



Portrayal of Women in "The Bamboo Stalk" by Saud Al-sanousi

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Abstract

This research delves into Saud Alsanousi's novel "The Bamboo Stalk", aiming to highlight the portrayal of women within the narrative and unravel the socio-cultural implications embedded in their depictions. The hypothesis posits that Alsanousi's representation of women in "The Bamboo Stalk " serves as a microcosm reflecting broader societal norms and challenges related to gender roles in the cultures. This research is significant in contributing to the scholarly discourse on Arabic literature, gender studies, and societal critique. By highlighting of Alsanousi's portrayal of women, the study aims to deepen our understanding of the complex interplay between literature and society, offering insights that extend beyond the confines of the novel itself. The study underscores the complex interplay between societal expectations, gender dynamics, and the challenges faced by women in the depicted communities.

Keywords: Women, Portrayal, Feminism, Culture.

تصوير المرأة في " ساق البامبو " للكاتبة سعاد السنوسي

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هذا البحث يتناول رواية سعاد السنوسي " ساق البامبو " ويهدف لتسليط الضوء لتصوير المرأة لكشف التأثيرات الاجتماعية والثقافية المتجسدة في تصويرهم. وتظهر النظرية ان تمثيل السنوسي للمرأة في روايتها يعكس التقاليد الاجتماعية والتحديات المتعلقة بالجنس في ثقافتهم. واهمية هذا البحث في المساهمة في دراسات الادب العربي والجنس والنقد الاجتماعي.

الكلمات المفتاحية:- المرأة ، التصوير ، الثقافة ، النسوية.

1. Introduction

Saud Alsanousi, a prominent Kuwaiti author, has made significant literary works, delving into complex societal issues through his novels. One of his notable works, "The Bamboo Stalk", explores intricate themes, including the portrayal of women. This academic research seeks to dissect Alsanousi's representation of women in his novel, shedding light on the multifaceted dimensions of the female characters and the socio-cultural implications embedded in their depictions.

Saud Alsanousi, born in 1981, is celebrated for his ability to weave narratives that resonate with the intricacies of Kuwaiti society. "The Bamboo Stalk" winner of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2013, stands out as a poignant exploration of identity, belonging, and the human condition. As we delve into the study, the focus sharpens on the nuanced portrayal of women in Alsanousi's work, unraveling the layers of meaning and societal critique embedded in their representation.



The central problem addressed in this research revolves around the study of the image of women as presented by Alsanousi in "The Bamboo Stalk." This entails an examination of the author's treatment of female characters, their roles, agency, and how their depictions contribute to the broader narrative. By exploring these aspects, the study aims to uncover the underlying messages, stereotypes, or challenges related to gender dynamics within the novel.

The objectives of this research are twofold: first, to critically analyze Alsanousi's portrayal of women, identifying recurring themes and character dynamics that contribute to shaping the image of women in "The Bamboo Stalk." Second, to explore the socio-cultural implications of these portrayals, examining how they reflect, challenge, or reinforce prevailing attitudes towards women in Kuwaiti society.

The hypothesis driving this study posits that Saud Alsanousi's representation of women in "The Bamboo Stalk" serves as a microcosm reflecting broader societal norms and challenges related to gender roles in Kuwait. The narrative choices made by the author, the agency granted to female characters, and the thematic undercurrents contribute to a larger discourse on the status of women in contemporary Kuwaiti literature.

Finally, this research holds significance in contributing to the scholarly discourse on Arabic literature, gender studies, and societal critique. By unpacking the intricacies of Alsanousi's portrayal of women, we aim to deepen our understanding of the complex interplay between literature and society, offering insights that extend beyond the confines of the novel itself.

2. Literature Review

Mohamed (2022) has delved into the social exclusion in Saoud Al-Sanousi's "The Bamboo Stalk," examining the resilience of the protagonist Isa, who embodies multiple roots, nationalities, names, religions, and mothers. The researcher has employed intersectional theory to analyze the discrimination and oppression Isa faces, highlighting various perspectives on the discriminatory system. The hypothesis suggests that Al-Sanousi's novel sheds light on multiple forms of discrimination in both Kuwait and the Philippines. The researcher had concluded that Saoud Al-Sanousi's "The Bamboo Stalk" serves as a powerful exploration of social exclusion and discrimination, offering insights into the protagonist's complex identity and the challenges he faces in navigating diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.

Al-Mutairi & Hashim (2019) have focused on the struggles of Jose, the bicultural protagonist disowned by his Kuwaiti family and raised in poverty in the Philippines in Saud Alsanousi's novel "The Bamboo Stalk,". Employing Colin Richards' graft theory and biculturalism concepts, the study aims to analyze the negative impact of grafting on the formation of the individual's



social, religious, and national identities. The study highlights the protagonist's identity crisis and dilemma, revealing the circumstances leading to his split identity. The study concludes by emphasizing the bicultural experience in establishing a clear grafted identity as depicted in Alsanousi's work, illustrating the challenges faced by individuals navigating two vastly different and incompatible cultures.

Khawandanah (2014) has discussed familial and social relations, racism, ethnicity, hypocrisy, class distinction, language, religion, culture, and career. Her study analyzes the intricacies of the young hybrid protagonist, Jose Mendoza or Yousef Al Taref. The research examining the protagonist's endless quest for a real identity amid the challenges of being tangled between two religions, languages, and vastly different cultures. Despite the protagonist's noble efforts, his quest for identity will ultimately prove fruitless. Additionally, the study explores Alsanousi's narrative technique, where he presents the fictional work as if translated from Filipino to Arabic, enriching realism and contributing to the novel's originality. The conclusion underscores the profound thematic richness and narrative innovation in depicting the struggle for identity in "The Bamboo Stalk."

Based on the previous studies presented in the research paper, which addressed various issues in Saud Alsanousi's novel "The Bamboo Stalk," the current study distinguishes itself by focusing specifically on how Alsanousi portrays women in his narrative. This deviation from prior research is significant, as it hones in on the author's depiction of female characters, offering a nuanced exploration of the roles, agency, and societal implications embedded in their representation. While earlier studies touched upon broader themes such as identity, social exclusion, and discrimination, the current research seeks to unravel the complexities of Alsanousi's portrayal of women, shedding light on the multifaceted dimensions and contributions of female characters within the novel. This refined focus aims to contribute a unique perspective to the existing body of literature on "The Bamboo Stalk" and enrich the understanding of how gender dynamics are articulated in Alsanousi's work.

3- Methodology:

This qualitative study focuses on the portrayal of women in Saud Alsanousi's novel "The Bamboo Stalk." The research methodology involves a feminist perspective, emphasizing the analysis of female characters to unveil the nuanced depictions presented by Alsanousi. The data collection process relies on a thorough examination of the novel's text, complemented by a review of articles and studies related to the novel. Additionally, exploration of existing literature that tackled the important issues the novel to provide a comprehensive understanding of the context surrounding the study.



The primary method involves a close reading and textual analysis of "The Bamboo Stalk." This includes a detailed examination of how female characters are portrayed, considering their roles, agency, and the broader societal implications.

The study adopts a feminist lens to interpret and analyze the representation of female characters. This perspective allows for a nuanced exploration of gender dynamics and the portrayal of women in the novel.

By employing these methodologies, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of how Saud Alsanousi portrays women in "The Bamboo Stalk," contributing to the understanding of gender dynamics within the novel and its broader implications.

4. Results and Discussions

The concept of women's images is an exploration of women's roles, as highlighted by Sugihastuti (2000:121). In a lexical sense, "image" refers to the impression of a person, company, or product. In literature, women's images are considered a sociological perspective that sees literary texts as evidence of various women's roles. The diversity in women's roles emerges due to varying perspectives, resulting in different opinions influenced by individual views. These opinions contribute to a multitude of perspectives on women's roles, both within the family and society, reflecting the inherent diversity of human opinions and perceptions.

Beauvoir (1949) asserts that within a patriarchal society, women are relegated to a subordinate status, considered second-class citizens and not regarded as equal human beings. Additionally, Tong (1998:72-73) notes that patriarchal societies classify women and men based on gender stereotypes, ensuring that women are characterized as passive, kind, cheerful, obedient, soft, and affectionate, while men are portrayed as enthusiastic, audacious, responsible, competitive, and ambitious. This perpetuates a dynamic where men are positioned as masters and women as slaves.

In Saud Alsanousi's "The Bamboo Stalk," women's portrayals are explored, presenting varied images influenced by societal dynamics and external factors. Alsanousi crafts a narrative that delves into the multifaceted roles and identities of women, illustrating the impact of societal expectations, cultural norms, and prevailing conditions on each character's destiny.

The character of Ghanimah (Rashid's mother) in Saud Alsanousi's "The Bamboo Stalk" serves as a compelling portrayal of a domineering mother deeply ingrained with paternal authority. Her mindset is marked by a rigid adherence to patriarchal norms, viewing her son's marriage to a Filipino woman as a disgraceful and demeaning act that undermines their societal standing in Kuwait.



Rashid's mother perception reflects the deeply rooted influence of the patriarchal and male-centric society, shaping her beliefs and actions.

The portrayal of Mother Ghanimah in the excerpt "Issa is regarded as '...a curse for the family'(Alsanousi,2015,p:51) reveals her character as authoritative and significantly influenced by the male-dominated societal norms. The characterization of her son, Issa, as a "curse for the family" suggests a negative perception and an unfavorable societal view towards him within the community they inhabit.

Firstly, the text implies that Mother Ghanimah holds substantial authority within the family, where Issa is deemed a curse. This could be interpreted as an indication of her power and influence in making decisions that shape the family's social values.

Secondly, the passage illustrates the mother's influence being molded by the male-centric society, as describing Issa as a "curse for the family" reflects societal values and expectations that prioritize adherence to traditions and cultural norms to maintain the family's status. Mother Ghanimah's esteem for traditions and entrenched social expectations underscores the idea that her authority and opinions are strongly shaped by the values imposed by society.

In general, the excerpt suggests that Mother Ghanimah's character embodies the strength and influence of an authoritative mother in family matters. Simultaneously, it highlights her profound susceptibility to the societal expectations and male-centric values that heavily influence her perspective and decisions.

Rashid's mother character exemplifies the impact of societal expectations and traditional gender roles on her mentality. Her strong belief in the superiority of Kuwaiti identity, coupled with a disdain for intercultural unions, highlights the societal pressure to conform to rigid norms. The lens through which Rashid's mother sees the marriage, as both a societal and personal affront, underscores the prevalence of cultural biases and the hierarchical structure that perpetuates male dominance.

Furthermore, Rashid's mother characterization is emblematic of the overarching influence of male-centric and paternalistic structures on women's attitudes. Her rigid adherence to the expectations of a Kuwaiti mother, expecting her son to marry within their cultural boundaries, reflects a subconscious internalization of societal norms that subjugate women. The portrayal of Rashid's mother sheds light on the complexities of identity, gender, and societal expectations in the Kuwaiti context, providing a nuanced exploration of the challenges faced by women like her within a traditional and patriarchal framework.



For a time young Aida offered her body to anyone who asked, at a price set by her agent. The price for foreign men was higher than the rate that local men with little money were asked to pay. The price varied according to the time and place. There was a price for the hour and a price for the whole night, a price for services provided in the back rooms at the club and another price for services offered in hotel rooms (Al-Sanousi, 2015, p.13).

The presented text from Saud Alsanousi's novel delineates the portrayal of women, particularly through the character Aida, emphasizing the profound impact of societal norms and economic conditions on shaping her image within the narrative. Aida's involvement in prostitution, as indicated in the passage, serves as a stark illustration of how social conventions and economic circumstances influence women's roles and choices.

Aida's willingness to offer her body for a fee underscores the intricate connection between societal expectations and economic pressures, highlighting the commodification of her body. The differential pricing for foreign and local clients reveals the societal hierarchies and economic disparities that contribute to valuing women differently based on the backgrounds of their clientele.

Furthermore, this passage serves as a poignant commentary on how the depiction of women, exemplified through Aida, is intricately tied to societal norms and economic conditions. The pricing structure and Aida's engagement in such transactions illuminate the multifaceted relationship between individual choices, societal expectations, and economic realities, providing a critical examination of the nuanced portrayal of women in the novel.

Circumstances drove my mother to leave her country and family and friends to work abroad. Although it was hard for a woman of twenty, she had a much better life than her sister, Aida, who was three years older.... 'Everything happens for a reason, and for a purpose,' my mother always said, and whenever I looked for a reason for everything that happened, it was always poverty that raised its ugly head (Al-Sanousi, 2015, p.12)

The provided text reflects the academic analysis of how Josephine is compelled to work abroad due to social and economic circumstances, aiming to avoid the necessity of engaging in undesirable work, as her sister Aida had done. The passage indicates that Josephine's decision to leave her home country and family was influenced by challenging social and economic conditions. Despite being a young woman of twenty, the prospects of working abroad offered her a better life compared to her older sister Aida.

The emphasis on the difficulty faced by Josephine highlights the sacrifices she had to make due to societal and economic pressures. The comparison with



her sister Aida suggests that Josephine's choice to work abroad was a strategic decision to escape undesirable work situations that her sister experienced. The phrase "Everything happens for a reason, and for a purpose" underscores Josephine's belief in fate and her acknowledgment that economic constraints play a pivotal role in determining life choices.

The recurring theme of poverty as a driving force behind Josephine's actions emphasizes the harsh reality she faces. The phrase "poverty that raised its ugly head" conveys the pervasive and limiting impact of economic hardship on the choices available to individuals. This analysis illuminates the intersection of economic conditions and social expectations that shape Josephine's narrative, offering insight into the broader socio-economic context depicted in Al-Sanousi's work.

Many young women in the Philippines are treated like paper handkerchiefs. Strange men blow their noses on them, throw them on the ground and walk away. Those handkerchiefs then give rise to creatures whose fathers are unknown...., and some of the children have no qualms about admitting they don't know who their fathers are (Al-Sanousi, 2015, p.11).

The provided text vividly portrays the challenging situation faced by many young women in the Philippines, employing a metaphorical comparison of them to paper handkerchiefs. The metaphor implies a degrading treatment of these women, as they are used and discarded by strangers without regard for their dignity. The imagery of being blown on, thrown to the ground, and left behind symbolizes the exploitation and disregard faced by these women.

The subsequent mention of these handkerchiefs giving rise to children whose fathers are unknown adds another layer to the narrative. This narrative suggests a scenario where women, treated as disposable objects, bear the consequences of their exploitation, facing the challenges of single motherhood and the absence of paternal acknowledgment.

Finally, the text illuminates Saud Al-Sanousi's depiction of women, emphasizing their vulnerability and mistreatment within a socio-economic context. The metaphorical portrayal and the subsequent consequences underscore the harsh realities faced by these women, shedding light on the interconnectedness of social and economic factors in shaping their experiences.

5. Conclusion:

In Saud Alsanousi's novel "The Bamboo Stalk," stereotypical portrayals of female characters emerge, shaping their identities within the narrative. Mother Ghanimah, influenced by male-centric values, embodies a woman empowered by these values, seeking to command authority over everyone, including her son.



She prevents her son from marrying a Filipino woman due to societal and patriarchal reasons, representing a stereotypical image of the community in which she lives.

On the other hand, Aida and Josephine represent the stereotypical image of Filipino girls struggling with poverty, compelled by society to engage in prostitution to support their families. This portrayal reflects the vulnerability of women in Filipino society, depicting them as victims of circumstances. Josephine further symbolizes the plight of women seeking dignity in the Gulf but facing discrimination and deprivation due to the male-dominated society.

In summary, the novel illustrates stereotypical representations of female characters, portraying Mother Ghanimah as an empowered yet restrictive figure influenced by male values. Aida and Josephine embody the stereotypical image of Filipino girls facing societal pressures, engaging in undesirable professions to survive, and experiencing discrimination and deprivation in pursuit of dignity in the Gulf. The narrative underscores the complex interplay between societal expectations, gender dynamics, and the challenges faced by women in the depicted communities.

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