

## The Image of Foreigner in Emirati's Women Novel (with an Example of *Rayḥānah*, by Maysūn Ṣaqr al-Qāsimī)

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### Abstract

This kind of research, especially in the field of comparative studies, is crucial, because it provides a better understanding of people, culture, thought, and their way of thinking, seeing and dealing with the other. Therefore, choosing to study the image of the foreigner in Emirati women's writing can help to examine the deep dimensions of relationship with the other who does not belong to family, class, and homeland, in this society. The study, hence, aims to shed a light on women awareness and their ways to articulate their own issues, and experiences after long history of isolation and suppression that women in this country and region in general had witnessed. Moreover, the study focuses on Maysūn al Qāsimī and her first narrative controversial work *Rayḥānah*, aspires to reveal how the strict upbringing and education had its impacts on women's personality and thinking, and thus their ways of looking at the stranger in their home or homeland. The expected results of this study are to demonstrate women awareness and capability to disclose, to certain extents, the depth of female agony in very complicated network of political, social, economic and cultural factors that would shape the history of the whole region in postcolonial time. In addition, the study is expected to help to reach better understanding of the different roles that the foreigners have played in this society, from the female locals' point of views, and therefore, their narration.

**Keywords:** Narration, Foreigner, Emirate, Women, Feminist.

### Introduction:

The art of novel has prominently witnessed an active movement of publication of women's writings, in the Gulf countries in general, and in the United Arab Emirates, in particular. Critical studies have shown much efforts to keep pace with this activity. Nevertheless, more studies are always needed in the field of literature to bridge the gap between these two vigorous realms: creative writing and criticism. Criticism, on one hand, is significant to follow up with literary works. It is important, on the other hand, to evaluate these works by identifying their objective, constructive, artistic, and technical elements. In addition, critical approach seeks to examine the artistic visions, experiences, and technical skills of the writers, as revealed in these novels.

From this perspective, this research aims to shed more light on Emirati women narratives, focusing on *Rayḥānah*, the first narrative work of a well-known Emirati writer Maysūn Ṣaqr al-Qāsimī. The study approaches a specific theme in this novel, which is the image of the foreigner. The purpose of choosing this subject is to know how the UAE woman portrays the stranger or the foreigner, in her literary writing, and to examine the features of this/these picture/s, and its implications and dimensions.

### Research Objectives:

The study of the image of the other in various kind of arts, including literature, is very important in the field of literature and criticism. It is important, particularly, in the field of comparative and cultural studies, because it helps in providing deep understanding of people, their cultures, and ways of thinking by examining how they see the others/foreigners, and the way they deal with them.

The focus on women's point of view can be justified by the women's long history of being suppressed and marginalized. In addition, Arab women, especially in Gulf region, have extensively experienced an external isolation due to the limitations of society, its customs, traditions...etc., Furthermore, the additional internal restrictions caused by the strict upbringing and

education have psychological impacts on women's personalities, behaviors, ways of thinking, and expressions in writings. Thus, this research aims to give further introduction of the literature of Emirati woman, highlighting aspects of their issues and topics as well as their technical method.

The experience of narrative writing- like all other creative experiences in the UAE- is diverse in levels, sounds, dimensions and constituent components, which gives the readers a wide range of topics for research.

The spread of storytelling in the UAE can be seen as a sign of the radical transformation of the society and its development in various fields, the most important field that is witnessing processing and developments is the literature. The contribution of emirate women and their rich presence in the UAE literary scene is a proof of this transformation and development on both quantitatively and qualitatively sides.

Hence, the interest in studying the subject of the foreigner in the writings of Emirati women will also show, to a certain extent, the Emirati society itself and its openness to relations with the other through the eyes of very sensitive deserved speaking members/the women.

Furthermore, it will indicate the nature of these relations, their dimensions and the deep advantage and disadvantage implications.

On the other hand, this study may help in exploring the creative self and its spatial manifestations, and the various relations that are established in the proximity and dimension, and the coalition or difference so that it can manifest itself in a foreign environment.

From this perspective, I chose to study the image of the foreigner - specifically - in the Emirati women's novel: Rayḥānah by Maysūn al-Qāsimi as a model. The gender chosen is far from bias or intolerance but is a systematic demand that has its reasons including teaching women literature and feminist literary theory, and my interest in the production of women and their creative writings, especially in the United Arab Emirates. However, the intention is to continue the research- in the future- to include more Emirati novels works outside the gender framework.

### The other

Some scholars have commented about the image of the other in literature, as Rasūl Muḥammad Rasūl did in his study entitled: *Ṣūratu al-ʿĀkhar fī al-Riwāya al-ʿImārātiyya: Qirāʿaj fī al-Mutakhayyal al-Ibdāʿī*.<sup>1</sup> While he mentions the problem of the term and its wide and vague uses, (Rasūl, 2010), he prefers to restrict the term to denote "the foreigner in contrast to the Arab who were forced by political, social, geographical and cultural conditions to have a contact, relationships and interchange between them."<sup>2</sup>

In addition, Saʿīd Al-Thawayḥ discussed the image of the other in Arab poetry from the Umayyad until the end of the Abbasid era (al-Thawayḥ, 2008). Fawzī ʿIssā, likewise, approached the term in his study; the image of the other in Arabic poetry (ʿIssā, 2010).

Scholars have pointed to the difficulty of defining the concept of the other, if not impossible, as André Lalande believes in his philosophical dictionary, there are other terms that converge, alternate or intersect with the self; such as: Diverse, Different, Distinct, which are concepts based on heterogeneity. Nonetheless they differ in the type of this heterogeneity, for example the first (diverse) is objective, and the last (distinct) refers to the mental process by which heterogeneity is defined, as Lalande explained. (Lalande, 2001)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I use, in this study, the transliteration system to write the Arabic names and titles in English. The translation of this title is: *The Image of the Other in the UAE Novel: Readings in creative imagination*.

<sup>2</sup> Rasūl Muḥammad Rasūl in his study entitled: *Ṣūratu al-ʿĀkhar fī al-Riwāya al-ʿImārātiyya The Image of the Other in the UAE Novel: Readings in Creative Imagination*, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Community Development, Abu Dhabi 2010, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Lalande, Laland, *Philosophical Encyclopedia*, v. Khalil Ahmed Khalil, Owaydat Publications, Beirut, 2001, pp. 124-125. See also Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Rubā ʿAbbūd, al Madā Printing House, Damascus, 1998, p. 9.

Apparently, the concept of (other) arises only in comparison to a (self) that is centered in speech and attention, looking at everyone else as (other), using to refer to and specify various classifications. (al-Thawayh, 2008).<sup>1</sup>

The first of these criteria in the classifications of the other is the criterion (national identity), the other is the (stranger/foreigner) to the country /identity, and the foreigner is usually aware of this discrimination, and may also him/herself sees the people of that country as (other/s)! Perhaps the classification of the national identity of the public or private (Race or Nation or Tribe), is one of the oldest classifications used to distinguish the other. In ancient history, for example, "Babylonians looked at the Pharaohs as other[s], the pharaohs themselves looked at the Babylonians as other[s], and Persians looked at the Greeks as other[s]..."<sup>2</sup> (Rasūl, 2010)

The second criterion in the classifications of the other is the ideological classification, on disparity in order and impact in ranking, according to circumstances and national and religious conditions and awareness.<sup>3</sup> People were -and still are- defined depending on their beliefs and faiths. To give an example, Jewish looked at Christians as foreigners and vice versa,<sup>4</sup> and they had the same feeling towards Muslims later. Conceivably, the same thing happens with people in other religions and beliefs. It could even include the ideologies and doctrines inside the same religion.

From this point of view, the idea of "other" may seem to have a history associated with enmity, segregation, dispersion and conflict. This was widely common, especially during the colonial times, until it was associated afterward with the famous slogan (divide and rule)!

Rasūl Muḥammad Rasūl has pointed to this link between the image of the other, and the colonial idea in old and recent periods. He even attributed to the colonial discourse the role of theorizing the idea of otherness. Then the colonial discourse came up with the notion of Orientalism, as (Rasūl, 2010),<sup>5</sup> to help in rooting and expanding this idea until exceeded the limits of geographical, moral and ideological boundaries to the idea of ethnic race, to promote a standard of differentiation among peoples. Thus, contributing to widening the gap between the self and the other, which worsened when Samuel P. Huntington (1993), posted the idea of Clash of Civilizations.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of all of the above, we can also observe - away from the atmosphere of conflict and competition - some images of harmony and association until the limits of the boundaries between the self and the other are almost removed, and this reaches the limit of oneself-identification and the union between the self and the other, as reflected in love and Sophie poetry.

### The foreigner or the (other)

The concept of the other (or otherness) can be a wide concept, starting from the family and opening up to the cosmic, and thus this concept – in its essence – bears multi meanings that go in parallel and intersect with the concept of the foreigner. However, despite this convergence and cross-border, there remain differences in which it distinguishes itself and distinct from it.

If we can count every foreigner to be an (other), because of heterogeneity, even if it does not reach the limits of difference, then the opposite is not right. We cannot count every foreigner as an (other), is not the relative or the lover (other) from the

<sup>1</sup> See Sa'd Al-Thawayh, *Ṣūratu al-ʿĀkhar fī al-Shi'r al-ʿArabī min al-ʿAṣr ʿUmawī Ḥattā Nihayati al-ʿAṣr ʿAlī abbasī*, ʿĀlam al Kutub al Ḥadīth: *The Other in Arabic Poetry from the Umayyad Until the End of the Abbasid Era*, Irbid, 2008, p. 7 and forth.

<sup>2</sup> Rasūl Muḥammad Rasūl, *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> This disparity has deep roots and several causes and manifestations. In short, it can be illustrated by the situation of the Arabs- especially the Levant countries such as Lebanon- during the period of colonialism there was convergence and overcoming the ideological differences, and the focus only on the national identity. The Christian religion, for instance, that some of the victims/the colonized share with the colonizers/the French, was not enough to bring them together. Whereas the level of religious awareness and understanding of the Arabs at that time, could accommodate those who do not embrace the same belief. Regrettably, this is different from our current reality where sharp differences emerged amongst people to the extent of fighting between the people who share the same religion, doctrine, and sadly, share the exact same country!

<sup>4</sup> Rasūl Muḥammad Rasūl, *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Rasūl Muḥammad Rasūl, *ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Huntington came up with this idea at the end of the twentieth century entrenching cultural, religious and historical differences among civilizations, predicting that it will be the focus of future wars and conflicts in the world. Samuel P. (Rasūl, 2010), *Clash of Civilizations, Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer, 1993), p. 22-49, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/i20045614>

concept of otherness and individuality, and not from the concept of emotional state. Even if we want to talk metaphorically, does not it happen that the self is separated from itself, or from its environmental surroundings and becomes another?! In this context, is it right to apply the term (foreigner) to the self?!

Perhaps the clearest area to clarify the boundaries of the foreigner is the legal field, since the subject of the foreigner - from this perspective - is related to the subject of nationality and its outcome, because it is the criterion of distinction between locals and foreigners. This introduced the concept of foreigner as contrary to the concept of national and, accordingly, legal issues appeared and centers for foreigner's issues were established.<sup>1</sup>

### **Rayḥānah's novel by Maysūn Ṣaqr al-Qāsīmī**

Rayḥānah's novel combines between two types of narrative styles. The first is the historical documentary narrative, when documenting some parts of the Emirate of Sharjah's history and registering all the events that this Emirate had come through and had affected its Rulers. The second is the fictional autobiographical narrative of the author/ruler's daughter, and the details of her exile with her family from her home in Sharjah and her residence in Egypt. It also mentions some related issues that followed, or coincided with her exile, and had a certain effect in the narrative, to become an "autobiography in which the self-imaginary Autofiction Overlaps the historical reality."<sup>2</sup> (Rasūl, 2010)

In addition, the narrative techniques focus on different narrative voices that allow to discover more deep details of these voices. One of the main voices, who represents a central character in the novel is a slave /a female servant of the family brought from the Africa within the slave trade that was common until the first half of the twentieth century, before the abolition of slavery.

### **The image of the foreigner appears in Rayḥānah's novel in several contexts:**

1. The framework of slaves and servants<sup>3</sup>: Rayḥānah as a hero and one of the main characters in the narrative, and her relatives, her husband Ḥabīb, her sons, and the bands that Miḥrāk, Rayḥānah's eldest son, had connection with... etc.
2. The framework of the environment of exile (Egypt) and the related central or marginal characters: Hādif, the lover of Shamsa the daughter of the exiled ruler, and Shamsa is the second main character that takes role in the narrative.
3. The framework of the land of Jihād (Afghanistan), to which Nāṣir, Rayḥānah's youngest son, was sent to join the warriors there. However, he realized that his presence in that land is strange and felt that the battle was not his own.

Since the narration is centered around two central characters that meet and overlap and embody two foci interspersed or intertwined with more events and characters, so this paper will focus on the characters of Rayḥānah and Shamsa, and what may be related to the subject matter of the research.<sup>4</sup>

### **Rayḥānah / Threshold:**

The image of the foreigner revolves around the character of Rayḥānah, who bears the name of the novel, and she represents an important core that surrounds around her many events, visions, and ideas in the novel.

Rayḥānah, as a title, represents a threshold to enter the novel's world, as was her voice- at the end of the novel- also a threshold to exit! The title Rayḥānah, which is the name of a woman (slave) of the ruler's wife, bears itself a strong indication

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<sup>1</sup> The Arabic Encyclopedia in this website:

<https://www.arab-ency.com/en/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%D9%88%D9%84%D9%80%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A8>

<sup>2</sup> Rasūl Muḥammad Rasūl, *ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>3</sup> The study does not directly focus on what the foreign image of expatriate labor relations may indicate, its problems and dimensions, as discussed by many literary works and critical studies such as Abdel Fattāḥ Ṣabirī's study entitled: *al ' amāla al Wāfida wa Atharuha fi al Adab al Emārātī: al Qiṣṣa Namūthajan Expatriate Labor and its Impact on Emirati Literature: the Story as a Model*, Cultural Publishing House, Cairo, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the framework of jihad and travel to Afghanistan, there is a short reference to it in the novel, the trip that Nāṣir/ Naṣṣūr made under the pressure of an Islamic a group in the mosque, and quickly he found out the wrong decision and returned to his country.

of the status that this character occupies in the novel, and the function she performs in the events. Rayḥānah who is the heroine, the narrator/the primary character with the first-person pronoun in the novel. She shares this role with - less and in a somewhat overlapping way with her mistress, Shamsa the daughter of the ruler.

Here, Rayḥānah appears as a foreign figure, at the general level/nationality (one of the slaves brought from Africa via Zanzibar to the UAE), or at the private level / family /social class, because she does not belong to the family of the ruler, or to his tribe and not either from the perspective of the freedom, social and political status of the ruling family.

Perhaps this is what attracted the attention of Rasūl Muḥammad Rasūl to show his admiration of the novel because , According to him: "We rarely find a text dealing with slaves in the creative way in which Maysūn Ṣaqr treated this class, which represents one pattern of the (other) in the society that she works and lives in ..." <sup>1</sup>(Rasūl, 2010)

The second voice that is involved with Rayḥānah in the narration appears- by the virtue of the status of its bearer/ the daughter of the ruler- was a voice that had a tone that tried to be confident and powerful. However, this force appears to be contrived and cheaply reduced in contrast to Rayḥānah's power and will. Rayḥānah did not hesitate to express her love for Ḥabīb her mistress's driver, she even had the courage to ask her mistress to help her to marry him, without taking care about his opinion or making sure that he has the same feelings for her. All that give this character has distinctive features which slavery Her slavery did not reduce her determination or break her pride.

On one hand, some of the details in the novel show Rayḥānah as a slave and a helpless person, as for example, she was forced to travel with the ruler family; carrying her child who is three years old, and bearing, in her womb, the other unborn sixth month baby. She also had to leave her husband behind ; because - even if he shared her life with her, he would not share her destiny of slavery,<sup>2</sup> for that he remained in Sharjah, and she went to Egypt with the ruling family members, whom were exiled from their own country. (al-Qāsimī, 2003)

On the other hand, the strictness of the family towards her (slave) seems to be contrived, as Rayḥānah sees herself (the daughter and slave),<sup>3</sup> and Shamsa- the daughter of the ruler- admits that she has never considered her as a slave, but she was part of her life.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the family embraces the newborn baby whom the ruler named (Nāṣir), after the President of Egypt Jamāl Abdel Nāṣir. After that, the ruler family gave him a nick name which is Naṣūr and became the family spoiled kid, not the son of her female slave or maid. His older brother, in spite of his mischievous that caused him to receive some punishment, he had the confidence to enter their mistress room, wearing her dress and using the tools of her adornment, and even escape from her wrath to the arms of her husband/the ruler to protect him!<sup>5</sup>

Despite of all that, the child was fond of the ruler's wife, because she used to take him out, and hold his hand and never come back without candies and clothes in his hands."<sup>6</sup>His picture with his brothers became part of the family photos!<sup>7</sup>

The image of Miḥrāk, the eldest son of Rayḥānah denotes an admonition of anomaly as a child, which he will practice it as he will become older. However, his inclination for likeness of women, especially in copying his mistress and wearing her dresses and makeup has been explained in the novel as a kind of compensation by personal venting about his feeling of servitude. The child is undoubtedly more attached to his mother, so he is more sensitive to her (bondage): "he was fond of imitating her, as if in that game he was groping for his existence, copying her situations and her place in the social ladder."<sup>8</sup>

Here, we may wonder whether his existence was achieved by copying the women specifically, was not it more convincing if he resembled his master/ruler, who is undoubtedly more favored, worthy and powerful, in the norm of that tribal society?!

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<sup>1</sup> Rasūl Muḥammad Rasūl, *ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Maysūn Ṣaqr al-Qāsimī, *Rayḥānah*, Dār Al-Hilāl Foundation, Cairo, 2003, p. 11, 13.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 13, 14.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

However, the vision of the narration had deepened the presence of the women, to make their influence overwhelming in the novel, starting with Rayḥānah, even if her role does not seem like that. The ruler's wife (the lady of the house) is more present in her home than her husband, and she is the one who initiates punishment for Miḥrāk. Even (Rayḥānah)/the slave is more presence and influential in the family from the father/the free man! Therefore, in his five years, Miḥrāk was seeing the "hidden rope that binds him and his mother to this family, which owns him like other things, without any feelings, and he preaches her existence, hoping that he perhaps escapes the cocoon that narrows on him as his perception grows... This is the slavery that he realized by his sense which is starting to bloom."<sup>1</sup>

This was the analysis of the narrator/Rayḥānah, an analysis that seems – like as many other discourses given to her – beyond the awareness that is assumed of a simple, uneducated, or inexperienced in life. However, this is no longer an incidental case. In Rayḥānah memories, there were images of her eldest child Miḥrāk when he was aggressive towards her mistress and playing with her things although she always tried to restrain him. Above all, the family was patient towards the changing of Rayḥānah mood, when she knew that her husband Ḥabīb had married to Faṭūm and her extreme hostility<sup>2</sup> toward them. The exiled ruler family has shown tolerance toward their slave, even when her condition had worsened to the extent that she left their service completely and neglected herself and her two children, only by that time the ruler's wife accepted her sister's offer to take Rayḥānah with her in her trip to Sharjah where Ḥabīb stayed.

This jealousy does not seem appropriate to a servant that was used to obedience and submissiveness to orders. Nor it does seem appropriate to a woman that the novelist described her as suffering from strong feelings of inferiority and deep senses of humble lower class. Rayḥānah (who has a history of slavery and its cruel bound), shown by the novel treats her husband Ḥabīb (the free man) with much equality, and even arrogance! She refused to be a second wife, and did not accept the second wife too, and did not find Ḥabīb's attempts to convince her that this is very common and acceptable in the norm of the society, even her free mistresses from the ruling family experienced this matter! She did not forgive him for marrying another woman even after he had complied to her request to divorce Faṭūm.

Love, on the one hand, made her soul free towards whom she loves, and on the other hand it is a "betrayal" towards her slavery and her loyalty towards the family of its master<sup>3</sup>. She wants from her love to Ḥabīb to escape from the family bondage and its subordination. She admits that the family of her master loves her, but she does not appreciate this love; because it is based on the repossession, and not based on concession that allows them to let her catch up with her husband. In addition, she denies the concession in love to herself, because she does not want to give up on her husband so he will be associated with another woman (Faṭūm).<sup>4</sup> She apologizes for this duality, explaining that her love for her husband is a balanced love because it is the love of peers and parallels. On the contrary, her love to the family of its master and their love to her is unreal love, because it is the love of the lowest in social class to those who are in the upper class and vice-versa.<sup>5</sup>

But when she returns to her husband, she fails to establish an independent life away from her master family, despite its liberation and separation from them. Thus, Rayḥānah falls in a state of conflict and dispersion of thinking and feelings; and she found the only way to solve this conflict was by taking alcohol and drugs!

The obsession with freedom seems to be pressing on Rayḥānah and appears from the outset when she quarrels with Marhūn, the jailer, attempting to open the prison's gate and release the prisoners. She repeated these attempts, although her mistress restrained her strongly and threatened her by the ruler punishment. She remembers this quarrelsome, even when she was leaving the country, and the palace besieged by the English, deliberately misappropriating the key and put it in her chest, to exchange with Marhūn - as Shamsa notes - challenging looks!<sup>6</sup> She did not deliver the key back until the critical moments, when she cut off the last covenant between her and the family that owned her. At the end she was accused that she stole documents about the family history which did not appear until it was too late!<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

### Rayḥānah/Shamsa the daughter of the ruler:

On the contrary, the image of Shamsa appears in a way subdued and peaceful, although she does not give up easily. However, she is not- in any case- confrontational or an arrogant character. She loves but fails in convincing her family of this beloved/who is a foreigner! As her family insists on marrying a close relative that is equal to her social status.

The personality of Shamsa - who becomes a foreign in exile - is intertwined with the character of Rayḥānah in a narrative rotation, although Rayḥānah's voice, the narrator and the narrated, is the most dominant. Shamsa talked about Rayḥānah to Hādif, analyzing her life in a way she projects many things from own her life ,although she explains that she wanted to write about Rayḥānah (the slave) to record a part from " The marginal world that is fading in the memory." <sup>1</sup> she adds: "I will write about the freedom we dream about and it is another chain."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, she says "I will write about the transition from slavery to freedom, however, the freedom unfortunately is incomplete, the shadow of slavery is that still rooted deep inside."<sup>3</sup> She was talking about Rayḥānah hoping from Hādif to "dispel her fear of being like her,"<sup>4</sup> but he did not care. Thus, she repeated in herself Rayḥānah's question: "for how long I will postpone my life? I open my hand and have only this open hand to reformulate herself and her balance."<sup>5</sup> Then, this central question arises: Is the soul frees from the body of bondage, or the body frees from the spirit of bondage? This may seem the mystery of existence, as she says, perhaps not only to Rayḥānah, but also to Shamsa whom, despite of her apparent freedom, suffers from restrictions that limit her freedom and enslave her.

According to Shamsa, Rayḥānah's real crisis is that her husband/Ḥabīb could not save her by taking an active and positive attitude, but rather he fell in her crisis too. It seems that Shamsa, by blaming Habib for his weakness, alludes to Hādif, because he also has taken a negative attitude and could not solve her crisis, but rather he became a part of it.<sup>6</sup> Shamsa was trying to disclose the sadness that was tormenting her - as she complains. She felt that Rayḥānah would like the time to stop, so when she comes back - whenever she does - she would find everything, and everyone would carry on as before.

When her expectations did not happen, she waited for her relationship with Ḥabīb to save her, nonetheless the reality has changed, and her opinion about him changed too, and the whole society has been transformed as well. " She had no choice but to rely on her own self, after the other failed her, but she could not." As if Shamsa, in this analysis of Rayḥānah's condition, was talking about her experience and her own life, which has scattered after leaving the palace, and she has also wished if the time had stopped, so she returns to the same life that she used to love. Again, when this did not happen, she suspended her hopes on her beloved (Hādif) to save her and achieve the stability that she is aspiring to have, but he – like Ḥabīb - has also failed her, as he was waiting for her action to remove the obstacles between them!<sup>7</sup>

She has nothing but to restore the memories; monitoring the social transformations in society during the era of al Sādāt, successor president of Abdil Nāṣir, that with his openness policy the plumber( 'Alī) turned to be (a Pashmuhandis: which means in local Egyptian dialect an engineer), and (Najm), the worker became (al Ḥaj Najm), and other extreme manifestations of this rapid unripe transformation and the outrageous profit for those who knew how to achieve it. On the contrary, those who have pity to go on this way, and feared the consequences, they descended to the worst, as what happened with (Muḥammad), nicknamed "Muḥammad Dollar," to be called (Muḥammad Firākh/chicken in local dialect); because he turned from selling the dollar to the sale of slaughtered chickens!<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, and after the death of her father and her brother, Shamsa felt the burden of what was expected from her to take responsibility for the family, disapproving this expectation, in herself, admitting- in this context- that she would rather like weakness more than power, loss more than possession, and failure - despite fear of it- more than success!<sup>9</sup> Despite her desire for success, she tries to reassure herself by saying that failure is a "normal thing", apologizing for her inability to

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 216-217.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

"do supernatural things!"<sup>1</sup> But when she deplores this; wondering: "Why am I glorifying what is not real in me deep inside?" She discovers that she is fleeing from the responsibility of what she really believes in and searching for a way to withdraw from the world, to resort to weakness and defeat!<sup>2</sup>

### The question of identity

The reader to this novel can sense that the question of identity underlies the narration and seems to rise from time to time in a jagged tormented tone: "They will wrap me and my cousin with the flag and then I will leave home. She wears the flag of her country, then her father dies in prison inside the motherland, and I wear the flag of Egypt then I leave home and go to it."<sup>3</sup>

The event was recorded again with the voice of the neutral narrator, presenting the memories of Rayḥānah in a different way, in the context of the historical events, indicating how Rayḥānah still remember when the governor agreed with Jamāl 'Abdel Nāṣir on visiting the Arab League Secretary-General of Arab League 'Abdul Khāliq Ḥassūna to Shārjah. Rayḥānah recalls how the British tried to prevent the governor from receiving him, but he insisted on the visit and challenged them by conducting his reception at the airport. His daughter Shamsa wore the "dress that has the flag of Egypt" and her friend was wearing the "dress that has the Emirate's flag," they also gave the flowers to the guest. Rayḥānah continues proceeding in her narration: "The flag of Egypt contained many colors, white, red, black, and with green stars in the middle, Shamsa was very happy with it."<sup>4</sup> As for Shamsa says in her narration: "The flag draws me to Egypt, the flag with which I wrapped myself, and defeat begins. I find the martyrs bodies are wrapped with the same flag, the flag of Egypt, which I was wrapped before with it too. "Our defeat was small matching my size, and the defeat of Egypt was as great as its martyrs, the honor of the homeland latent in the blood spilled on it, and I return home only because of nostalgia."<sup>5</sup>

Hence, the sense of alienation, increases not only spatial, but also psychological, which makes it more difficult to define the concept of the homeland, even when Hādif asked her about the concept of the homeland,<sup>6</sup> she dodges and recalled the song of 'Abdul Ḥalīm: "From where we start the story?" implying the long agony surrounding the notion of home, where the closer/the relative conspires with the stranger against his own flesh! Instead she started talking about her project to document the history of slavery and writing about the marginal world.

In some other points in the novel, we find that she links the identity with the flag, as she recalls the image of wearing the flag in her mind: "whenever I stood in front of the weaver, I wore the flag in my imagination to feel a sense of belonging!"<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, she feels that Hādif represents her whole world, the center of her life, so her day begins whenever he comes, and ends up whenever he farewells. Apart from him, there are only small little things in her life. Whereas, Hādif has, unlike her, another life after she farewells him. His other world consists of "friends, Politics, the streets and the whole world!"<sup>8</sup> She explained that, before she knew him, she used to receive instructions about ethics and female behaviors from her mother: and she never used her mind, or learnt criticism and scrutiny except from Hādif. When she heard him talking to his friend Ṭaha saying: "Choice makes you feel unique, it makes you go out from the framework that is swinging depending on the changes in the circumstances," she felt as if they are opening for her "a path to think and search for her being, not only based on her history even if it was tough."<sup>9</sup>

So, she was obsessed to find who really her being was, because she did not find that in the castle when she was small, and does not seem to find it in her exiled because her family seems to live in the old world, not in the new environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 11, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

So, for that she found in her lover- the stranger- her belonging and homeland! Therefore, she wonders addressing to him a question in a state of silence soliloquy imbued with a painful sorrow: "are not you also like the flag, Is not love considered to be the homeland for orphans who are, like me in the world, without fathers nor mothers?!"<sup>1</sup>

That is why the reader can understand her deep pain and isolation, when he let her down.

The issue seems more existential than emotional and romantic, although she admitted her romanticism, and her quarrel about this with Hādīf, who described himself as a pragmatist and realist. The matter of belonging is linked, here, to the idea of what the homeland represents within the consciousness as well as the unconsciousness of the human being.

It seems that the heroine narrator/the writer's stay in Egypt during the Nasserite tide, and her experience of the outburst of national feeling and its complicated issues, have caused her to take align to an issue that she feels, consciously or unconsciously, greater and more important than hers or her family crisis. This stance can be understood from certain terms leaked during her talk or conveying her father's (the ruler) talk about Egypt. In these talks appears Egypt, as "Ka'ba (the Center) of the revolutionaries and the militants,"<sup>2</sup> which represents a refuge for fugitives who run from oppression and persecution- as was in the case with their family, for example, and what President Jamāl Abdel Nāṣir represents for national Arab values. Thus, the historical events that they are going through will not be confined to its borders alone, but the entire region will be affected by its events. From this point, the defeat of the 1967 war, which is considered a burden more severe on the exiled ruler of Shārjah than his local defeat, as he found that his crisis was lesser than the crisis of the entire Arab world, as Shamsa articulates: "how come he talks about his defeat in the rule of (Emirate), and here is, all Arab people, in which he believed, were defeated?!"<sup>3</sup> The logic seems so strange here. The narrative was referring to the ruler's struggle in resisting the English colonizer, and to the complicity of the English with those who conspiring to control the emirate. The issue for the ruler then is a matter of homeland, freedom and independence, and should not appear, by any means, a small or trivial thing, as she elaborates: "our defeat was as small as me, and the defeat of Egypt was as big as its martyrs."<sup>4</sup>

### The feminist view in the narration

The feminist view seems clear to the reader of this novel, and it is related- in one form or another- to the foreigner, where Rayḥānah (the slave) had a prominent presence in the novel that may dominate the role of the ruler himself. In addition, the female teachers who came from Egypt to teach the girls instead of the (Reciters)/the males who were flogging girls if they made mistakes in reading Qur'ān. In addition to (Hausman), the nurse and her colleagues who came from America to practice medicine were trusted by the local women,<sup>5</sup> unlike the man Doctor, McColi, who was known of the drunkenness, and many people had died on his hands!<sup>6</sup>

The governor has been content to escape from the brutality of the English-backed conspirators, while his wife tries to save his papers, documents, and official credentials by wrapping them around her body under clothes. Rayḥānah's husband was not in a better position that his state of powerlessness blockaded him from the beginning. His wife (the slave) chose him as a husband, as well as she is the one who arranged for him a job as a driver for the ruler family. Although he was free, he did not show any action or sign that displays his objection to be separated from his wife, and to carry her as a baggage with the exiled family to Egypt. Instead, he soon gave up and married to Faṭūm. Moreover, when Rayḥānah came back to him again after five years, he was again waiting for her to help him in finding another job, as a driver for her new mistress, then a police officer in the army, and that is how they became rich.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 14, 47.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 35. It must be mentioned, here, that there are other aspects of interpreting this image in different contexts. Regarding the British colonizing the region, we can justify the unpleasant image of the British not only in this novel, but in other Emirati's narrations as well. Bearing in mind the Competition between the British and Americans to control the Arab lands, one could think of the strategy of the Americans to popularize their reputation at the expense of the British. See for this topic, for example, Penelope Tuson, *Playing the Game: Western Women in Arabia*, trans. 'Abdullāh Jarādāt, Hay'at Abu Dhabi li al Taqāfa, Abu Dhabi, 2010, p. 250.

Rayḥānah keeps repeating that he “loved her strong soul and braveness,”<sup>1</sup> it is as if he liked in her what he missed in himself! Or to put it in the word of the narrator: “he loved to be desired, to be the weakest in this relationship.”<sup>2</sup> In contrast to his mother who broke down and neglected him when his father married another woman, this woman Rayḥānah compensates his weakness and sense of negligence, so that is why he enjoyed cohabiting with her more than Faṭūm, the free, beautiful and younger woman! Rayḥānah, after all, was the owner of the money so she bought a palace and sank in pleasures, as a result, her husband (her follower) was the victim. He perished with his daughter in a traffic accident because he was driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. This is what Rayḥānah did not forgive him for, and she was only extremely sad on her daughter that she had tenacious love towards her more than her brothers!

The males in the ruling family are absent- or isolated- for example Shamsa mentioned her father just few times, as she mentioned- casually - a brother who took her with him to train on horseback,<sup>3</sup> to remember their deaths accidentally on the dining table “I was sitting next to my mother ..... when my father died, my brother took his place at the head of the table, and after his death, my mother sat at the head of the table.”<sup>4</sup> The males in the Rayḥānah family, however, were not in better condition, or happier with their presence, starting from Rayḥānah's husband and passing to his two sons who were not raised up in normal circumstances which affected their personalities in such a contradictory complicated manner. Miḥrāk seemed to have a kind of anomaly, as if he “wanted to violate the world around him,”<sup>5</sup> and Nāṣir turned to extremism “he was looking for his being through religion.”<sup>6</sup>

Hādif, as shown before, despite he loves Shamsa, he never takes any action forth. He always waits for her to convince her family to tolerate the different social class and family levels and bridge the distance between them. The only action he appeared to take was to leave her and go away with his theoretical ideas. Thus, all males in the novel have their limitations that hindered their positive effects and lessened their validity to gain the reader's sympathy. In contrast, they may be seen as the real challenge that examined the women roles in the narration, and hence, their relatively success in overcoming it

#### **Conclusion:**

After this approach to the most important threads of the novel, it can be concluded that (the foreigner) here represents everyone that came out of the circle of the local identity. The ruling family fleeing to Egypt, and their stay in Cairo, although that was still an Arabic society, but it remained foreigner in both sides. While the Exiled family members looked at the others in the new society as foreigners, the others in their surrounding community had the same attitude. Hādif, for instant, considered as (foreigner) twice, first is because of his nationality, he is not an Emirati, and because of his social class, for he is not equivalent to her family and social status. But Shamsa saw in him the home that she had been stripped of, and then come back- after her disappointment in this love- to get rid of him again and suffer from the sense of alienation even within the family environment.

On the other hand, the foreigner/the colonizer appears to be behaving as one of the local citizens of this country/Emirate. He even has the privilege with the advantages of their superiority. The British official, for example, opens his house to freedom seekers from slavery, with no single condition except of touching the wood in the middle of his house garden!<sup>7</sup>

Rayḥānah also, the exotic slave of the family, seems to be more fluent than other characters in the novel including her mistress the peer narrator, in both movement and ability to express and apply her thoughts simultaneously. Nevertheless, her bad luck is not embodied in her bondage more than in the weak personality of her helpless husband, to whom can be attributed- directly or implicitly –her tragic ambiguous end.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>8</sup> The end of Rayḥānah is not clear, her son Naṣir appears to be looking for her, and he receives different answers stating her madness, her disappearance, or her sinking into the sea.

With these references, the writer expresses the image of the foreigner in several dimensions that vary in their meanings. The English who represented colonialism came up with the demands of humanity and civilization, helped the slaves to be liberated naively, and did not care about what they will do next, as what happened with Rayḥānah, for example. She eventually gained her freedom but found no support to value and cherish living free, so she withdrew and fell in depression and drugs.

Finally, the study found that the image of (the foreigner) in the novel is linked to feminist views. Women appear to be more active and more positive than men, in several contexts, such as Rayḥānah, as well as the American nurse who came in the missionary campaign with her colleagues helping the locals and gaining their trust. On the contrary, the English doctor lost this trust, but unfortunately this included even Shamsa's lover to cause the suffering of the woman on humanity and emotional levels.

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