Eyes Do Not Know Forgiveness', a divorced woman meets a man. She attempts to rediscover or renew her feminist feelings following the painful legacy left by her ex-husband, but her new relationship is interrupted because the man follows society's rules and no one wants to marry a divorced woman with a daughter. The result is a disconnection between the woman and the man, and in the middle, there exists social value.

The same concept is presented in Dalal Khalifa's story titled 'A Bear of Blue Fur'⁴⁷, wherein a widow and her child are in a park. The child likes playing with a bear, and the widow notices this bear and in fact loves the man hiding in the blue fur. In other words, she loves the man even without his features and without his power. Alternatively, when he invites the woman and her child to watch a play, enticing them with free tickets, the woman runs away, and the bear returns to his true existence, resuming his male persona.

Hessa Al-Alwadi investigates the impact of marriage in the story 'Recognition of Remorse', in which a girl accepts the first person asking for her hand in marriage (Al-Awadi, 2012, p. 113)⁴⁸. This marriage forces the girl to postpone her ambitions to continue her higher education because, after the wedding, she becomes a machine to deliver children. Her body is controlled as she is forced to marry by her family, but her soul is disconnected as she retains her dreams; she does not want her body to remain an incubator for children. This is similar to one of the stories written by Huda Al-Naimi, who looked at a woman's body through the new experience as a woman on the threshold of motherhood⁴⁹. This story reflects how a woman perceives her body and its changes—especially through pregnancy—how she perceives herself, and how others perceive her. Growing a baby inside one's body is an unfamiliar feeling; no men in this world will ever understand the feeling of growing another being inside one's body, and very few men care. Rather,

they are preoccupied with work and other aspects of life, and no men can understand the changes females express when they become pregnant: 'Why in the world deal with the case with all this lack of scariness. Every change in my body. Chemical and physical changes considering a matter does not have any appreciation'⁵⁰.

In the story, this experience helps the woman understand how much she sacrifices for her marriage, which thus prevents her from continuing her studies and seeing the world:

*This marriage costs me very much, for I married a man that I loved for three years, I gave up completing my studies but if there is any appreciation or more than this baby in my body, why am I with this man as I am a maid, as if I did not know him*⁵¹.

In the context of marriage and the role of men, Hessa Al-Alwadi provides a clear sample of disconnection in one of her stories—a permanent separation between the female and male. Two characters, a man and a woman, are both divorced from their spouses, but they cannot get married despite their freedom. The man divorced his wife because she was talkative and did not maintain house secrets, whereas Hala divorced her husband because he cheated. Al-Alwadi tries to draw an image of women from society's perspective, as she is the main reason for all the problems in the world—an opinion that is hidden and exists in every mind in society, specifically amongst Eastern men. According to the male perspective in this story, all problems originate from women: 'All the problems in the world come from women; they are the reason for all problems, the country female, every country or state have in her name letter of "T" woman, oh... This "Ta"⁵².

Hessa Al-Alwadi continues focusing on the husbands in most of her stories in an attempt to represent them as irresponsible and selfish men. One of her characters rids himself of his sick wife who needs urgent surgery even though she took care of their children while he was in Europe continuing

his studies. This link means to create an understanding of all the relationships in marriage as an incomplete process because men and women are in different places. There exists no healthy relationship, the cause in most situations being attributed to the man. In this story, even when the wife calls her husband and asks if she can travel to Europe to obtain medical care, he threatens her, commanding her to stay and die in her home country. This negative image recounts another story in which the husband is a criminal and is addicted to drugs; many stories represent marriage as a hellish and unpleasant experience.

Isolation of body and soul

In these stories, women try to keep their feminism intact without male assistance, proving they can survive without men and that men are not conditional to life. Every woman can create her own world or paradise without needing a man, as demonstrated by Al-Awadi's significant work titled 'Featured Female'. This story concerns a beautiful girl who refuses all the men who propose to her. She is interested in building herself a future, claiming 'No, the man did not come yet; I will not bury this entire featured feminism in the arms of these'⁵³.

The word 'these' is associated with men, representing a very heavy load of contempt as a result. This girl decides to continue her studies and travel because she desires to maintain her feminist body and soul; despite this, she at times feels lonely. The rightness of her decision, however, is solidified namely when she notices her friends suffering from marriage because they have kids and responsibilities but receive no appreciation from their husbands. For this reason, she mockingly refers to all men as 'knights'. In the same book, a story titled 'Where Does the Road Begin?'⁵⁴, the author depicts a direct representation of an isolated female, a woman who, despite being married, always feels lonely. She got

married to escape her stepmother and her biological father's negativity. To her, a husband is merely a tool that determines her miserable life; their marriage is not a real relationship because there exists no love, and he is exclusively a shelter.

Bushra Nasser adheres to her body and soul representations through her stories, wherein she analyses the concept more deeply. Her book 'Soul Spiders' presents a significant allusion that reflects loneliness and unoccupied, derelict, and other fears. First, we notice that a woman refuses to submit to society's values; rather, she rebels against them, thus forcing her to flee her country after declining to marry a man mandated by family arrangements. She was in love when she was a teenager, and thus leaving the country means her body and soul are exiled, and she must manage and maintain her feminist heart.

On the other hand, she is damaged as a human. This woman possesses many memories from her home country, and she has spent her whole life in fear despite her reaching the age of 45. She has learned, however, to keep her eyes on the floor such that no one sees any flicker of desire. She lives her life between the walls; she is damaged, and she criticises the patriarchal system by replying to society with some language but with a directly higher tone, as the social system deals with women from her biological difference:

There is no violence directed against the female more than (cultural cruelty), which derives itself from the images and perceptions, that fall under the item (imaginative). Which is always repeated, and repeated whenever needed, or whenever the authority wanted to tighten its grip on the people. This language is not limited to characterisation and the classification of the female according to the status of her body. With all the biological variables such as menstruation, puerperal, jinn, fertility and sedition, which delineates the limits of the

*forbidden and allowed in the map of the female body and composition*⁵⁵.

Bushra Nasser refuses and deconstructs all the representations based on their structures, biological functions, or classifications as sterile, diacritical, immortal, virgin, eternal, and absolute⁵⁶. This woman nonetheless takes care of her body as well as arranges and celebrates a beautiful atmosphere, which eventually turns into an abandoned house wherein she grows tired waiting for an ideal man who never comes; these same themes are exhibited in many stories:

*I filled the bathtub with soapy foam, immersed my body in it, then stripped my hair and clenched it with my hair clips, and sprayed enough hairspray. Then I poured the perfume of the big misses on my neck, having made a feast worthy of two lovers and wearing a bare dress. I lit the candles after the curtain was down, and I sat waiting for every time he visited me, a man I do not know, I do not remember his name, but his smell is manly, and his face is almost cut off since I was created*⁵⁷.

In the previous passage, a layer of meanings forces us to analyse the body's position in feminist writing and the concept of isolation. This guide is the driver that forces many female writers in Qatar to adopt the same perspective implemented through different strategies. They refuse the man not as a gender, but as a concept—an idea. The exclusion of the female presence in the body and soul is absolute, and it appears again in Bushra Nasser's story 'Once Happened'. This story produces a new perspective of the female body not due to male society, but as something especially private. The main character is driven by curiosity, and her experience in the Eastern or traditional bath in an Arab country is one wherein she is forced to take off her clothes in public or in front of others to share the showers with other women. She denies this practice because she perceives her body as a private entity. Moreover, this is a very dangerous denial, as refusing to practice this custom is

forbidden even in front of the same gender. The character claims:

*...which relationship between me and the women and girls came after a hard and exhausting week, and the new peasant brides dreamed of getting a bath in the town like me, but in a different way, what about the others who prepared for Friday night may not know about Friday night for Eastern women*⁵⁸.

The feminine body has at times been perceived as a jail that limits women's choices. Society arranges a woman's life path, preventing her from being free to do as she desires. The female teenager in the story would like to rid herself of both her body and the concept that she is a female. She did not live her childhood as society demands, but rather, she lived with many borders. She enjoyed acting like a boy when playing games and other activities. She wanted to play games that boys play and urinate as boys do; furthermore, she wanted to climb the wall while wearing boys' clothing⁵⁹. However, she was unable to express herself experimentally due to her gender, and for that, she hates her family, school, and society, all of which represent a male perspective. We identify this theme as commonly occurring in many stories, wherein the women are yearning for male bodies or male lifestyles because men have freedom and are physically strong.

Conclusion

In general, we notice the conceptual concern about women and their presence as bodies and souls in the face of a patriarchal society. Many representations and strategies are required to resist the cultural system and reflect feminist criticism in some cultures in the Gulf. I noticed that most connections between men and women in the analysed stories are interrupted or incomplete. Most stories negatively represent women, and in fact, almost all stories include an unhealthy or unmanageable relationship between both genders—specifically in marriage. Furthermore, the majority of these stories

display women as depressed, frustrated, and/or anxious. Therefore, women occasionally attempt to isolate themselves both physically and emotionally as a reaction to society. Thus, women are attempting to become more independent and freer through the ambitions and goals they hope to achieve.

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³ Sara Mills, *Discourse* (London: Routledge, 2004), P.71.

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⁵ Salman Al-Oadah, 'The Partnership between Body and Soul', 10–12 <<https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/10667/partnership-between-body-and-soul/>> [accessed 10 February 2019].

⁶ The partnership between body and soul.

⁷ ALmutasari, l. 95.

⁸ Frances Bartowski Colmar, Wendy K, *Feminist Theory*, trans. by Emad Ibrahim (Amman: Al Ahlia Publishing, 2010), p. 80.

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¹⁰ Lennon.

¹¹ Abdullah Al-Guthami, *Illusion Culture'. Approaches on Women, Body and Language* (Casablanca: Arab Cultural Centre, 2011), l. 39.

¹² Fatima Mernissi, *Women on Dream Wings* (Casablanca: The Arab Cultural Center, 1998), p. 11.

¹³ Mernissi. 11.

¹⁴ Mernissi.P.71.

¹⁵ Mernissi, p. 71.

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¹⁷ Ahmed Abdul Malik, *Nuafidh Ealaa Shurfat Alruwh* (Beirut: Al-Rehab Foundation, 2013), p. 15.

¹⁸ Abdul Malik, p. 25.

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²⁰ Mohsen Hajri, *Haraam on You* (Doha: Dar Al Sharq, 1998), p. 55.

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²³ Jabr, p. 118.

²⁴ Huda Naimi, *Abattail* (Cairo: Egyptian Lebanese publisher, 2001), p. 21.

²⁵ Nora Al-Saad, *Paranoia* (Beirut: Arab Institute for Studies and Publishing, 2013), p. 20.

²⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), p. 25.

²⁷ Al-Saad, p. 73.

²⁸ Joseph Presto, *Gender*, trans. by Adnan Hassan (Damascus: Dar al-Hwar, 2007), pp. 32–33.

²⁹ Al-Saad, p. 73.

³⁰ This word in Arabic or Bedouin is a sign of weak camels that are easy to control, and this carries the meaning of monitoring, surrender, and isolation, as seen in Nora Al-Saad's (2013) main character, p. 73.

³¹ Al-Saad, p. 109.

³² Al-Saad, p. 120.

³³ Presto, p. 161.

³⁴ Al-Saad, p. 171.

³⁵ Avia Venefica, 'Butterfly Animal Symbolism - Butterfly Meaning' <<https://www.whats-your->

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³⁶ Hessa Al-Awadi, *Euyun La Taerif Alghufrān* (Beirut: Hassan Modern Library, 2012), p. 103.

³⁷ Al-Awadi, p. 103.

³⁸ The meaning of the word in English is 'stoning'.

³⁹ Huda Naimi, *Halat Tashabuhuna* (Doha: Ministry of Culture and Arts, 2011), p. 7.

⁴⁰ Naimi, *Halat Tashabuhuna*, p. 15.

⁴¹ Naimi, *Halat Tashabuhuna*, p. 36.

⁴² Noura Faraj, *Almarajim* (Doha: Ministry of Culture and Arts, 2011), p. 35.

⁴³ Faraj, p. 73.

⁴⁴ Naimi, *Abattail*, p. 79.

⁴⁵ Naimi, *Abattail*, p. 87.

⁴⁶ Spivak, p. 66.

⁴⁷ Dalal Khalifa, 'Dub Min Alfara' Al'azraq', *Doha Magazine*, 26 (2009), p. 63.

⁴⁸ Al-Awadi, p. 113.

⁴⁹ Bushra Nasser, *Eanakib Alruwh* (Doha: Ministry of Culture and Arts, 2013), p. 105.

⁵⁰ Nasser, p. 105.

⁵¹ Nasser, p. 107.

⁵² Al-Awadi, p. 83.

⁵³ Al-Awadi, p. 49.

⁵⁴ Al-Awadi, p. 56.

⁵⁵ Nasser, p. 14.

⁵⁶ Nasser, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Nasser, p. 16.

⁵⁸ Nasser, p. 67.

⁵⁹ Nasser, p. 38.