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The Scheherazade Romance in Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*, Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma*

Aya Akkawi *
Department of English and Translation, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman
Department of English Language and Literature, Yarmouk University, Jordan

Rasha Maqableh
Department of English Language and Literature, Dhofar University, Oman

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Abstract

Many Arab, female Anglophone writers have taken the lead to showcase new dimensions of women empowerment in their works of fiction. One of these dimensions includes a plot we coined as the Scheherazade Romance. This coined term allocates Arab, Muslim women as heroines and White, Western men as heroes when defining the romance they experience. This paper aims at providing a new conceptual framework added to the subgenres of the romance, the Scheherazade Romance. The female characters (emblems of Scheherazade) challenge the conventional identity tropes of their culture, and go through with the shape-shifting forces of their lives. This similar shift in their identities come to explain their enhanced agency, forms of resistance, and their ability to achieve trans-cultural harmony with racially and culturally 'other' man. Thus, the study examines the following literary works— Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*, Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma* — which relate to this concept.

Keywords: The Scheherazade Romance, Female Anglophone Writers, *In the Eye of the Sun*, *The Translator*, *My Name is Salma*.

I. Introduction

In 1999, people, in the Arab world in particular, witnessed an upsurge in media discussion about the elopement of a princess from Bahrain with a US Marine. Stories about the princess's oppressed life in her family and her struggle to resist and escape patriarchal domination in all aspects of life, including relationships with men, flooded national and international news organizations[1].The latter polished the US place in the world as a beacon of hope for the oppressed while the former condemned and harangued with questions of the princess's dishonorable behavior. What matters at the end, though, is that this love story didn't last long when, after four years of marriage, the princess filed for divorce to win her "freedom" again but this time with the US green card[2]. Such discourse reveals how ideologies are perceived and, most importantly, reconstructed. This story draws attention to some Arab female Anglophone writers,

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* Corresponding Author: **a.akkawi@squ.edu.om**

whose works fantasize about a new romance trend: An Arab woman falling in love with or marrying a European or American man. Despite the fact that numerous novelists and postcolonial theorists including E.M Forster, Frantz Fanon, Salman Rushdie, Edward Said, Gyatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, to mention a few, have addressed the clash between the Eastern and Western political and social paradigms in their works, the Arab female Anglophone authors in this study may have marginalized these clashes and turned to focus on portraying a vast system of oppression Arab women endure in diaspora, caused not by Western culture but by their Eastern one. The Arab female characters in these novels, as we claim, may be a synecdoche for a new Scheherazade that attempts to expose those who deny their empowerment and freedom of choice. Thus, this paper attempts to investigate the romantic relationship between an Arab Muslim woman with a western man, American and English, in the works of three Anglophone female writers—Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*, Leila aboulela's *The Translator*, and Fadia Faquir's *My Name is Salma*. We attempt to add, present and analyze a new coined conceptual framework to the subgenres of romance: The Scheherazade Romance. The paper argues that this new phenomenal plot challenges insidious cultural and social oppressions. In addition, the paper showcases new dimensions of women empowerment, and explains the shift in their identities which enable them to enhance their agency to finally achieve trans-cultural harmony with the 'other' man.

Romance, as Benjamin Disraeli defines it is "the offspring of fiction and love" (qtd. in Ramsdell 1999, 3). As romance nowadays alludes to a love story, novels that treat this theme fictionally can be referred to as romance. In the contemporary western literary canon, a romance "focuses on the developing love relationship or courtship between the protagonists," should have "a satisfactory ending," and has other secondary "complications…and mysteries to be solved" (Ramsdell 1999, 4). Romance, in western literature, might contain subplots but the main plotline focuses on the adventurous love story between two characters and should end with an emotional and successful fulfillment of their relationship. This leads us to ask some questions: is there a mass-market version of romance in the Arabic literary canon? If there is, what are the criteria that qualify it as a romance?

II. Romance in Arabic Literature

When today's Arab readers refer to romance, the *Arabian Nights* is one of world- wide fame. Scheherazade, the emblem of this romance, captivates King Shahryar by her provocative and digressive stories leaving her narrative climax suspended till after 1001 nights; the king falls in love with her and finally upgrades her to be his queen not only his entertainer. However, romance anecdotes in classical Arabic literature, most of the time, are perceived through the love narratives in its poetry. Pierre Cachia contends that such kind of narrative appears in pre-modern Arabic poetry— "qasīda":

> Qasīda was known as the nasīb or amatory prelude. This was the celebration of a lost love. Sometimes what stirred the poet's emotion was an apparition which he took to be the specter of the beloved. More commonly, however, the entire poem started with a situation so conventional and so well understood by the audience that it was not explicitly described: The poet, traveling through the desert with one or

> two companions, comes upon the traces of an encampment where once dwelt a woman he loved, and he gives expression to what was known as "weeping over the ruins." (2002, 4)

Cachia refers to the structure of the pre-modern Arabic poem, qasida, which entails a romance narrative. The famous heroes and heroines in those poems are Antar and Abla, Qays and Layla, Qays and Lubna, and Jamil and Buthayna. The narration offers to present the rapture of love between an Arab man and his beloved (typically a kin or from another rival tribe). The hero, in these poems, goes into a quest due to regulations of desert life and tribal lore of the Arab world in pre-modern period. He must fulfill his role in the tribe, go into wars and raids on other tribes, prove his chivalry, and gains qualities needed for survival. Part of this quest includes his strife and struggle to fulfill this love union between him and his beloved, yet either the family of the heroine or of the romance hero sets series of barriers and obstacles to end this union. Prominent, of course, is the narrative form of these poems in which the male character habitually dominates the tales.

Prose began to flourish in Arabic literature in the eighth century. Letters, short stories, treaties, and 'maqamas' (an assembly) told lively and amusing stories. The historical, religious, and political incidents that were happening at that time loomed large in prose works while love stories were conceived as subplots meant for entertainment and often were instrumental in the success of the theme. Nevertheless, love was "almost exclusively the theme of the muwassah" (Cachia 2002, 95). Muwassah is a form of Arabic and Andalusian poetry which includes romance language and some colloquial Andalusian and Arabic words. Some of these works revealed what love meant and how it was characterized at that time: an elite person fell in love with a slave girl among other sexual attractions.

In modern Arabic literature, which began to develop in mid nineteenth century, love stories replicate the same classical romance narratives in the sense that it was considered a secondary theme and not most often celebrated. Although current academic research on romance in modern and contemporary Arabic literature is limited, scholars in recent decades have noticed some changes that took place in romance narrative conventions. For example, Reuvin Snir claims that "Arabic love poetry was just as often pederastic as it was heterosexual" (2017, 12). He alludes that homosexuality has a place in love narrative and is overtly celebrated. Cachia, on the other hand, argues that by the end of 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, "Arabs were swamped with European romantic models, and these induced an outpouring of emotion" (2002, 131). He continues to claim that "standards to which the present-day Arab writers hold themselves are still those that have proved their efficacy in the THE GRAFTING West. It is by these that they measure the global culture in which they seek a dignified position" (2002, 138-139). Cachia's assumption excludes any creative judgment that might be found in Arabic literature and it strikingly demonstrates that text productions of modern Arab writers are an imitation of western literary resources, forms, ideas, and images. A good illustration of Cachia's aforementioned argument is found in works of Syro-American school whom Cachia called "the Elite": they " were mostly Christians; they fitted easily into a Western environment and readily absorbed its dominant tastes and perceptions" (2002, 157) and their works "[hold] the initiative in cultural matters and [determine] what the literary canon is to

be" (2002, 178). Romance, in "Elite's" text production can be found in Khalil Mutran's sentimental work *A Story of Two Lovers* and in the amorous letters exchanged between May Ziyadah and Jibbran, to mention but a few. Further, most of those writers, quoting Cachia, “view themselves principally as reformers, as molders of the future” (2002, 180). They were key figures in paving the way for the romantic movement to be addressed in many Arabic literary works in the first half of the twentieth century.

In other words, these Arab writers were influenced by western authors and assimilated themes found in the western literary canon. Although those leading writers have tried to resist the blind imitation of western influence especially after western colonization, they find themselves replicating themes found in antecedent western texts to investigate newly genuine problems in their society[3]. Arabic literature, then, becomes mainly classified as historical, political, or social. Subjects of romance (love, courtship, marriage, and sexuality) are used to conceptualize the historical and socio-political life and envision changed values occur in society due to the turbulent incidents.

Some contemporary Arabic scholars and writers consider romance trivial and go far by claiming that love relationships, courtships, and sexual attractions are influenced by western culture. To them, romance contradicts with Arabic traditions and values, and should be resisted. Ibrahim al-Mazini, for instance, claims that "the belief that it is desirable for the Arabic novel to be analogous to the Western novel is a mistake; each community has the particularities of its life" (qtd. in Cachia 2002, 10). He further ponders,

> who claims that every novel must revolve around this sentiment alone, and that love must be the novel's framework and pivot? Don't people in this world have occupations other than that of love, and intentions other than a woman's success with a man or a man's with a woman? (10).

As he states his disagreement with the Western influence regarding romance narrative in Arabic novels, it is ironical to believe Al-Mazini's proclamation once one read his novel *Ibrahim Al-Katib* (1931) which recounts the hero's love adventures with different women and *Three Men and a Woman* (1943) which traces a beautiful woman's search for love and her bewilderment to choose a man to love and marry among three men in her life. We come to a conclusion that romance as a canonized genre in Arabic literature is absent while romance narrative found in text productions are politicized, historicized and socialized.

III. The Scheherazade Romance

Unlike the classical Arabic romance narrative form in which the male character dominates the tale, modern and contemporary Arabic literature written by women includes female protagonists dominating the narration. Modern and contemporary Arab female writers draw on a rich and complex representation of many themes including the theme of love that defies silence and oppression in the patriarchal world. The heroines can be classified as

> the believer who recites poetry about divine love; the princess who possesses knowledge, power, and standing; the slave girl trained in the lute and pleasuring her

> master; the strong, free woman capable of public, eloquent speech, at times bold or even obscene; and the shy woman who speaks in a low voice from behind the curtain. The mother of them all is, of course, Shéhérazade, the mistress of speech, who tells stories upon stories. Her tales go beyond time and place, and through them, she takes leave of the king's bedchamber and steps into the wider world (Ashour et al. 2009, 10).

Since they all lineally descended from Scheherazade, as Ashour suggests, they are patterned on the frame story of Scheherazade: They are domestic, malleable, maternal, passive, chaste, romantic yet enchanting, revolutionary, reformist, empowered and erotic. Each female heroine lying within Ashour's classification has her own plot which includes in many respects a form of romance escapade and a goal to accomplish. Arab female writers, if we may assume, use Scheherazade as an emblem of romance heroine to manipulate stereotypes of Arab women and to articulate resistance for them through reinforcing their role in challenging all sorts of authority, social conventions, and patriarchal control. We may further claim that love narratives portrayed in these works can be depicted as instrumental in constructing the female identity in a patriarchal culture.

IV. Sheikh Romance as a Subgenre of Western Romance and the Scheherazade Romance as a Subgenre of Romance

Western romance genre is classified into several subgenres depending on the setting, plot, and theme[4]. One subgenre of romance—Sheikh romance or desert romance—has inspired us to write this research paper. Essentially some of the known works of sheikh romance genre, like Susan Mallery's *The Sheikh and the Bought Bride*, *The Sheikh and the Christmas Bride*, Kim Lawrence's *The Sheikh's Impatient Virgin*, and Nalini Singh's *Desert Warrior*, to mention a few, focus on the love story between a rich Arabian/sheikh hero and a white (typically British or American) heroine. Amira Jarmakani states that sheikh novels are popular in the west (specifically in the US)

> because of the electrifying "alpha maleness" of the sheikh-hero; because of the romance of the Orient, which provides a faraway, dreamy setting for fantasy or escape; and because they provide a forbidden, unknown, and exotic backdrop in which the romantic scene can unfold (2010, 994).

What articulates the relationship between the sheikh and the white heroine is exoticism, difference, race, sexuality, and power relations which made such line of novels flourish in the west since, as Reina Lewis argues, "the whiteness of a white subject is so normative that it is often experienced as nonevent unless activated by comparison with a black subject" (1996, 15). Although Billie Melman feels that "the emergence and spread of the stereotypes of the eastern lover was a threat to the ideals of western manhood" (1992, 91), and even though the war on terror has stimulated anti-Arab/Anti-Muslim prejudice in the west, Jessica Taylor, on the other hand, asserts that "the sheikh hero has continued on as a staple of the romantic fiction industry" (2007, 1037). It is worth considering, though, that this subgenre "[manipulates] stereotypes of Arab men" (Storey 2014, 126). Likewise, Patricia Rauber notes that in

sheikh romance "the roles have been reversed; the conqueror now entreats his subject. Within the fantasy world of this romance power relations between men and women have been reversed" (1992, 126). Thus, the Arab hero becomes entrenched with exotic whiteness and is transformed by the white heroine's cultural supremacy and liberation from a violent, regressive predator into a tamed, humbled lover and husband. Although this portrayal is relevant to the Orientalist discourse of how the Oriental male is constructed and civilized by the occident female, this discussion is irrelevant to the paper's focus and aim.

What role then do Arab heroines (the female children of Scheherazade) play in the works of Anglophone female writers like Soueif, Aboulela, and Faqir? To fully understand their role, however, we must construct a sub-genre of romance for them— the Scheherazade Romance—in which the Arab heroine falls in love with a western hero. Unlike the Sheikh romance which is set in fictional desert-like countries in the Arab world, the Scheherazade Romance is set in real western places. The western hero is not a knight-like figure; he is an average successful man, white, and modernized, while the female Arab heroine is vulnerable, fragile, suppressed, and inferior. Nonetheless, through her dwelling in the West, this heroine, as characterized by those writers, manages to adapt to her conditions and succeeds by surviving and by creating new solutions that are appropriate for her circumstances. Various literary themes, including East and West, colonial and post-colonial, urban and rural, and classical and modern—are combined in the narrative, which reveals an inescapable hybridity of the text. In order to reach out to a wide range of audience, these texts are written in English.

Scheherazade, as a classic archetype, is portrayed in many Arab female immigrant writings. Their works, whether poetry, fiction, autobiography or non-fiction, lean on narrating compelling stories, just like Scheherazade, to explore ways to shatter stereotypes about them, bridge the gap between East and West, present the issue of identity crisis, and disseminate concepts of justice and equality. For instance, Naomi Shihab Nye, Etel Adnan, Suheir Hammad, Gregory Orfalea, and Mohja Kahf, among others utilize their writing to express their challenging experiences of diaspora, define themselves and fight against stereotypes about their race (Alqahtani 2017, 19). Suzan Darraj in her edited anthology book entitled *Scheherazade's Legacy: Arab and Arab American Women on Writing* exhibits many Arab female Anglophone writers residing in America as "Scheherazade's legacy." What brings these writers together, according to Darraj, is that they "are inspired by their Eastern connections, their writing and their themes touch a global audience while reclaiming the image of Scheherazade as a woman who wove a marvelous tapestry of tales" (2004, 3). Jumana Haddad's (2011) *I killed Scheherazade: A Confession of Angry Arab Woman* dispels the long-held idea of Scheherazade, who won the king's affections, and questions common perceptions about Arab womanhood. This investigation into what it means to be an Arab woman in the modern western world has influenced a new global feminism. These writers, though, do not bring into account in their narratives or investigations the romantic relationship between an Arab woman and a Western man found in other Arab Anglophone novels like Soueif's *The Eye of the Sun*, Aboulela's *The Translator* and Faqir's *My Name is Salma*.

Probably, what encouraged Soueif, Aboulela, and Faqir to address the love relationship between a Muslim woman and a Western man is their own marital experience and transculturation. Soueif married

Ian Hamilton, a British literary critic, poet, and publisher with whom she lived in London before he died in 2001. Aboulela's husband is half Sudanese and half British, and they live in Aberdeen, whereas Faqir's husband is Hungarian and English, and they live in Durham. Due to their non-Western cultural heritage and exposure to Western culture through Western-style education and/or by living and attending school in the West, they acquired knowledge of disparate temporality[5]. Their early lives include bilingual dialogism, and the experience of crossing cultures develops into a key motif in their writing. As the paper will later detect, the authors are able to fluidly incorporate the actual tones, images, voices, and complex socio-politics of Arabic society into the recognizable English language and the imaginative and moral world of English literature, in which their narrators are well-versed. Like their authors, the heroines, in the novels under study, have dual life experience and traverse cultural and linguistic boundaries.

We find it compelling to mention that it is impossible to disregard Said's theories about Orientalism as this research sort of probes into the East and West, notably in the portrayal of Oriental women and their relationship with western men. Said argues that Orientalist literature and art often depict these women as exotic objects of desire, perpetuating a sense of Otherness and reinforcing the power dynamics between the East and the West. The research at hand, nonetheless, critically analyzes how these representations may have influenced some Arab female writers' perception of Oriental women, and how they have contributed to the construction of a discourse that challenges such presentations. Moreover, Said's concept of Otherness is essential when discussing the relationship between East and West. As the West has historically positioned itself as superior to the East, creating a binary opposition that defines the East as fundamentally different and inferior, we argue that Arab female writers and characters—Scheherazade emblems— explore how this constructed dichotomy shapes their understanding of cultural identities, challenge the power dynamics that exist between cultures, and strive for a more nuanced and fair understanding of each other.

Despite the fact that these heroines were created by their female authors, they are "self-conscious protagonists" (Sarnou 2016, 210) who have experiences that might be different from their authors regardless of some found similarities. Since they have lived life differently, these heroines offer comments about topics related to their life-condition as women who perceive the world differently (Sarnou 2016, 211). Therefore, we won't be surprised when we perceive these female protagonists as carrying a disappointment in men (father, brother, lover, or husband) and the need for them to depend on themselves. They don't want to follow the rules that their society and culture has set for them. To the opposite effect, they discover that they also aspire to the same kind of success as women do "back home," namely marriage and a fulfilling relationship with a man. As will be manifested in the discussion, the Scheherazade Romance confronts patriarchal oppressions, exemplifies new facets of women's empowerment, and explains the shift in their identities that allows them to increase their agency and achieve cross-cultural harmony with the racially and culturally "other" man.

V. Asya, Sammar, and Salma's Romance Journey in the Arab World

The works under study, as we claim, speak out against patriarchal authority which hinders women's agency when it comes to romance. Therefore, the Scheherazade Romance journey is important to provide such agency to the female characters in these novels. The patriarchal society entails a patriarchal control, the realization of which requires two inseparable things: a father who embodies wisdom, knowledge, and undiminished perfection, making him a forbidding command of the sole will, and minor children, regardless of age, who are subject to the sole will of the father, and they must accept it, without protest or accountability. This derives the woman into double subjection: she submits to the father like all others, and she submits to the male brother or husband when he takes the place of the father image. The dominant male figure might be present (real father/brother/husband) or absent (symbolic father/brother/husband)[6]. Tabitha Freeman, on the other hand, argues that

> while the paradoxical place of fathers within psychoanalytic theory can be understood in terms of its patriarchal heritage, the implicit tension between the symbolic presence and qualitative absence of men in family life ultimately undermines the logic of this ideological system (2008, 118).

Freeman suggests that the absence of the dominant male figure promotes his "alienation" from his children (2008, 128) which eventually leads to the absence of patriarchal dominance in the family life. This alienation results in a shift in monolithic decision making. In other words, the decision-making center has shifted from one in which the father has sole authority to one in which other family members participate. This shift promotes women's agency and elevates their status from the margin to the center.

The representation of the real father— the father as a person— and the symbolic father— the name and authority— is replaced by the husband in *In the Eye of the Sun*, the mother in law in *The Translator*, and the brother in *My Name is Salma*. This calls into question the ubiquity of patriarchal authority beyond its manifestation in any individual female.

Soueif introduces the character of Professor Mukhtar al-Ulama, the dominant father, who was once the dean of the Faculty of Arts at Cairo University, an ex-Minister of Culture, and a respected public figure (1992, 29). His dominance over Asya negatively disturbs his relationship with her especially when he "[insists] on a lengthy formal courtship before she can marry Saif Madi—a four-year delay that Asya claims ruins their sexual life" (Kirkus 1993, 1). As Asya, at a young age, lacks father-daughter intimacy which is hidden under the cultural supremacy of the father, the father becomes more and more marginalized throughout the novel. His influence and authority over Asya evades when she gets married to Saif whom Asya thinks might give her romance, intimacy, security, and freedom she desired from her father. Asya describes Saif to her friend when she first met him: "I know the obvious analysis is the 'father-figure/father-fixation' one, but really he's utterly unlike my father. For one thing he has a moustache. I never thought I could fall in love with a man with a moustache" (Soueif 1992, 98). Saif becomes the fixated father-image and lover who will dominate Asya's life as shown in the novel.

When Asya has fallen in love with Saif at the age of 18, and while she has been studying English Literature at the University of Cairo, she manages to escape the fatherly assigned curfews and spends

every Sunday lying in bed next to Saif, kissing him and experiencing orgasms through the sensual touching (Soueif 1992, 161). Asya always feels sad afterwards because they could not go out dancing, visiting friends, or making love properly as a married couple (Soueif 1992, 161). She meets Saif in Beirut and London while they are still not engaged, and she tries to persuade him that she is ready for a physical relationship, which Saif bluntly and repeatedly assures her that he wants to wait until they marry. Their sexual experience after marriage is not as she has fantasized about when she was in love with him.

The intimacy, pleasure, romance and love she has imaginatively desired before their marriage is replaced with fear, pain, and displeasure after their marriage. Saif, then, refrains from sexually penetrating her. What results from this alienation is Asya's beliefs that Saif has stopped loving her and has regrets marrying her even when he says to her "I love you. I love you well enough to live with you like a sister" (Soueif 1992, 302). Chambers notes that "what results from this in the context of touch and the body is that Asya is unable for a long time to move beyond the binary of 'virgin' or 'whore', the only categories into which patriarchal structures in general and Saif in particular see fit to slot her" (Soueif 1992, 12). The sexless marriage puts a strain on Asya who sees Saif as the one who should provide stability, security, and intimacy in their lives, but he is not particularly romantic.

The patriarchal dominance in *The Translator* does not take the shape of an authoritative father, brother, or husband. Sammar's father and husband are dead and only Waleed, her brother, is there but he has no authority over her. Patriarchal power in the novel could be read through the Foucauldian notion of power which is not necessarily repressive, coercive, or violent. It is "employed and exercised through a netlike organization . . . Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application" (Foucault 1980, 98). In other words, it could be suggested that the authoritative system is one that uses instruments to enable it to produce aspects that ensure its survival rather than one that inevitably requires force and direct repression to enforce its control. In this regard, one of the elements of its continuity is women who embrace the patriarchal system as a natural approach that governs the universe and ensure that none of the women veer off the path. This can be manifested in the novel through Mahasen, Sammar's mother in law, who is described by Sammar as "a strong woman […] a leader" (Aboulela 1999, 7). After nine months of Tarig's death, Sammar is confused and feels vulnerable. She has decided to get married to Am Ahmad, an old man who has two wives, because she claims she needs a focus in her life (Aboulela 1999, 28). Mahasen has fiercely refused this marriage, called Sammar an "idiot girl" (Aboulela 1999, 8), and asked her to focus on her son, Amir (Aboulela 1999, 28). Sammar's eagerness to remarry is an attempt to acquire a sense of completeness again after her devastating loss since she believes that "marriage [is] half of their faith" (Aboulela 1999, 108). Mahasen, on the other hand, believes that Sammar's clear path to happiness and a sense of completeness is through working because she is an educated woman and through taking care of her son, while rebellion on this path is a monument of recklessness and lack of awareness.

Kate Manne, in her book *Down Girl*, asserts that women who conform to gendered norms and expectations do not necessarily hate women who rebel against patriarchal norms. Rather, it means that these women are transformed into a tool of the patriarchal system by perpetuating the duality of the good woman and the bad woman (2017, 71). This means that any woman who deviates from the stereotypes of

good women that society has constructed, such as the respectful friend, the understanding daughter, and the loving mother, will suffer at the hands of conformist women from a barrage of accusations of selfishness, rebellion, and shame. As a result, she will be violently punished, either verbally (through titles and rumors) or morally (through repudiation and reprimand) or physically, or all of the above. In this sense, Aboulela shows that Mahasen doesn't hate Sammar. Her age and family status as the head of the family are two advantages Mahasen employs against Sammar, particularly if religion is cited as the sole justification for submission. Sammar submits to Mahasen because she is a devout Muslim and because Mahasen represents the patriarchal system. As a result, she gives up some of her rights and desires, such as receiving the full inheritance of her husband's home and agreeing to Mahasen's commands and household duties, in order to prevent all privileges and rights from being taken away from her.

Unlike Soueif and Aboulela's novels, the stereotypical Arab patriarchal mindset is realistically depicted in Fadia Faqir's *My Name Is Salma*. The novel portrays in flashbacks the life of Bedouins located in a fictional village called Hima. Salma's father, haj Ibrahim, is a "tall strong man" who needs a "fatwa" from the Imam to sell his olives (Faqir 2007, 29). This implies that the Bedouin society depicted in the novel adheres to a social structural code that is valued by all members of the society. Religion, however, does not maintain order within their social life; rather, loyalty to the tribe and clan does. Salma claims that her father does not pray on a regular basis unless a goat is stolen or there is drought (Faqir 2007, 10), but he must seek permission from the Imam to sell his crops. The implication that haj Ibrahim, who is described as tall and strong, is weaker than the Imam indicates how men are put under pressure because of patriarchal authority and the tribal code. As Salma falls in love with the son of the chief tribe, Hamdan, and becomes pregnant out of wedlock, her father and brother intend to kill her because she has tarnished her family's honor. The reader learns later that the father died because he could not tolerate the shame and the dishonor among his tribe. With the help of her mother, Salma is taken into prison—protective custody— where she gives birth to her daughter Layla who is taken from her and is given to her family. It is noted that these honor crimes are pervasive in tribal cultures, or societies with a strong traditional culture. With support from other crimes of a like nature committed "without a legal reservation to achieve social honor" and in an effort "to refute the fallacies surrounding the doubts and attitudes of the dishonored families" (Akkawi and Nashwan 2019, 51), this criminal activity has developed into a sort of social norm in such cultures. Honor crime, as it appears in its direct manifestation in Faqir's novel, does not reflect a violent reality, but it does reflect the more important reality of women in the consciousness / culture of Middle Eastern societies. Although, at the end of the novel, Salma couldn't escape her fate as a victim of honor crime, Faqir, as a female author and a prominent figure in the Scherezade's legacy, takes the agency to "[attack] patriarchal societies where women are forced to occupy a subordinate position, and rejects the notion of submissiveness in all its forms by empowering her female character" (Ben Amara 2022, 77). The act of empowerment that Faqir has infused in Salma is perceived through Salma's escape to England and through her journey to begin a new life as Sally.

VI. The Scheherazade Romance in *In the Eye of the Sun*

These novels depict women's dissatisfaction with romance to eastern men, bringing to light the Scheherazade Romance theme discussed in this paper. The Arab men fail to love, protect, and nurture the female heroines or restore the father intimacy lost between fathers and daughters. As depicted in these novels, when Arab women fall in love with Arab men, the relationship becomes oppressive, painful, and exhausting, leaving these heroines incomplete. We could argue that the female heroines are unable to see a resolution to such frustration except through a complete subversion of their tradition and cultural heritage. They depend upon a revolutionary material which is falling in love with a western man in order to fulfil the fanciful romance they have desired and to subvert patriarchal society- the symbolic order of their culture. This experience is the core of the Scheherazade Romance these characters experience in diaspora.

In Souief's *In the Eye of the Sun*, Asya's husband is not always seen, but his patriarchal effects pervade all places around her in Cairo and in London. When Saif visits Asya in London while she is pursuing her PhD, romance and touch are absent which matters most to Asya; therefore, she relies on her imagination to bridge the gap between the need for love, which can be tedious at times and necessitates endless giving on her part, and the desire for romance. Saif's alienation from Asya along with his infrequent meetings with her "impinges heavily on 'Romance', [and intensifies] the role of the imagination over straightforward sexual touch between Asya and Saif (Chambers 2019, 11). Living alone in London, away from any patriarchal influence, despite Saif's infrequent visits, causes Asya to question her needs and marital status. Saif's suppressive feelings of touch and romance can be attributed to his patriarchal upbringing which considers these emotions low and nadir. In order not to be emotionally manipulated by Asya's attempts to revive the romance between them, Saif, as Chambers records, "tries to mold Asya into exercising similar restraint in her speech and gestures, internalizing her emotions rather than expressing them too intemperately" (2019, 12). These suppressed emotions make Asya realize that her marriage is disintegrating and feels "sorry for herself" (Soueif 1992, 514).

Saif's physical, sexual, and emotional escape provokes Asya to feel "unslaked lust" for Mario, Saif's South African friend (Chambers 2019, 3). When Mario touches her when they are dancing in front of Saif, Asya remembers what her father once said that "it was only by other people's touching us that we knew we were here at all" (Soueif 1992, 500). Through thinking about touch and romance, Asya yearns to feel that she is desired, loved, complete which Saif ignores totally.

Asya, then, becomes aware that she cannot suppress her needs. Therefore, she indulges in a sexual relationship with an Englishman, Gerald Stone. She, at the beginning, doesn't feel "guilt, fear—confusion" (Soueif 1992, 541). Her justification to this feeling comes through these questions: "why not? Why should she […] never to be kissed and caressed and undressed and looked at and admired…?" (Soueif 1992, 540). Stone, who is doing an MA in marketing, metaphorically sells his love to Asya through "touch" to harbor his love to and wantonness of her. Their first sexual attempt is described as "impressive in its timing and execution" (Soueif 1992, 542). Asya is alive and confident once more. Chamber illustrates that "Asya is attracted to Gerald's blondness, his rangy body and unashamed

sensuality. If his surname suggests the unbending nature of rock, by contrast 'Gerald' has the aggressively phallic meaning of '[m]ighty spear ruler" (Soueif 1992, 14). Stone empowers Asya physically and emotionally. Her relationship with Stone allows her to stand up for herself and eliminate Saif's dominance; it is his turn to be repulsed and turned down by Asya when he wanted her (Soueif 1992, 687). Asya enjoys the sensual affair with Stone, yet she fears that Stone wants to dominate her.

Asya's relationship with Stone recalls the colonial atmosphere which looms large throughout the novel. Their relationship showcases an emphasis on the cultural differences and power hierarchy between the two but not within the colonizer/colonized discourse. Lila Abu- Lughod argues that "discourses on emotion or emotional discourses . . . are implicated in the play of power and the operation of historically changing systems of social hierarchy" (1990, 28). Abu-Lughod clarifies that emotions are essential in the power dichotomy and they can change and reconstruct the social hierarchy. In this sense, Soueif supports Asya with an impressive ideological formation related to the emotional discourse which makes Asya privileged with knowledge and domination over Stone who lives in her husband's house and "pays the rent" (Soueif 1992, 650) while her husband is absent. Concepts like inferior, subordinate, and dependent are reversed and describe Stone's position with Asya. Whenever Stone quarrels with Asya to force her to leave her husband and "to give […] this wonderful, unique, precious relationship, a chance to live" (Soueif 1992, 683), Asya feels detached "as though [she was] beyond it all" (Soueif 1992, 678). This scene always makes Stone refers to Asya's privileged upbringing as if she is better than anyone else (Soueif 1992, 685, 874). This detachment weaves a reversed power dichotomy between Asya/the East and Stone/ the West. Soueif, in her resistance to such dichotomies (West/East, Man/Woman), grants Asya the privilege to deliberately detach herself from Stone through focusing on finishing her PhD and having her mother, Professor Lateefa al_Ulama, to assist her. This denotes Asya's recognition of her social hierarchy and power against Stone and Saif. She no longer imagines romantic scenes between her and Saif as she becomes physically satisfied. She realizes that as much as she enjoys the sensual affair with Stone, he is not the right man for her nor is Saif. Asya tells Stone "Why should I stay if I don't want to?' – these boots were made for walking" (Soueif 1992, 854).

Soueif gives agency to Asya to express herself without engaging any sort of elevated facade (unlike she does when she's with Saif). She also reveals how Saif distorts Asya's nature with emotional and sexual deprivation and how she is emotionally and sexually emancipated with Stone. What is entailed here is that Saif's absence prompts Asya to ponder about her marriage life away from any patriarchal influence. Consequently, she realizes that she has to establish her own social hierarchy through finishing her PhD and working as a professor at Cairo University. Throughout the novel, she is found caught between two men, the absent husband whom she insists she loves, and the present English lover who encourages her to be "a leader" (Soueif 1992, 555) and "to get [her] priorities straight" (Soueif 1992, 556). Although Asya struggles psychologically and physically within this triangular relationship which eventually resulted in ending her relationship with Stone and getting divorce from Saif, Scheherazade's romance journey is instrumental in provoking Asya not only to transition out of the confinements of

patriarchal authority but also to efface it as she becomes alert to her sexual, emotional, and individualistic needs.

VII. The Scheherazade Romance in *The Translator*

Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* culminates in Sammar's idealistic romance formed at home and in diaspora. Sammar is born in Aberdeen and goes back to Sudan with her parents when she is seven. Being raised around her Sudanese relatives, Sammar gets married to Tareq, her cousin, and leaves with him to Aberdeen to pursue his medical studies. Tareq, however, dies in a car accident leaving Sammar incomplete. That is why, as mentioned earlier, she decides to get married to an old man who has two wives in order to feel complete again. After quarrelling with her mother in law, Sammar decides to go back to Aberdeen and live alone as if she has been "exiled" from her country (Aboulela 1999, 16), leaving her two-year old son with Tareq's mother, Mahasen, because she couldn't "mother the child" (Aboulela 1999, 7). She gets indulged to work as a translator to Professor Rae, a Scottish scholar whose research interest tackles the Middle East and Islamic studies. Although Tareq is symbolically present in Sammar's thoughts, the young woman realizes she cannot suppress her needs for romance, feelings she finds with and towards Rae.

Sammar's strong faith and her impenetrable sense of identity as a Muslim Sudanese woman contribute to this idealistic romance. She is "predicated on romantic love that can be described, along with other forms of love and emotions, as a constructed part of her identity" (Zannoun 2019, 1). Sammar constructs her identity in response to idealistic Islamic norms and idealistic Western morals, rather than her traditional and cultural upbringing. In other words, we can assert that Sammar represents Bhabha's idea of the hybrid self. Aboulela provides Sammar with a constructed identity and voice that come from the network of filaments that keep her connected to Sudan. Through this, Sammar comes to terms with the fact that she cannot reconcile either with Aberdeen or Sudan, but rather with her hybridity. She is a devout Arab Muslim but no longer a stereotyped vulnerable, breakable, and insecure woman. Sammar holds a special appeal to Rae, partly because she is unique in that "[he] feels safe with her" (Aboulela 1999, 51). She is not arrogant like his English ex-wife nor annoying like the Muslim scholars who want him to convert to Islam just because his research interests indulge with Islamic history and politics (Aboulela 1999, 89). Insofar as she believes that Rae loves her, she wields a form of power over him – the power to reject or leave. Before leaving to Egypt in a work mission, and as Rae confronts his love to Sammar, the latter somehow coerces him to convert to Islam so they could get married. However, Rae is not sure about that and asks Sammar to leave his office and never come back (Aboulela 1999, 125-129). Love makes lovers vulnerable, according to the laws of the romance genre (Clements 2001, 12). In this respect, Rae and Sammar are in a position of vulnerability in their romance. Sammar leaves Rae and decides to stay in Khartoum. She manages to keep herself "busy so that there would not be pauses in the day to dwell on. She tired herself so that there would not be dreams at night" (Aboulela 1999, 160). Sammar respects her religion and Sudanese culture but cannot deny her love for Rae or her wantonness to marry him. However, "like all translators, both Sammar and Rae are accused by their citizens of being

potential cultural traitors: he for telling the truth about Arabs and Islam, and she for cherishing a desire to marry a foreigner" (Abdel-Wahab 2014, 234). Through her suppressed love towards Rae, Sammar is not considering herself a "potential cultural traitor" if we may allude to Abdel-Wahab's claim. She sticks to her constructed identity which highly values her religion over love. When she learns that Rae has converted to Islam, she sends him a letter asking him to come and see her. When they meet in Khartoum, they decide to get married and go back to Aberdeen. Sammar's empowering forces arise when she initiates a productive dialogue with Rae which eventually leads to sustaining their romance. Rae's love of Sammar, on the other hand, not only empowers Sammar and gives her a sense of her subjectivity as a woman but also symbolizes her difference which Rae can rely on to establish a romantic love he also desires. Furthermore, Sammar is also empowered by her constructed identity which is an amalgamation of her religion and culture. These forces move "in opposite directions, prompting change and agency" (Zannoun 2019, 72). Aboulela rejects the categories of East versus West or Arab against European. Since Aboulela presents Sammar as neither entirely Arab nor fully Westerner, she slowly works things out and uses Sammar to bring the two cultures together. Thus, one might claim that the Scheherazade Romance exhibits characteristics such as women empowerment via romance and resisting/accepting societal forces to develop a feeling of subjectivity and agency.

VIII. The Scheherazade Romance in *My Name is Salma*

Contrary to Souif's Asya and Stone and Aboulela's Sammar and Rae, Faqir's romance, the love bond between Salma and professor John, is feeble. Faqir's portrayal of the romance in her book is unreal and prevents readers from fully engrossing themselves in it; she doesn't give it the necessary amount of time to grow and evolve. The name of Dr. John Robson appears firstly and suddenly in the novel when Salma is sitting with a random guy called Jim who has asked her about what she is doing in her life. She tells him that she works as a seamstress and does a part-time diploma in English. Then, the reader is introduced to Dr John Robson, whom Salma believes he is "distant", "busy", and his eyes are "always focused on something other than [Salma's] face" (Faqir 2007, 52). Afterwards, their story is separated between incidents and flashback memories Salma keeps indulging until, suddenly again, we see her submitting her essay to Dr. John who offers coffee to her and starts a brief chat with her asking about the name of her daughter (Faqir 2007, 171). There is no indication as where and when did Salma talk about her daughter or her life to John. Then, on Parvin's wedding night, Salma drinks too much and John is there to offer her his jacket because she is feeling cold (Faqir 2007, 201). After two weeks, she meets with John to get his feedback on her submitted essay which he criticizes harshly (Faqir 2007, 205). Then, he confronts her that he knows she doesn't have a daughter or husband but she admits that she has a daughter (Faqir 2007, 212). Later, Salma tells Parvin that John wants to marry her (Faqir 2007, 217). It is worth noting that the conversation between Salma and John is abrupt. The reader is left, sometimes, not knowing where Salma is, what she is doing why she is being assaulted or criticized, and how she manages to make John fall in love with her. Suddenly, she is married to John and the only genuine feeling of a

romance expressed by Salma is when they lie on the beach at Santorini, supposedly in their honeymoon, and she admits:

> In his arms I sought forgetfulness, oblivion, the colour of new seeds. He became the master and I the slave girl attending to his every need. He whispered orders and I, the English lady, obeyed. (Faqir 2007, 223)

We could argue that this poorly constructed narrative results from Salma's passivity and lack of agency, which Faqir intends to curtail by her determination to expose the injustice Arab women experience as a result of traditional and cultural restraints. Faqir here acts as an agent who controls her heroine and decides about Salma's movements and actions. This is also similar to other characters in the novel who control Salma and make choices for her while she sits there as a passive recipient. Hamdan exercises his power as the son of chief tribe over Salma when he deflowers and abandons her (Faqir 2007, 18); Salma's mother sends her to protective custody and her family takes her new born baby as an act of vengeance (Faqir 2007, 172); the Lebanese nun with the help of officials smuggle Salma out of the country and help her reach England (Faqir 2007, 46); English people criticize her look and verbally and physically abuse her while she accepts all this silently.

It is worth mentioning that *My Name is Salma* is a semi-autobiography of its writer's life as there are similar incidents in the novel Faqir herself encountered before leaving to England. She was forced by her father to leave her son in Jordan with her ex-husband. Then, she left to England and married an English professor (Aziz 2018, 2). Salma oscillates between the past and the present, comparing her first pregnancy which was out of wedlock with the second pregnancy as she is married to a foreigner (Faqir 2007, 227). Marrying John has not saved her as it is supposed to be in the Scheherazade Romance. We do not claim that John has treated her badly. To the contrary, from the fragmented conversations thrown here and there, Salma admits that John is a good husband and father (Faqir 2007, 233). He asks Salma to forget the past and focus on the present; to "hold on Imran and let go of Layla" (Faqir 2007, 240). Salma's past ruins her: "I should have been happy, but something was holding my heart back" (Faqir 2007, 231). The past has a powerful impact on Salma than the present and John and Imran's presence are not enough to empower her. As Faqir is taking agency over Salma, the former is consumed with revealing the ugly picture of honor killing than saving her heroine. Faqir gives Salma the opportunity to be liberated but both, Faqir and Salma, want this liberation to be practiced in their home country rather than in a foreign land. Salma is killed but Faqir is alive to tell Salma's story of failure, success, and death.

IX. Conclusion

The Scheherazade Romance allows Arab female authors and their heroines to do so without being bound by archaic cultural conventions. The writers featured in this study assert the autonomy of the female self and her right to act without restraint or supervision. We surmise that Soueif, Aboulela, and Faqir's works represent a paradigm shift in the Arab world's perception of women's romance that eliminates any stereotypes present in both Middle Eastern and Western literary production. In order to empower their heroines, these writers subvert the patriarchal ideology and manipulate the physical and

symbolic presence of the oppressed woman. Asya, Sammar, and Salma may have believed that they were too tied to their homelands, their families, and their lovers. However, their romance journey in the west, as part of the Scheherazade Romance experience, shows that this is not the case. Asya's relationship with Stone allows her to emancipate herself from the different shackles haunting her through her journey between Cairo and London. Sammar, on the other hand, manages to construct an idealistic romantic relationship with Rae through clinging to her hybrid identity as a Sudanese, Muslim, westernized woman. Salma, however, suffers internally as a result of her memoires, which makes it difficult for her to maintain the comfortable life she has built with John. The Scheherazade Romance reconstructs the traditional narrative of romance found in the Arab literary production. Instead of adoring the patriarchal powerful male, Scheherazade's female heroines have adoration of a romantic western man. In their quest for romance in the west, these women get an authenticity of experience they would never achieve with Arab men. These writers' interest in this taboo relationship—miscegenation- came out of complex reasons that have to do with their social and cultural issues. By looking at these narratives critically, the Scheherazade Romance emerges in a way in which these novels attempt to break taboos, maintain women's freedom of choice, and avoid racial tension between western men and Arab women. The coined term also opens the way for future research in which other scholars might investigate other themes related to Eastern female characters and their romance with Western men.

رومانسيّة شهرزاد في رواية *(في عين الشمس)* لأهداف سويف، المترجمة لليلى أبو العلا، و*(اسمي سلمى)* لفادية فقير

آية عكاوي
قسم اللغة الإنجليزيّة والترجمة، جامعة السلطان قابوس، عُمان
قسم اللغة الإنجليزيّة وآدابها، جامعة اليرموك، الأردن

رشا مقابلة
قسم اللغة الإنجليزيّة وآدابها، جامعة ظفار، عُمان

الملخص

أخذت العديد من الكاتبات العربيات الناطقات بالإنجليزيّة زمام المبادرة لعرض أبعاد جديدة لتمكين المرأة في أعمالها الروائيّة. يتضمن أحد هذه الأبعاد حبكة صيغت على أنها قصة شهرزاد الرومانسيّة. هذا المصطلح المصوغ يصف النساء العربيات والمسلمات كبطلات والرجال البيض والغربيين كأبطال عند تعريف الرومانسيّة التي يمرون بها. ويهدف هذا البحث إلى توفير إطار مفاهيمي جديد يضاف إلى الأنواع الفرعيّة للرومانسيّة، رومانسيّة شهرزاد. تتحدى الشخصيات النسائيّة (كرموز لشخصية شهرزاد) مجازات الهويّة التقليديّة لثقافتها، وتواصل مع عدة قوى لتغيير شكل حياتها، ويأتي هذا التحول المماثل في هوياتهم لشرح فاعليتهم المعززة، وأشكال المقاومة، وقدرتهم على تحقيق الانسجام العابر للثقافات مع "الآخر" عرقيًا وثقافيًا، وتحلل الدراسة الأعمال الأدبيّة التالية – *(في عين الشمس)* لأهداف سويف، "المترجمة" لليلى أبو العلا، و*(اسمي سلمى)* لفادية فقير - التي تتعلق بهذا المفهوم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: رومانسيّة شهرزاد، الكاتبات العربيات الناطقات باللغة الإنجليزيّة، في عين الشمس، المترجمة، اسمي سلمى.

Endnotes

[1] For more information about this story, please check:
https://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=83086&page=1
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/may/26/duncancampbell
https://www.cbsnews.com/news/no-ruling-yet-on-royal-marine-bride/

[2]For more information, please check https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna6628334

[3] This is reflected in socialist realism and class struggle politics found in the works of Najib Mahfouz, Latifa Al-Zayyat, Abd Al-Hamid ibn Haduqa, Muh ̇ammad H ̇usayn Haykal among others.

[4] The list of romance subgenres includes medieval Romance, historical romance, contemporary romance, fantasy/science fiction romance, paranormal romance, futuristic romance, Gothic romance, romance mystery, sheikh romance, and the list goes on.

[5] David Couzens Hoy (2009) defines temporality as "time insofar as it manifests itself in human existence" (xiii). He discusses this concept from a philosophical perspective related to "lived time," or "human temporality"—hence, "the time of our lives" (xiii). It has to do with the individual's awareness of collective images, signs, experiences, and phenomena of a certain culture and history. These writers acquire knowledge of the phenomenon of temporality in each Culture-East and West- and compare between them.

[6] See, for example, Jacque Lacan's *Ecrits* (1977). Indeed, for Lacan, the symbolic father is crucial in the developmental process of the individual, with the paternal function of enforcing the Law of the Symbolic Order assigned to him.

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