

ISSN 2141-9744

Ibadan
Journal of
Humanistic
Studies

Volume 26, No 1, 2016



Ibadan University Library

Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies

Volume 26 (No 1) 2016

ISSN 2141-9744

Published by
Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan,
Ibadan, Nigeria.

Gender, Women and Word in Fawziyyah Al-Bakr's *Hayātu min waraqin*

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Abstract

The emergence of gender in Arabic literary writing in the contemporary period is partly traceable to the popularity of women's movement all around the world. This does not, however, mean that before today the Arab literary landscape had neglected issues which border on women's right, the girl-child, women's sexuality, marital obligation among others. In fact, Arabic literary writing since the classical period exemplifies an extremely strong patronage, by poets and prose writers of men and women subjects. A reading of the works of Imru'u'l-Qays, al-Khansā', al-Mutannabī among others compels this conclusion. This paper investigates the concept of gender in general and gender in Arab land and Saudi Arabia in particular. In this paper, I briefly analyse the work of a female writer; Fawziyyah Al-Bakr to showcase female literary writers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which are all but ignored in literary scholarship.

Introduction

Fiction among women in Saudi Arabia is becoming more and more sophisticated and expressive with gender issues as their thematic preoccupation. The interpretation of their artistic works, based on the experience they have, exposes the hidden with reference to their women-women (homosocial) and women-men relationships (heterosexual). Their writings do more than influence our beliefs and values; they contain knowledge of and insights into the women's world. The paper explores the aesthetic quality of a female writer who is among the marginalized contemporary women writers in Saudi Arabia. It is intended to establish how far the art of writing has revealed women's condition in Saudi Arabia. Another aim of this paper is to explore the contribution of Saudi women to fiction writing in a society where religious texts are widely predominant. This paper shows that research into Saudi women fiction is justifiable since their writings are relevant in Saudi society, Arab world and the world at large, in spite of the fact that their literary productivities and their subject matter of interests are marginalised.

Now in the contemporary period, gender themes in Arabic literary writings have developed, in part, as an outcome of the Arabic literary renaissance which was

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a movement to a modern Arabic literature, stimulated by the interaction of the Arab world with the West. This began in the 19th century following the Napoleon invasion of Egypt (1798). The fiction, a literary form new to Arabic literature, was developed largely under the influence of the European literary works that became available in the Arab world especially in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. This later spread to other Arab land in the early 20th century including Saudi Arabia. This modern trend is demonstrable with the fiction-work of Fawziyyah that I have selected for study. Saudi Arabian women writers have consequently emerged as important players in the modern literary renaissance in the Arab world. The rich diversity of their style and the subject matter of their works have opened critical avenues of discussion in the social and cultural arenas. As a result of this, their texts are now used in literary and cultural studies and critically examined with growing frequency in the contemporary period.

One question of interest for critics is whether Saudi Arabian women-authors write differently from their male counterparts. Some have argued that the elements of imaginative literature do not differ from gender to gender (Amīn Qahar 2003: 1), rather, differences occur as a result of each gender's responses to specific experiences and impressions of life and society. Thus, one should not be on the look-out, it is argued, for a distinct type of literature with particular qualities in women's writings, although one should acknowledge that women have different interests owing to their different social and psychological circumstances (Amīn Qahar 2003: 3).

Over the last six decades, Arabic fiction has flourished in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Though, it is true that most of them are produced by male writers, a careful study shows that a considerable number of such works belong to female writers which could definitely be of interest to Arabic literary critics from Saudi Arabia. This is because women literary writers are using literature as a means of expressing their personal interests. They appeared desirous of using fiction as a platform. As a result of this, they usually channel their energies into writing which provides them with the opportunity to express themselves and affirm their objectivity.

It is interesting to note that the ever-watchful eye of the Saudi's cultural patriarchal authorities is usually unable to prevent women writers from expressing their thoughts. In fact, the need to escape cultural censors and give a voice to their concerns serves as a catalyst that stimulates Saudi women writers to explore new forms of expression and presentation. Then the voice we hear in their works is often that of a woman, using the first-person form of narration in most cases. While this technique confers a quality of verisimilitude to the stories, it also presents a peculiar problem to Arab women writers. Arabic literary writers such as Latīfat Al-Zayyat, Salwa Bakr and Yūsuf Idris argue that the first-person pronoun may not refer to the

heroine in the story at times but to the author him/herself (Amīn Qahar 2003: 5). Thus, Fawziyyah Al-Bakr's fiction work could be regarded as self-revelation.

Though it is in the field of literature, more than in any other domain, that Saudi women have carved an identity for themselves, their achievements have only recently begun to enjoy critical patronage. This calls attention to the existence of extraneous factors which impede Saudi women from realising literary-intellectual aspirations and ambitions. This also conveys the impression that literary writing is an extension of the Saudi patriarchal hierarchy to which women are forbidden. What remains to be seen is the extent to which these assumptions are true. Aside from these, the following questions are pertinent: why is that the existing studies on Saudi Arabian literature which is dominated by male writers who are interested in entrenching male dominance, have ignored the expression of equality and resistance in the literary tradition of the Kingdom (as can be perceived from female writings)? To what extent is gender a factor in the production and consumption of literary texts in Saudi Arabia? Why have female writers been absent or marginalised in the literary writings? How might we begin to measure and appreciate the contributions of these women to the art of literary writing in Saudi Arabia?

In this paper, I have restricted my focus to the text written by just a Saudi woman. This is because the literary work produced by the author is of high quality. She discusses different themes and subjects such as patriarchy, women exploitation, gender, and psychological trauma among others. Here, I only analyse the text *Hayātu min Waraq* published in *Mawsūat al-Adab Al-Arabiyy As- Su'ūdi al-Hadīth* (2001) based on the thematic gender features that are depicted in her story, and to showcase that Saudi women are relevant in literary writing.

Theoretical Framework

The success of any research depends largely on the choice of its methodology. This is because a research method can be likened to the pathway towards a particular destination. It is like a compass in the desert. For this study, I adopt the gender critical approach which relies on Virginal Woolf's (1929: 8) *A Room of One's Own*, and Latīfah al-Zayyat's (2001) *Min ūwar al-Mar'ah fi al-Riwayāt al-ʿArabiyyah wal Qiṣṣa al-Qaṣīrah* (Image of Women in Arabic Novels and Short Stories) to women's writing. This provides an eminently applicable and suitable thematic technique for use as a framework to investigate Saudi women's fictions.

Latīfah al-Zayyāt's *Min ūwar al-Mar'ah fi al-Riwāyah al-ʿArabiyyah wal Qiṣṣa al-Qaṣīrah* (2001: 4) addresses injustices inflicted on women by a man-made system in the literary tradition of the Arab land. More subtle, though no less painful, injustices are depicted by Latīfah al-Zayyāt, who discovers at an advanced

age that her lifetime spent tending and mothering other people's feelings and thoughts has allowed no time to register her own. The theme of her story; *Min ʿuwar al-Mar'ah fi al-Riwāyah al-ʿArabiyyah wal Qiṣṣah al-Qaṣīrah*, is that women's obsession with living up to the social image of themselves as faithful lovers, caring wives, and selfless mothers precludes any opportunity for self-realisation or self-fulfillment. Her stories are passionate call to women to question prevailing concepts of women's happiness, success, and achievement, and to redefine them according to their own personal goals and interests in life. She highlights boldly the dominance of men's literary criticism which, by being detrimental to women's writings, has consequently operated to the detriment of society at large (al-Zayyāt 2001)

Al-Zayyat's method gains strength from Virginia Woolf's argument about the marginalisation of women's writings. She canvasses the opening up of space for women to express themselves through the medium of writing. Woolf illustrates the status of women through history and argues that women would have to either accept being silenced and inferior or punished by a patriarchal society:

Any woman born with great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside village, half witch, half wizard, and mocked at. For it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to certainty. (Woolf 1929: 5)

But the struggle to afford Arab women more opportunity in the society has not been the sole concern of women. Arab male writers have risen up to challenge the traditional order which imperil women's fortune. This is true in reference to Qāsim Al-Amīn (2003: 11) whose work, *Al-Mar'ah Al-Jadīdah* (The New woman) was acclaimed as the first publication in the modern times which promoted women's rights and freedom. *The new woman* is now considered as the result of the new civilisation, the recognition of women's right and value and equality between men and women.

However, women use writing as a means of expressing personal and social freedom. They write to prove that they are equal to men. They realise that they will not be equal to men if their achievements are trivial. Women's writings became the medium to express their ideology freely and to depict themselves in a better way. In

on *Power and Literary Texts*, Barbara Watson argues that women used masculine style of writing, not only to conceal their identity, but also to protect themselves. She says:

What has been the experience of women in regard to power? Literature has more to say about this subject than might at first appear. Women, like other groups with minority status, adopt various forms of accommodation for the weak is to conceal what power they do have, and to avoid anything that looks like threat or competition. Therefore, we [must] not expect either literature written by women or that written by men based on their observations to tell us much about so sensitive a topic in the form of declaration, manifestoes, plot summaries, or even the broad outline of characterisation. We begin instead to look at such techniques as ambiguity, equivocation and expressive symbolic structure (Watson, B. 1975: 18)

Furthermore, in line with the above view, Ruth Yeazell anticipates the politics that underlies literature written by women especially those selected women writers from Saudi whom I choose their works for study. Yeazell assesses the literary approaches adopted by Saudi women writers whose works have been earmarked for study. He says:

The struggle of the feminine writers shows a marked difference from that of their male counterparts. Deprived of education because of their sex, and financially dependent upon the male, these women were made painfully aware of their inferior status. The constant pressure to prove them in the arena of intellection drained their creative energies, and they also struggled against evangelical disapproval of imaginative literature. While woman could assume the role of wife, mother, nurse, or teacher, she could not be a writer without being accused of selfish defiance. In creating heroes that women idealized, novelists oscillated among figures of compliance. (Yeazell, R. 1987: 32)

Henceforth, most scholars assert that all movements that tackled women's issues should be considered as feminist movements.

Gender and Psychological Trauma in Fawziyyah's Text: *Hayātu min waraqin*

The Saudi Arabian women fiction writers are mostly concerned with their societal issues especially the woman question. In this paper, I will analyse the text of Fawziyyah al-Bakr *Hayātu min Waraqin* (A paper's life) to find how women are portrayed and to discover the position of the Saudi women. The concept of gender has undergone something of a major revision in literary discourse especially in the contemporary period. It is a concept which enables groups to come together and articulate their different experiences. Gender has been a very useful concept to the text of the author in that it enables her to discuss common experience within the society with others whom she regards as like herself; that is others who share what she sees as crucial features of the social positioning.

In this paper, I analyse the text of the writer in terms of the evident theme and inherent meanings. This is to explore how the writer's decision regarding what is artistically possible is reached in relation to what is socially permissible. As her confidence grew, the writer began to explore the circumstances of women in the story and used the medium of fiction to articulate her vision of the society. Al-Bakr addresses issues that are central to women, particularly those prevailing notions in the Arab society especially Saudi Arabia.

The text analysed here was published in *mawsūʿat al-adab al-arabī al-suʿūdi al-hadīth* (Encyclopedia of Modern Saudi Arabia Literature) in 2001. The title of the story is highly instructive in regard to some of the issues I have mentioned above. In other words, *Hayātu min waraqin* graphically illustrates the kind of life Saudi Arabia women usually find themselves. It is one which is forged against social segregations, gender oppression and inequality. Given this background, it becomes axiomatic that the kind of literature which the writer produces can be regarded as protest literature. Fawziyyah al-Bakr, the author of this story was born in Riyadh in the year 1958. She obtained her Master of Arts degree in school administration and cultural supervision from the Faculty of Education at the King Saud University. Then, in 1990, she obtained her Ph.D in the same subject from the Institute of Education at the University of London. She presently teaches in the Department of Education and children's Kindergartens at the King Saud University, Riyadh. She is known as an active contributor of essays and short stories to local newspapers. Her works include *al-mar'a 'al-su'udiyya wat-ta 'līm* (*The Saudi Woman and Education*) published in 1988 (Al-Qash'amiyi. 2001: 38). The institution which is probably the most talked about in gender discourse is patriarchy. The concept and widespread use of the term 'patriarchy' grew out of feminist

debates about gender in the 1960s and 1970s. Patriarchy replaced the earlier term 'sexism' emphasising the importance of institutions in gender oppression, rather than individual prejudice (Julia, 1994: 50). Fawziyyah has shown in her work that the society is a system in which maleness and masculinity confer a privileged position of power and authority; where man is the 'self' to which woman is the 'other'. To this writer in her literary endeavour, the Saudi society features a kinship system in which the eldest male, sometimes literally the father or the patriarch, is invested with authority over women. Early feminist theorists used the term strategically to highlight men's dominance over women in the private (the family) and the public (work, politics, cultures) spheres.

Writing on literary themes that are based on gender issues means violating privacy, and in Saudi Arabia precisely where private life, family life, inner feelings and thoughts are sacrosanct, this is a risky undertaking particularly for women writers. In Saudi Arabia, the public space is man's domain, i.e. 'male', whereas the inner, private space is assigned to women and therefore defined as 'female'. Ideally, men's and women's worlds are totally separated, but nevertheless constitute a unit, as a man's 'honour' depends on the absolute 'non-existence' of his female relations in public. A woman's face must neither be visible, nor her voice be audible in public. Her name must not even be mentioned outside the house. Nowadays, in literary writing, the most significant expressions of this spatial gender division, harem and veil, have been abolished but in some Arabian peninsula, they are emerging again. However, in Islamic societies, one can still find invisible harem walls and sensitivity or the borders of privacy, which, if transgressed, will be avenged immediately. In the literary world, social control and pressure upon an author through society is often much more effective than the censorship of some of the regimes of the region. Women's mobility outside the house is traditionally regulated by rituals which clearly define how and to what degree she is permitted to enter the street, the market or the mosque. One of these rituals, for example, is to lower her veil as soon as she crosses the borders of the inner, female space (Al-Zayyat, 2001: 34)

Fawziyyah's story dwells on the existence of the protagonist and her family in their village. The day to day struggles for survival and how they come to grips with overcoming them. The different means of survival through tilling the land juxtaposed with this is the heroine's idea of city life, its sophistication and the freedom for the female. The author portrays deep affection for nature and its other elements. The moon, sun, trees, hills, etc.; the heroine equates education with birth.

The author explores the reality of a solitary life in a rustic village setting. The setting of the short story reeks of desert existence for which the Arabian Peninsula is famous. She avidly portrays her heroine solitary existence by asserting:

أنا المرأة التي لا تملك من اتساع عالمها غير أن تقف في
 الخفاء على أصابع قدميها لتتنظر إلى العالم من خلال فتحات
 النافذة الصغير
 Al-Zahrani, M.S. 2001:503

*I am a woman who has nothing in
 her world, but the chance to
 stand strictly on tiptoe, gazing at t h e
 world outside through cracks in the
 small window. (Akewula. 2004: 111)*

This excerpt portrays a solitary confinement with the heroine being a victim. Her life seems to be an endless existence of toiling in the scorching sun, trying to coax life out of the hard ground in order to survive. It is symbolic that the rain refuses to fall. This in a way signifies the staleness of life and lack of development in the narrator's continued existence, except a vicious cycle of toiling the unyielding. Psychologically, the heroine, whose name is not mentioned, is depressed with the situation of the environment she finds herself. Showalter (1986) identifies three phases in the development of women's writing, the first phase of imitation, the second, a phase of protest and the third a phase of self- discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. Fawziyyah al-Bakr can be described with reference to her story as belonging to the group of writers, who represent the feminists "rediscovery". This is like Virginia Woolf, whose first modern work of gender criticism in literary writing addresses the social, literary and cultural aspects of female difference. It is considered one of the most important pioneering approaches in women literary criticism, and has influenced several theories. Many commentators have noted "the prescience of Woolf's ideas and her capacity to anticipate the concerns of feminist in the future" (Julia. 1994: 51). It was "the first literary history of women writers and the first theory of literary inheritance in which gender was the central category" (Ellen. 1995: 28). The book "has served the needs of various strains of feminist criticism, not all of them compatible with each other" (Ellen, 1995). In 1973, the novelist Margaret Drabble emphasized how *A Room of One's Own* expressed her "own conditions as a writer". "I could hardly believe that a woman from her background could speak so relevantly to my condition" (Ellen 1995:28). Several contemporary critics consider *A Room of One's Own* to be "the twentieth century's most important statement on the question of women and writing" (Julia. 1994: 55).

For example, the expression "And Zaynab dies and in her death lies the death of her world" could be read in restrictive terms by the 'laity', to mean Zaynab's hopes and aspiration while on earth. But critics who operate at the second level of meaning argue that this interpretation may not actually reference the author's intention. Thus, the phrase, "death of her world" demands a second level of

interpretation in order for the reader to appropriate the intention of the speaker, which eventually would be the real meaning of the discourse. This would then mean that at the first level, the direct meaning of the phrase the "death of her world" would, in practical terms, be the cessation of her life and everything she stood for. But a more critical reading would lead the critic to the conclusion that the phrase actually refers to the loss of hope on the part of those she left behind most of whom depended on her for good living. It is this second level of meaning, the indirect meaning, which Al- Jurjānī (1956:30) refers to as *ma'ana al-ma'ana* (meaning of meaning). Thus, the appropriation of meaning of meaning in a discourse depends on and requires not only more subtle reading of the text and a second thinking, but also a certain amount of familiarity with the writer's or poet's social and cultural background and his environment. It is this approach that guides the analyses of the author's work.

Mary Ellmann's *Thinking about Women* (1986: 34) was one of the main books that spotlighted how the critical estimates of women's literature were constantly prejudiced. She exposed what she called "phallic criticism," which was practiced by male academics and reviewers. Ellmann has presented many examples of 19th century opinions about the inferiority of women.

In the 1970s, another disciplinary field of feminist criticism influenced by *A Room of One's Own* appeared. The new approach focused on the rediscovery of lost and ignored literature written by women: it is called "gynocriticism" (Showalter 1986: 43). Three major books led to this approach: Ellen Moers' *Literary Women: the Great Writers* (1976: 24), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977: 45) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979: 28). In this feminist approach, critics, aimed "to give a material shape, and revalue women's culture and writing". This approach has contributed greatly to the "rediscovery" of many writers and many undervalued works by the traditional, masculine literary canon. In *Literary Women*, Moer states three reasons for dealing with women writers separately. First, the amazing results such separation produces; second, the realization that "we already practice segregation of major women writers unknowingly", third, for a better understanding of women's history (Moer.1976). She proved that women's writings, drawing their themes from their own experiences and cultures, measured up to any literary standard, but they have been misread and misjudged.

Showalter (1977: 14) in *A Literature of Their Own* focuses on the same conceptual ground. She emphasizes that "to rediscover" the past and form "a sense of collective identity is a must for any movement. In this book, Showalter gives an academic emphasis to many neglected or forgotten women fiction writers and their subjects of interest. Later, in her article "Towards a Feminist Poetics", Showalter defines two distinct mode of feminist criticism: "feminist critique" which

designates the critical attitude towards male writings, and “gynocritics”, which means “scholarship concerned with woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women” (Showalter, 1986: 44).

Gilbert and Gubar's (1979: 8) *The Madwoman in the Attic* came to assert this direction. They developed a theory of “female literary response to male literary assertion and coercion”. They focused on “female literary creativity” and the anxiety of the author exploring “the difficult paths by which nineteenth century women overcame their anxiety of authorship, repudiated debilitating patriarchal prescriptions, and recovered or remembered the lost foremothers who could help them find their distinctive female power”. Gilbert and Gubar (1979: 9) argue that women could not both write and remain feminine without transgressing the norms set up by patriarchal authority. Thus the women writers were faced with a double burden. They themselves raised and answered the questions about the options open to the woman writer. They showed how women from Jane Austen and Mary Shelley to Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsest works whose surface designs conceal and obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meanings” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 11).

Since the 1980s, feminist criticism has followed various traditions, but all are related to gender analyses and gender theory: French feminist criticism, Marxist/Socialists-feminist criticism, Poststructuralist/deconstruction/Postmodernism, Third World feminist criticism, Black feminist criticism, and Lesbian feminist criticism. By 1985, the French feminist approach started playing a vital role in shaping feminist literary criticism by presenting a new conceptual framework. Moi (1985: 31), in *Sexual Textual Politics*, criticizes the approach of Gilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman* as well as other representatives of Anglo-American feminist criticism. She supports the approach of feminist French criticism presented by Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Helene Cixous, who focus on language and its relation to gender, literary forms, and men and the psyches of women. She focuses on a separate feminine literary identity that has its own beauty and characteristics.

The Marxist/Socialist-feminists critics such as Tillie Olsen, Juliet Mitchell, Lilian Robinson, and Michele Barret stress the identical phase of literature and life. In general, “Marxism argues that literature is the ideological representation of life experience”. (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 38). This focuses on economic relations, though gender is not at the centre of Marxist-feminist critics, the idea of gender is part of this theory. Robinson in *Sex, Class and Culture* (1978: 60) argues that literature describes women's social roles. They focus on the “ways of institutions in which representations of gender and representations of institutions such as class and

the family interconnect” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 40).

Poststructuralist critics focus on how literature works in particular contexts. It attacks binary oppositions between men and women. Their arguments are in line with those of Marxist/socialist feminist criticism: “no language or literature can ever be 'free' from the conditions which produce it” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 42). Culler (1987: 56) in *Structuralist Poetic* says that “the notion of rational identity is crucial to the semiotic or structural analysis of all kinds of social and cultural phenomena”, because in formulating the rules of the system, one must identify the units on which the rules operate and thus must discover when two objects or actions count as instance of the same unit. Michel Foucault has also analyzed the way in which discourses control and define women and men. Poststructuralists present a discipline for understanding literature and gender as constructions. To them, literary values which are used to define and choose the literary canon are not fixed but are based on class and gender forms of control and power. French feminist criticism and poststructuralist feminists in literature form the ideal discipline for understanding literature and gender as constructions. To them, the literary values which are used to define and choose the literary canon are not fixed but are based on class and gender forms of control and power. French feminist criticism and poststructuralist feminists share an interest in the idea of subjectivity which focuses on the role of language in literary form: the specific linguistic representations of masculinity and femininity and what alternative representations can be constructed, considering literature to be the accumulation of objectivity.

Partriachy: A means of Women Exploitation in *Hayātu min waraqin*

Saudi Arabia features a social system in which the male is the primary authority in all matters be it the moral, the political, the social and the religion. Fathers hold authority over women and children without their consultations. Fawziyyah al-Bakr portrays this in her short story *hayātu min waraqin* while engaging the social life of Saudis. The story shows how decisions are traditionally reached in typical Saudi families without any input from women. The mother cannot challenge the authority of the father, even if he is not right. In portraying her father, the narrator says:

والوالد المهيب يتوسط الحلقة... كم يبدو شامخا المركز... إنه الأساسي
للدائرة... تتطلق كل الخيوط... وبأصابعه تتقرر المواسم. (Al-Zahrani, M.S. 2001:505)

Our venerable father always sits in the middle. Many a times he appeared intimidating! He's indeed the centre of the circle; all issues for discussion emanate from him, and it is he who decides everything (Akewula.2014: 113)

Fawziyyah sees Arab women as trapped beings, and explores their consequent feelings of alienation and destructive rebellion. Her heroine expresses self-absorbed view of woman's dilemma. This is in line with Al-Zayyat who is concerned primarily with the absence of freedom of choice for women. Perhaps because Al-Zayyat's characters are concerned with personal rather than political goals, they seek, and often find, an inner strength that allows them to transcend social barriers.

The heroine's father in the text is the patriarch of the family. Thus he is the sole decision-maker of her family. It is rather symbolic that the heroine does not have a name; this shows her lack of identity. In addition to this, the heroine's family is a representative of her society and their daily experiences and responsibilities. Most forms of feminism characterise patriarchy as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women. Al-Zayyat argues that the patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection. In feminist theory, the concept of patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male dominance over women. Feminist theory typically characterizes this form of Saudi system as a social construction which can be overcome by revealing and critically analyzing its manifestations. Al-Zayyat illustrates the theme of rebellion, the second phase of development of Arab women writers. It describes the life of Laylah Fawaz, a young woman who wants to rise above the hypocrisies of her environment. In order to do so, she rebels violently and self-destructively. The culmination of Laylah's negative rebellion is an unsuccessful suicide attempt. The dual purpose of Al-Zayyat's portrayal of Laylah, a criticism of die-hard traditionalism as well as of superficial modernity, has been pointed out by the critic Al-Amin who sees Laylah as "An extreme example of a woman disenchanted with her existence as she seeks to find meaning for her life and asserts her identity despite the restrictions of a conservative society." According to Accad (2007: 3), the portrayal of Laylah underlines not only the absurdity of tradition but also the hypocrisy and dishonesty concealed by the Arab society.

Each person in Laylah's world becomes an object of revulsion: her father, because she catches him watching the plump neighbor woman undressing; her mother, for submitting to the petty oppressions of her married life; one sister for wanting to get married, the other for wanting to amass learned degrees. She sees as typical of every Middle Eastern family an attitude unabashedly hypocritical or blindly passive. Laylah's feelings toward her sisters show the extent of her alienation. She no longer has any compassion for other victims of society whose circumstances closely resemble her own. Limited by the tunnel vision of her personal rebellion, Laylah even feels hatred for her own sisters.

Bored and frustrated, Laylah takes a job in a press agency. Her parents violently object because it costs them a good deal of social status to have a daughter who goes off to work. At work she is not taken seriously: her job is to answer letters of complaint, but no such letters ever come.

As it is in other Arab countries, gender consciousness and politics operate at the core of Saudi Arabia. This is being used as an analytical approach in the private and public, heterosexual and homosocial relations of the society which is predominantly patriarchal. The women in Saudi Arabia, like others in the Arab world, appear to have no identity of their own (Oladosu, 2008). They view themselves the way society perceives them. It is possible to generalise most Saudis believe men and women have different roles in life. The Islamic interpretation of some scholars, however, puts the most radical construction imaginable on the rights and position of women. The debate rages incessantly throughout the Muslim world. All that can be said is that in the daily reality of the Kingdom, women's freedom is severely restricted. Women are not allowed to drive cars; they are not free to move about outside the homes unaccompanied by a male guardian, or *mahram*, or to represent themselves in their legal or business dealings (Badran, 2005: 6).

The origin of these restrictions is not completely religious but of tribal mores that characterises Saudi laws. Hard-liners justify the prohibitions on religious grounds. They see women as inherently wanton temptresses, who must be contained for their own good, by a firm male hand. In tribal custom, it made sense at one stage to keep one's womenfolk from the acquisitive gaze of rival tribes (among some tribes in the Najd, women apparently conceal their bodies and faces from their husbands). In any case, the two have now become inextricably intertwined (Badran, 2005: 7).

In theory, segregation merely defines the distinct roles of men and women. Men take care of business, while women rule in the home. But in reality, it is the women who lose out on many fronts, and such sway as they hold in the home depends on strong character and the acquiescence of husbands and fathers. A man can divorce his wife but a woman cannot do so. In exceptional circumstances, she can persuade a judge to compel the husband to divorce her and due to the importance of kinship ties, some women rely on their own paternal relatives to act in their defence; when they have problems with their husbands, their *mahram* may come and rescue the situation (Badran, 2005: 8). Hence, the identity of women in Saudi Arabia mirrors women's writing ability as far as literary creativity especially fiction is concerned. It is arguable that the socio-practices of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia play major roles in marginalisation and silence of women's fiction.

The narrator of *hayātu min warāqin*, explores the situation on ground in

their contemporary society and use the medium of fiction to reveal it. The language of Fawziyyah's story is simple as it is written from the first-person narrative point of view. This kind of story affords the readers the fact that the narrator may be directly involved in the events subsumed within the story.

Conclusion

This paper has been concerned with the marginalisation of women literary works, especially Saudi women. This is the aftermath of the emergence of women's movements. The study investigated the emergence of fiction writing in Saudi Arabia which is dated back to 1960s and *Fawziyyah Al-Bakr*, a female writer's text was selected for the study. In this paper, I have raised the question of marginalisation as the primary objective of my work followed by brief analyses of a chosen writer to buttress the assertion that women write literature in Saudi Arabia. This methodology was adopted from Eastern and Western feminists' writers. The paper has revealed that gender themes which are evident in Saudi women's fiction are unexplored by the literary critics. Women writers in Saudi Arabia carved more identity for themselves in genre of fiction than any other literary writings. The literary text of the author eventually gives an insight into Saudi women's world.

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