

Social Transformations in the Saudi Novel:  
Ibrahim Al-Nassir as a Case Study

Submitted by:

MAZIN ALHARTHI

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

Faculty of Arts, School of Modern Languages, Cultures and Societies  
Department of Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies

September, 2015

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## **Dedication**

I WOULD LIKE TO DEDICATE THIS THESIS  
TO MY WONDERFUL DEEPLY MISSED MOTHER  
QALILA SAEED ALHARTHI  
FOREVER YOU REMAIN IN MY SOUL

TO MY GREAT FATHER, PROFESSOR, MOHAMMED ALHARTHI

TO MY SWEETHEART WIFE, DR. ELHAM ALRUBAI

TO MY INSPIRING BROTHERS AND SISTERS  
MASHHOOR, MAJED, MUJAHID, NAJAT, MANSOOR, NUHA AND NADA

## Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to thank God for achieving this work. I would like to express my very great appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Sameh Hanna, for all his inspiration, guidance, and advice, which help me every day to develop my research tools and techniques. The patient guidance, enthusiastic encouragement and useful critiques from Dr. Hanna are not forgotten. Also, I would like to offer my special thanks to Thea Pittman and Dr. Zahia Salhi, who supervised this thesis at the beginning. They offer all their great advocacy and confidence to this research.

I would like to thank my mother Qalila Saeed al-Harthi, who died view weeks ago, (*May God rest her soul in complete rest and satisfaction*) without her continuous support and encouragement I never would have been able to achieve my goals. I would like to express my utmost thankfulness to my father, Professor Mohammed al-Harthi, who helps me continually by providing me with many updated academic sources, as well as the financial backing to accomplish this work. I would also like to express my deepest sense of love and gratitude to my beloved wife, Dr. Elham, who offered me all her support and encouragement, which were so necessary to realize this study.

I would also like to acknowledge the help provided by Dr. Radia Kesseiri, Dr. Mustapha Lahlali, and Dr. Hendrik Kraetzschmar, who gave me so much support in completing this project.

I would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance with the collection of my data: Professor Ḥāmed al-Rubai‘i, Professor Burikan al-Shilawi, Dr, Ḥusain al-Maliki, Professor ‘Atif Bahajat, Mansoor al-Harthey, Nada al-Harthi and Dr. Wessām Ḥusain who helped me in translating the passages from al-Nassir’s Novels.

In addition, assistance provided by Dr. Stephanie Dennison and Mrs. Karen Priestley was greatly appreciated. Many thanks also to Taif University and the University of Leeds for giving me the opportunity to continue to produce this work.

## Abstract

This study presents an attempt to understand how social transformations in modern Saudi society are represented in the fiction of Saudi novelist Ibrahim al-Nassir. Chapter one highlights the aims of the study and its importance, outlines the research questions, the data used and the methodology applied. Chapter Two explores the meaning of the term ‘social novel’, discussing some related theoretical and methodical themes and issues. Chapter Three provides a detailed account of the social transformations in Saudi society, focusing on two major factors that have contributed to the speed of the transformation there: the discovery of oil and globalisation. Chapter Four describes the literary career of al-Nassir, identifying some of his key thematic and stylistic concerns.

Chapter Five investigates the manifestations of identity in al-Nassir’s novels by discussing the relationship between self and the other in three contexts: Islamic identity, Arab identity, and Saudi identity. Chapter Six aims to show how space is represented in the works of al-Nassir by studying the complex relationship between village and city. Chapter Seven considers the representation of relationships in the Saudi family through al-Nassir’s novels in the context of social transformations. Chapter Eight discusses al-Nassir’s representation of women in his work, focusing on the role played by female characters in these narrative texts. The research questions are revisited in the concluding chapter which presents the major findings of the study and discusses opportunities for future research on Saudi social novel.

This thesis concludes that the Saudi novel has paid close attention to social transformation from its earliest appearance, whilst some studies claim that this theme is only clear in the novels written during and after the Second Gulf War in 1990.

## Arabic Transliteration Table

ء	dh ذ	Z/z ظ	n ن
b ب	r ر	ع	H هـ
t ت	z ز	gh غ	w و
th ث	s س	f ف	y ي
j ج	sh ش	q ق	
H/h ح	S/s ص	k ك	
kh خ	D/d ض	l ل	
d د	T/t ط	m م	

### VOWELS:

LONG: Ā/ā - آ    Ū/ū - و    Ī/ī - ي

SHORT: a - ا    u - u    i - i

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Aim and Importance of the Study**

Social transformations are generally important processes in any society because these transformations are required for society's adaptation to the reality of changing life; they are also often desired by the public or imposed by governments to achieve and maintain balance in a society. In contrast, some transformations can have negative impacts on society, driving people toward nostalgia for the past or thinking about better solutions to improve their social status. Such transformations can be good or bad, major or minor, rapid or slow, internal or external, primary or secondary, obvious or subtle, and elective or imposed.

In addition, social transformations have many different aspects, including intellectual, political, psychological and economic. These types of social transformations and their impacts are given a great deal of attention by certain novelists who have re-created them in their narrative work.

This study tries to fill the gap in the Arabic literary field regarding the social transformations appearing the Saudi novel. The study looks at the progress of social transformations inside these narrative texts and how the Saudi novel presents them in a literary form. Thus, the aim of this study is to answer the primary question of this research which is:

- How are social transformations in modern Saudi society represented in the fiction of Saudi novelist Ibrahim al-Nassir?

Many studies have focused on transformation in the Saudi novel. A large number of these studies focus on the development and transformation in the writing of Saudi narrative text. Hasan al-Nu'mi in his recent study (2009) on the Saudi novel discusses the historical evolution of the Saudi novel. His study divides the history of the Saudi novel into four phases: emergence (1930-1959), establishment (1959-1980), start-up (1981), and major transformation, which produced the largest number of Saudi novelists and narrative works. Al-Nu'mi attempts to provide a historical study detailing the major transformations in writing the Saudi novel and

addresses certain important issues in the content of these novels, such as questions of identity in the light of recent, rapid social transformations.

In the same context, 'Ali al-Qurashi (2013) studied the transformation in the narrative structure of the Saudi novel. The study is divided into two chapters- a theoretical chapter and a practical chapter. The former shows the variety of narrative structures, such as adjacent structures, inverted structures and generative structures. The study, as can be seen clearly, the social transformations in Saudi Arabia generate these multiple types of structure and refers to the Saudi novelists' awareness of the nature of the rapid changes in contemporary society.

Several studies examine this topic of social transformation in Saudi Arabia. Mohammad al-Ḥasoun (2008) studied the trends of social criticism in the Saudi novel, focusing on socio-political issues in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, especially following the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The work provides historical, political, sociological, and cultural background to Saudi Arabia and describes a number of cultural changes which took place. Five Saudi novels are analysed in al-Ḥasoun's study illustrating the trends in novel writing in Saudi Arabia pre- 1990. They include the political, romantic, educational, historical and social trends. The study indicates that the development in the writing of the Saudi novel was slow in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The study covers important social issues appearing in Saudi novels after the second Gulf War, discussed by both male and female novelists. It concludes that class distinction and marginalisation in Saudi society, the male-female relationship, and fundamentalism and religious extremism are the major social issues addressed by Saudi male novelists, whereas male dominance, intimate relationships and regional and intertribal discrimination are the major social issues addressed by Saudi female novelists.

Based on this study, Saudi novels reflected a keen interest in social issues from the start. Moreover, they revealed the whole spectrum of stances that these Saudi authors have vis-à-vis their society, namely, adulation, rejection, and reformism. Further, the writers' private visions not only provide a jumping-off point, but also colour their entire works.

Most Saudi novels, whether written by men or women, present the Saudi man as utterly chauvinistic at work and in the family, whether that he is a father, husband, son, or brother. They also emphasise the stress and marginalisation that women suffer, again both within the family and society in general. Male dominance is shown as being absolute in the repression of wife, daughter, and sister, often with tragic consequences. Mothers are often presented as feeble and ineffectual characters, and when they are given any role, it is more often than not as a pillar of the prevalent social conservatism. However, the study can also be considered as a criticism of certain social issues that appear in Saudi novels where there are considerable efforts to illustrate many questions regarding freedom, feminism, and religion in Saudi society. These questions are seen as important factors that initiated transformation in this region.

Other researchers have attempted to examine society in the Saudi novel by focusing on major social issues, such as the recent study by Mohammad 'Abu Milḥah (2007). This focused on the image of Saudi society presented in the Saudi novel, especially after the second Gulf War. His work describes the customs, traditions, and social issues in Saudi society that reflect the economic changes in people's lives, and identities some of the intellectual ideologies in that society, such as its conservative and liberal tendencies. The study asks two questions: (1) how did Saudi novels between 1400 and 1420 HD (1980-2000) portray Saudi society? and (2) what literary techniques were used in this portrayal? The research showed that Saudi society has different social strata which can be considered a salient feature of that society. Moreover, the determining factor for these strata is parentage, not economic class, as occurs in many other countries. In addition, the Saudi novels favour village life at the expense of city living, perhaps because most novelists originally came from villages, and they retained a feeling of nostalgia for this simpler, more traditional life style. Furthermore, Saudi novels praise the older generation with its traditions and customs by exaggerating the advantages of their lifestyle at the expense of the present generation, which is often described in a negative way.

Another important study by Ibrahim al-Daghriri (2007d) depicts Saudi society in the Saudi novel written between 1993 and 2003. It describes Saudi life after the second Gulf War. The study illustrates the methods used by Saudi writers in describing

Saudi society and how they communicated this social reality in their novels. The study has four chapters. The first described Islamic customs and teachings within society, and the second focused on the social relationships found in the Saudi novel, such as positive and negative fathers, and negative and positive husbands. In addition, the study offers images of women in Saudi novels as being moderate, oppressed, and autocratic wives. The study also sheds light on the son and daughter relationship. The last chapter depicts a Saudi society of villages, deserts, and cities. The study offers many significant conclusions, including that Saudi society is the focus of many novels, and Saudi novels describe men as dictators and show the woman in an idealistic light.

The last two studies focus on novels published after 1990, which describe Saudi society after the second Gulf War and consider this war as a turning point in the lives of Saudis. It is not accurate to link all the social transformations to this war alone; many turning points in Saudi society have resulted in broad social transformation, such as the unification of the Kingdom, the discovery of oil, globalisation, and industrial, technological and economic revolutions. Modern human ideologies, theories, and systems can produce large transformations in any society.

Interestingly, the studies that target the latest narrative works do not mention the events of 11 September 2001, events that claimed the lives of thousands of innocent people and changed many social concepts. Nevertheless, in this thesis, the social transformations in Saudi Arabia are shown to parallel major transformations in society, starting with the unification of Saudi Arabia as a country. This study analyses the narrative text focusing on novel elements such as the characters, setting, and events. Generally speaking, this study tries to show how the social transformations in modern Saudi society are represented in the fiction of the Saudi novelist Ibrahim al-Nassir who paid close attention to them. So, this current study covers an important period of transformation both before and after the unification of Saudi Arabia, an aspect and period of history that is neglected by many researchers in the earlier previous studies.

## **1.2 Research Questions and Structure of the Thesis**

As mentioned earlier, this thesis seeks to develop an understanding of how the social transformations in modern Saudi society are represented in the fiction of the Saudi novelist, Ibrahim al-Nassir. This primary focus can be sub-divided into several interrelated questions or research questions which are used to structure the thesis:

### **Question 1: What is a social novel?**

Chapter Two addresses this question by discussing the theoretical and methodological considerations necessary to understand this narrative genre, by reviewing many important studies on the social novel in Western and Arab literary studies, so as to develop a broader understanding of the multiple literary achievements using this theme. Also, methodological considerations are presented in this chapter to offer a clearer picture for studying the Saudi social novel in the light of social transformations in Saudi Arabia.

The chapter also considers different definitions of the term ‘social novel’ so as to draw clear limitations for the term, as it is employed in these studies. The chapter also looks at the origin and development of the social novel in Western and Arab society and the factors that contributed to the emergence of this subgenre. It also shows its importance in Saudi literature and introduces Ibrahim al-Nassir and his literary career, contextualizing his works in the development of the Saudi social novel.

This chapter explores the strong relationship between novel and social context. Some critics claim that the social novel is a representation of its social context rather than a reflection, whereas other critics claim it is a re-presentation. The chapter also illustrates the aesthetics aspects of the social novel through a reading of al-Nassir’s novels. This discussion is followed by a presentation of the typical themes addressed by the social novel.

### **Question 2: What major social transformations have taken place in Saudi Arabia?**

Answering this question in Chapter Three will give the reader a broader understanding of the nature of life in Saudi society in the light of certain social transformations by showing the important role of unification, clearly regarded as the

first and most important social transformation that changed the map of the Arabian Peninsula. Studying the ideas of ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb will give a clearer understanding of the Saudi regime, an institution still based on the principles of this reform, as this reform is founded on *Sharī‘a* teachings. Thus, the chapter will show the emergence of the reform, ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb’s educational influences, and the criticism of his efforts and the continuity of his efforts.

The chapter will seek the major factors that led to speeding up transformations in Saudi society and how these factors rapidly affected social life and its many aspects. This thesis believes there are two obvious factors that have helped to accelerate social transformation in this society, namely, the discovery of oil and globalisation. There is no doubt that these transformations had a deep and lasting impact on the Saudi personality, and this key impact will be discussed in this chapter.

### **Question 3: What role does Al-Nassir occupy in Saudi literature?**

Chapter Four introduces the position of Ibrahim al-Nassir in Saudi literature. The chapter also shows the relationship between him and other Saudi novelists in terms of interpreting Saudi society by reading al-Nassir’s fiction in the context of the work of other modern Saudi novelists. The chapter also addresses two important stylistic issues that relate especially to al-Nassir’s novels.

### **Question 4: How is identity narrativised in al-Nassir’s fiction?**

In light of the rapid social transformation identity is paid close attention in al-Nassir’s novels. However, investigating the relationship between ‘self’ and ‘the other’ is also controlled by the nature of identity and the changes inside this identity. Chapter Five focuses on the relationship between self and the other in the context of identity and change, starting by employing the terms ‘self’ and ‘the other’ in modern literary criticism to determine the clear limitations for these terms as they are used in this thesis. Contrary to recent studies that have claimed the prolonged absence of images of the other in the Saudi fiction, this chapter will show there is a clear and continued presence of these images in Saudi narrative discourse. The chapter also addresses the changing nature of the relationship between self and the other as represented by al-Nassir in the context of the three main dimensions of Saudi social identity: Islamic identity, Arab identity and national identity.

**Question 5: How are social spaces narrativised in al-Nassir's fiction?**

The city often forms the backdrop to social novels; however, al-Nassir pays particular attention to the village besides the city in his narrative work. He is considered to be the first Saudi novelist to employ rural space in his fiction. Therefore, Chapter Six explores the relationship between these spaces in the narrative texts of al-Nassir. This chapter examines the importance of the village in Saudi narrative discourse and its clear presence in al-Nassir's fiction. The images of city and village in al-Nassir's novels are analysed to understand the complex relationship between village and city in light of the social transformations. In addition, the chapter explores two important issues related to village and city, namely, migration and alienation.

**Question 6: How are Saudi family relationships narrativised in al-Nassir's fiction?**

Chapter Seven is designed to offer a broad understanding about Saudi family relationships as presented in al-Nassir's texts. Al-Nassir's novels present many types of familial relationships, such as husband-wife and parent-offspring. The chapter explores family's relationships in the context of social transformations, focusing on theme of the generation gap.

**Question 7: How are Saudi women's issues been narrativised in al-Nassir's fiction?**

Chapter Eight sheds light on the status of women and the factors that led to female characters playing a secondary role in the text. The chapter also shows the great attention given to woman's issues in the Saudi social novel. In addition, the chapter discusses two important issues related to Saudi women and how are they represented in the social novel. Finally, the chapter will present three images of women in the Saudi social novel, which represent the transformations occurring in the status of the Saudi woman.

The research questions are revisited in the final chapter (Chapter Nine) along with a discussion of the findings and conclusions drawn from the research and the previous chapters to show how social transformations in modern Saudi society have been



represented in the fiction of the Saudi novelist, Ibrahim al-Nassir. Suggestions for future research are also presented in this chapter.

### 1.3 Data

The thesis is grounded in the novels of Ibrahim al-Nassir to show how social transformations in modern Saudi society are represented in Saudi narrative discourse. The novels of al-Nassir were selected as a case study for this thesis for several considerations, such as his novels are social novels that have social themes. In addition, these novels cover the lengthy history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and they represent many of the major social transformations that have changed many aspects of society. Al-Nassir is an ordinary person who tried to understand more about progress in his society in light of numerous accrued social transformations. He does not have a fixed political or religious orientation; his protagonists seek social values that can make their lives better. This section will provide a summary of al-Nassir's novels in chronological order. It will also deliver a precise understanding of the material used for this study.<sup>1</sup>

*Thuqun fi Rida' al-Layl*(1961)

Main Characters:

- 'Issā: The protagonist, a young boy.
- Al-Ḥāj 'Ammār: 'Issā's father.
- 'Umm 'Issā: 'Issā's mother.
- Mufidah: 'Issā's girlfriend.
- Al-Shikh 'Uthmān: Al-Ḥāj 'Ammār's friend.
- Fu'ād: 'Issā's friend and Mufidah's brother.
- 'Isma'īl: 'Issā's friend.
- 'Abdu al-Raḥmān: 'Issā's friend.

This novel is the first and longest of al-Nassir's efforts. It takes place in a village describing the life of a traditional Saudi family which lives there. The events refer to the time period between 1930 and after World War II. 'Issā cannot adjust to the environment of the village, and its traditional social customs limit his hopes and

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the original Arabic are mine

aspirations. Although the village experiences many changes in its infrastructure and social customs, 'Issā still dreams about moving to the city.

The real conflict starts when the family moves to the city; 'Issā is caught between what he gained from life in the village and the opportunities now offered by the new, modern life in the city, which force him to change some of his attitudes and morals to adjust to the new civilisation. He starts to miss prayers, chases after girls, and lies to his father. The love relationship between 'Issā and Mufidah changes his outlook on life and he starts to meet her secretly as the relationship is socially taboo.

The city has positive effects on 'Issā as he becomes more interested in its social and political problems of his society. 'Issā and his friends become involved in student protests and are arrested by the authorities.

When 'Issā and his friends are released from prison, they decide to leave the country to look for jobs and start new lives. During this journey, Fu'ād is killed by the border guards as the friends try to cross the border without visas. They go back home after losing their best friend. 'Issā especially is very sad about his great loss, and he does not know what to say to his family and to his girlfriend who then breaks up with him.

*Safinat al-Ḍayā'* (1989)

Main Characters:

- 'Issā: the protagonist.
- 'Abīr: 'Issā's girlfriend.
- Nu'mān 'Aṭallah: the manager.
- 'Umm Jihād: the manager's wife.
- Qandīl Shanān: 'Issā's colleague.
- Jamīl Zāhir: 'Issā's colleague.
- Mohammad 'Itq: 'Issā's colleague.

This novel was published twice. The first time was in 1969 under the title, *Safinat al-Mawtā* (The Ship of the Dead). *Safinat al-Ḍayā'* (The Ship of the Loss) is set in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia, and most events take place in a huge hospital where the protagonist 'Issā used to work. The chronological setting of the novel is shown through events that refer to the Suez Crisis in 1956.

‘Issā is a young man who works as a general manager’s secretary in a Saudi hospital. He lived in hospital housing with other colleagues who have different ideas. ‘Issā is close to his manager, so they have many social meetings outside the work atmosphere. The older manager is married to a young lady (‘Umm Jihād) who was forced to marry him, so he feels guilty about his marriage.

‘Issā and his colleagues are concerned about the Suez Crisis, so they decide to become involved in this war as military volunteers. They attend military classes to prepare themselves for the war which is presented as a negative image concerning Western culture in Arab minds.

‘Issā, who does not follow gender segregation norms, is involved in a failed love relationship with a non-Saudi nurse named ‘Abīr. This relationship faces many problems due to Saudi social traditions, which reject any love affair between a man and a woman, even if the ultimate goal is marriage, such as his relationship with ‘Abīr.

‘Issā has an encouraging personality, so he supports the workers in the hospital when they go on strike for unpaid wages. This encouragement puts ‘Issā into conflict with his employers, so he is dismissed from his job. In a magazine interview, al-Nassir refers to the novel as narrating a human experience that needs to be examined and discussed further (al-Nassir, 2004c).

*‘Adhra’ al-Manfā* (1978)

Main Characters:

- Zāhir ‘Alawi: the protagonist.
- Buthaina: Zāhir’s wife.
- Ḥamza Sa‘īd: Buthaina’s father.
- ‘Umm Buthaina: Buthaina’s mother.
- Hudā: Zāhir’s sister.
- ‘Alawi ‘Abu al-Nisir: Zāhir’s father.
- Zain ‘Izzat: Zāhir’s mother.
- Jarrāḥ ‘Abdullah: Zāhir’s friend.

This novel is set in the Hijaz region, in the Western part of Saudi Arabia. The novel's events refer to the period between 1950 and 1970, before and after the introduction of female education in Saudi Arabia.

Zāhir is a young man who works as a journalist. The editor-in-chief, Ḥamza Sa'īd admires the works of Zāhir, so he chooses him to be an editor for a special page on women's issues along with Buthaina, his only daughter. Zāhir loves the idea but he is afraid of his family's reaction, as they are very traditional and do not accept their son working with a woman. He tries to explain the nature of his new work, but they view it as socially taboo for him to work with a woman.

Zāhir accepts the job and starts to prepare himself for the new work. He goes to Ḥamza Sa'īd's place for a meeting, and there he meets Buthaina who has returned from Beirut where she gained a high level of education. They meet regularly to discuss the strategy for the woman's page.

Sa'īd plays an active role in raising the level of social awareness about female education by establishing the newspaper page dedicated to women. He also believes that no society can achieve great progress without the full participation of women.

During their work together, Buthaina starts to pay attention to Zāhir, who believes in women's rights and he falls in love with her. They are both successful in raising social awareness about the importance of women in developing society and changing woman's traditional role which has been limited to doing housework.

'Umm Buthaina attempts to show her only daughter the reality of society which denies freedom to women in general and rejects any role for women beyond the scope of the domestic sphere.

Zāhir and Buthaina marry, although their families try to stop this marriage for social reasons, particularly the class differences between them. Buthaina's father; however, agrees to marry off his daughter to Zāhir, considering marriage to be a rite of personal freedom for his daughter, who has the right to choose her own husband.

In spite of the aggressive attitude of Zāhir's family toward Buthaina, Hudā supports her brother in his marriage and is impressed by Buthaina's character since she has rid herself of the social restrictions whereas Hudā is still restricted by them.

Jarrāh, who is in love with Hudā, cannot explore his emotions toward her as the relationship is socially prohibited one even for Hudā. However, speaking over the phone gives Zāhir and Buthaina a chance to show their liking for each other. Jarrāh, who has enlightened thoughts, feels alone inside Saudi society, living in a conservative society. He also has a liberal ideology especially towards women.

Zāhir believes in women's liberation, and he is surprised when his wife tells him about a relationship she had when she was studying abroad. Zāhir starts to suspect her. Their life becomes more difficult and not as Buthaina had dreamed, and the relationship ends in a divorce.

Generally speaking, al-Nassir was more interested in highlighting the role of some Saudi men who support the women's rights. In addition, al-Nassir wanted to examine the possibility of adapting the protagonist to the modern woman. The novel addresses the social problems present in the relationship between males and females in Saudi society, which includes suspicion and perfectionism, so his novel suggests that any human is vulnerable to making mistakes.

*Ghuūm al-Kharīf* (1988)<sup>2</sup>

Main Characters:

- Muḥaisin: the protagonist.
- Salmān: Muḥaisin's friend.
- Suzān: Muḥaisin's girlfriend.
- Mūdi: Muḥaisin's wife.
- Khalid: Muḥaisin's friend.

This novel is set in Greece. It presents the life of the Saudis during the beginning of the economic boom when the Saudi Government started its mega development projects. Al-Nassir frankly admits that *Ghuūm al-Kharīf* embodies reflections of the Saudi economic boom (al-Nassir, 2002) so the novel focuses on Muḥaisin's life during the economic boom.

Muḥaisin works as a businessman and his friend Salmān, who accompanies him on a business trip, is an educated man. The pair adapt to the Western lifestyle with all its negative and positive temptations. Muḥaisin, who left his responsibilities towards

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<sup>2</sup> 'Autumn Clouds' is the translation of this title in English.

his wife and daughter in the hands of his of servants, is busy expanding his business. Both characters represent different social and economic systems, namely, capitalism and Socialism, both of which have attracted some Saudis.

Muḥaisin falls in love with a Western girl, Suzān. He likes the Western lifestyle, but always remembers his life in Saudi Arabia before and after the economic boom and tries to identify the differences between Saudi and Western societies. He also remembers that his wife is very shy about expressing her feelings toward him, as Saudi social norms prevent Saudi women from doing so.

Muḥaisin believes that life has changed, and many other things have to change as well. He also recognises the negative impact of modernity on Saudi lives, which resulted from the impact of economic changes, such as relying on servants and changes in the relationships inside the Saudi family. He believes that money is the language of this modern era, but his friend Salmān sees knowledge as the foundation of any strong society. Salmān also believes that cooperation and social justice can solidify the foundation of any strong society.

The friends spend many nights partying in Greece with their girlfriends. During the journey, they meet another Saudi man named Khalid who is studying in Greece. Khalid comes from a rich Saudi family and lives in a huge house. He is attracted by the Western culture, but he still believes in some of the old positive traditions such as his responsibility toward his father so he leaves his study as soon as he learns his father is seriously ill.

At the end, Muḥaisin loses his business because he does not know that the product he wants to import is blacklisted by the Saudi Government and cannot enter the Saudi market.

*Ra'shat al-Zil* (1994)

Main Characters:

- Faliḥ: the protagonist.
- Fahhād: Faliḥ's brother.
- 'Umm Fahhād: Faliḥ's mother.
- Salīm: Faliḥ's colleague.
- 'Abu Sahal: manager of the palace.

- Zahrah: Faliḥ's girlfriend.
- Khalid: son of the palace's owner.

This novel is set in the capital city of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh. The events of the story refer to the time between 1960 and 1970 when music was prohibited by the religious authorities.

The protagonist Faliḥ moves from a little village to the capital to look for a job. Many people warn him about life in the city, telling him it is very dangerous especially for villagers who do not have much experience with modern life. His mother cries when he makes the decision to move to the city. He always remembers his mother, however, and her great role in educating and raising him.

Faliḥ becomes lost when he reaches the crowded city while he is looking for his brother Fakhād. Finally he recognises his brother among all the people in the huge market. He goes home with his brother, who tells him to memorise the way home. Then, Faliḥ starts a new job as a servant in a huge palace, following a short interview with the manager.

Faliḥ is fascinated by the hugeness and the design of the palace. There he meets his colleagues, Salīm and Zahrah, and Salīm starts to give him information about the jobs. Zahrah, who is from another country, is very well educated and is responsible for the internal affairs of the place. Faliḥ falls in love with her and she reciprocates his feelings. She starts to teach him English, and he starts to read more books to educate him-self.

'Abu Sahal, the manager, is unable to have children, so his marriages do not last long. He has married many times not for love, but only to have a baby. The problem lies with him, but he will not admit it, as it is seen as socially taboo. Finally he goes abroad to look for a medical solution.

Faliḥ easily adjusts to modern life in the city even though moving to the city is a cultural shock for him, as he had not been there before. Although he adjusts easily, he feels alienated inside the palace. The city has a major impact on many aspects of Faliḥ's daily life when dealing with the requirements of urban civilisation.

Khalid recognises Faliḥ's intention to gain knowledge, so he offers him a new job in his library. Faliḥ is very happy with this offer, so he immediately accepts it. A strong

relationship develops between Faliḥ and Khalid, so the latter offers him a free trip to the US. Faliḥ is very happy. It is his dream to travel there to explore a different culture.

*Dam al-Barā'a*<sup>3</sup> (2001)

Main Characters:

- Mūḍi: the protagonist.
- Sulṭān: Mūḍi's neighbor.
- Hiba: Sulṭān's girlfriend.
- Muṣ'ab: Mūḍi's brother.
- Sara: Mūḍi's sister-in-law.
- Al-'Ajūz: A woman who bathes the dead.
- 'Abu Sāmīr: Hiba's father.
- Al-'Ashram: Muṣ'ab's servant.
- Al-'Af'ā: the snake.

This novel is set in a small village at the end of the Ottoman Empire era. The novel describes the mind-set of the villagers who believe in myths and legends, and it describes many traditional customs and values that have limited the role of Saudi women.

Sulṭān is a young man who loves to breed pigeons. He has a cage on the roof of his house, so he always there watching his pigeons flying in the sky. Mūḍi is a young girl and the only daughter who hangs clothes out to dry on the roof. She feels freer when she does this task, as she cannot go beyond the walls of her house. Mūḍi likes her neighbour, Sulṭān, so she enjoyed looking at him while he flies his pigeons.

One day, Sulṭān jumps onto the roof of Mūḍi's house and tries to molest her. Her brother hears a noise coming from the roof, so he calls to her, and Sulṭān run away. Sara comes up unto the roof to find out the source of noise, and she finds Mūḍi who is trying to hide the parts of her body where her dress has been ripped. Sara sees spots of blood on the floor and thinks that Mūḍi has lost her virginity. Sara is happy as she does not like her sister-in-law, and she tells her husband about what she saw.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Blood of Innocence' is the translation of this title.



Muṣ‘ab has total rights to control his family. He is very angry, as virginity is regarded as a matter of honour in Arab culture and the loss of virginity is a sign one has lost the family’s honour. He decides to kill his only sister to restore the family honour.

Sultān meets Hiba while he is looking for one of his pigeons, and they fall in love at first sight. Ignoring the social customs of gender segregation, they have regular meetings. Her father, who teaches English, has a strange personality and few people will communicate with him, as he is very aggressive towards them. However, he is kind with his own children.

Muṣ‘ab takes his sister far away from the village. He goes to the house of an old woman who bathes the dead. Muṣ‘ab takes his sister behind a huge mountain. Hearing a gunshot, the woman believes the young girl is dead but finds she is still alive, unbeknown to her brother, so the old woman wraps the girl in a shroud leaving a hole in the grave so she can breathe.

A storm comes and Muṣ‘ab cannot see his way, and after falling into an abandoned well he is left in a coma. Then, he wakes up suddenly, feels dizzy and sees a snake staring at him. He fires a shot at it, thinking of a way to get out of the well. He follows the snake through a hole and finds himself in a wonderland.

Mūḍi returns home, where everyone is looking for Muṣ‘ab who has been lost for a long time. Eventually he is found, but has lost his mind. His wife puts him in a room, which looks like a prison, so he becomes very dangerous and acts like an animal. Mūḍi marries a rich man who helps the family after her brother goes mad and he employs a servant to look after Muṣ‘ab. Sara cheats on her husband with the servant right in front of her husband, and he cries about what he has seen. Muṣ‘ab dies, and the servant escapes. Hiba moves with her family into another place, and she leaves her sweet memories behind.

*Al-Ghajarīa wa al-Thu‘ban*<sup>4</sup> (2008a)

Main Characters:

- ‘Amir: the protagonist.

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<sup>4</sup> The Gypsy and the Snake is the translation of this title

- Sulṭān: ‘Amir’s friend.
- Sulimān: ‘Amir’s friend.
- Shanqafa: the son of the genie prince.
- Al-Ghajarīa: a beautiful lady.
- Al-Thu‘ban: Al-Ghajarīa’s boyfriend.

This novel is set in two worlds: the real world (between Dammam and Riyadh) and the imaginary world. The time of the novel is around 1980, before the Second Gulf War. This novel shows the problem of communication between the new generation, which believes things must change, and the older generation that sees the new generation as reckless when making its decisions and does not let them choose their way in life.

‘Amir is a young writer who travels with his friend, Sulṭān, to Riyadh by car. On the way, they stop to rest after visiting the desert where they lived a legendary life for hours. They see a huge camp, so they decide to go there. There are a number of gypsies, including al-Ghajarīa, who are partying and dancing. Sulṭān sees his dead father dancing with them. Suddenly, the camp disappears during a police raid.

Then, they go to stay with Sulṭān’s uncle for a while. He accuses the new generation of laziness and busy with his new business, he goes to Riyadh for a business deal whilst ‘Amir goes to *al-Fajur* newspaper where he works as a journalist.

‘Amir has a good relationship with the editor Salmān who invites him to stay at his house until he can find another place. The newspaper’s employees have different ideologies and a long dialogue among them shows the different ideas prevalent at that time.

‘Amir moves into his friend’s house. He meets Shanqafa who lives in a cemetery and has an ugly dirty appearance. Then, he sees al-Ghajarīa and her genie lover, al-Thu‘ban. They both love ‘Amir and want to help him. Al-Ghajarīa, who looks like ‘Amir’s ex-girlfriend, does not like Sulṭān who has been following her.

At the end, Sulṭān comes to the ‘Amir’s house with a sword to kill al-Ghajarīa, but al-Thu‘ban is faster and kills him. During the action, ‘Amir takes the sword from him and he falls down. Al-Ghajarīa is very worried about him and she tries to wake

him up. He awakes saying, “No one will take you from me. You’re mine. I will kill them.” Then, al-Thu‘ban flees under cover of darkness.

*Hitān al-Rīh*<sup>5</sup> (2008g)

Main Characters:

- Jabir: the protagonist.
- ‘Iṭir: Jabir’s wife
- ‘Umar: Jabir’s friend
- Fahhād: Jabir’s friend
- Sulimān: a prophet (Solomon).
- Balqīs: Queen of Sheba.

This is the final novel that al-Nassir wrote. It is also set in two worlds, in a legendary historical world and in the real cities of Cairo and Riyadh. The events take place in the period 1980-1988.

Jabir is an elderly Saudi man who falls in love with a young Egyptian girl called ‘Iṭir. This relationship brings together two different figures in age and intellectual, but love binds them together. Jabir says that love does not recognise age but society objects. After they marry, many problems appear due to money, so Jabir cannot offer a good life to his young wife. ‘Iṭir is arrested because she cannot pay the instalments on her car. Her uncle asks Jabir to pay the overdue bills or divorce her as there is another rich man who has promised to pay, provided she divorces Jabir and marries him. Jabir can do nothing, so their relationship ends in divorce.

This novel depicts the different mind-sets of a man from the desert and a woman from the city. The novel also includes one of the most recognised social phenomena, namely, marrying someone from abroad.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

The methodology of the thesis is designed to describe and analyse two main aspects of literary study: 1) the textual aspect and 2) the contextual aspect. In order to methodologically account for both aspects, the thesis uses the following techniques:

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<sup>5</sup> ‘The Windy Walls’ is the translation of this title.

1. A hermeneutic (interpretive) approach when reading the texts of Ibrahim al-Nassir. This hermeneutic approach takes into consideration both the thematic and narrative structures of his novels as well as their stylistic features. Interpreting the work of Ibrahim al-Nassir is only possible by examining the development of these themes and narrative structures throughout all his novels as well as the relationship between his overall work and style and the work and style of modern Saudi novelists.

2. A context-based approach locates the work of al-Nassir in its precise socio-cultural context. (See Chapter Two on methodological considerations for more detail).

## **Chapter 2: Understanding the Social Novel: Methodological and Theoretical Considerations**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses the nature of the social novel by defining the term ‘social novel’ through reviewing many critical studies which have employed the term. Our aim is to reframe the definition in a more inclusive sense by discussing the multiple definitions of the term in critical studies. The chapter also identifies for the philosophical, historical, and social conditions which have led to the emergence and development of this kind of novel in Western and Arab literature. The chapter will explore the other elements that led to the development of the social novel, which has become a dominant literary subgenre, especially in modern Arabic literature.

It has been established that there is a strong relationship between the social novel and society itself, so clarifying that relationship is an important first step in clarifying the essential nature of the social novel. Thus, this relationship will be taken into account in this chapter. In addition, identifying the features of the social novel plays a part in this chapter to explore the nature of the social novel. Addressing the major themes of the social novel also helps in determining the fundamental nature of this narrative subgenre. This chapter will focus on many social novels, in particular al-Nassir’s novels, to demonstrate the essential nature of this subgenre.

### **2.2 Literature Review: Critiquing the Social Novel in Western and Arab Literature**

Many studies based on this subgenre are designed to study its features or illustrate depictions of society. Two older works focus on the study of societies through the social novel. The first was written by Warren French (1966), and the other by Cazamian (1973), both of whom used the term ‘social novel’, but in a different sense. However, these studies do not relate directly to this thesis, except through

their use of the social novel as a field in which to study social phenomena related to England's Golden Era and the impact of the Industrial Revolution.

*The Social Novel at the End of an Era* by Warren French focuses on some social novels such as *The Hamlet* (1940) by William Faulkner, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) by John Steinbeck, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) by Ernest Hemingway. His study attempts to analyse the social significance of these selected works in order to understand the social and political trends of the end of this era (1940) as they are represented in these novels. The study focuses on the relationship between the social novel and history, considering this subgenre as an important historical document that can provide a deep understanding about broader social movements. French's study highlights the importance of the social novel in conveying social transformations, especially during a time which witnessed many societal changes.

Cazamian's study focuses on the social novel in England from 1830 to 1850 in order to present a picture of English society by selecting the works of four great British social novelists: Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Charles Kingsley. In this study Cazamian highlights the struggle between the social classes, especially after the rise of the industrial bourgeoisie. The study (1973,p.12) focuses on the conflict between "the economic phenomenon of the industrial revolution and the philosophical phenomenon of the idealist reaction". Generally speaking, the study focuses on the strong connection between economic and social culture.

In his critical study of techniques used in fiction, Henkle (1977) identified four types of novel: the social novel, the psychological novel, the novel of symbolic action, and the modern romance. Moreover, his study was the first critical study to focus on the social novel and its features. The study provides a detailed definition of the term 'social novel' based on its elements, setting, characters, events, and style. The study reveals the basic features of this subgenre by analysing social narrative texts. One of these features is that the social novel provides a picture of society. The other important feature of this subgenre is the social context of society, which involves people of different ages, occupations, and attitudes; this involvement is also recognised in the social novel. The study describes the structure, narration and point of view, characters, scene, and language in these four types of fiction.

On the other hand, Mohammad al-Shanṭi (2004a) provides Arabic literature with a recent critical study about the types of novels in Arabic literature. Al-Shanṭi studies three types of Arabic novel: the social romantic novel, the historical novel, and the realistic social novel. These types are explained through elements of the novel, characters, events, language, and setting. The study both confirms the significant interest of Arab novelists in writing social novels and illustrates features of Arabic social novels, such as the attention given to old places, the strong relationship between Arab novelists and social issues, and the use of social philosophy in some novels. However, this type of novel is based on two literary doctrines, the romantic and the realistic. Thus, this division neglects other types of novels, such as those that have a symbolic nature, even though many of these novels exist in contemporary Arabic literature.

Bushusha bin Jum'a (2007) also studies social transformations in the Libyan novel through the social novel. His study is divided into six chapters, starting with the history of the Libyan novel from its emergence and ending with the public's reaction to the novel. The study also introduces many Libyan novels to the reader and reports important results, including the attention novelists pay to the relationship between the self and the other, the image of the Libyan female, and open and closed social spaces.

In fact, the social novel gives the research field new literary material to understand social progress from many aspects. However, it is clear from the previous Arabic studies and their titles that the social novel is not given sufficient attention except for subtle hints between the lines.

### **2.3 Methodological Considerations**

As mentioned in the introduction, the methodology of this thesis has two main aspects: the textual aspect and the contextual aspect. With respect to the textual aspect, this thesis uses the interpretative approach to read al-Nassir's texts in the context of the social changes as they are represented in his social novels while also taking into account the social novel as a true representation and critique of social reality. Interpreting and analysing the texts of al-Nassir in this thesis has three methods. The first method is interpreting the fiction of al-Nassir in the context of the

social novel to explore its stylistic and aesthetic aspects, as can be seen in this chapter (see, for example, sections 2.4 and 2.5). The second method is interpreting the text of al-Nassir in the context of other Saudi social novels to understand how his work relates to that of other Saudi writers who have written on social themes. The final method involves placing al-Nassir's texts within the context of the development of his themes and narrative structures throughout his novels, as can be seen clearly through this thesis.

Generally speaking, al-Nassir's fiction has been interpreted through its elements such as the characters, the setting and the dialogue and how he created his social themes by using literary language. However, there are some methodological considerations that must be taken into account in reading al-Nassir's social novels, such as the impact of translated Western narrative works on his novels, especially those which carry Socialist ideas as this ideology had a clear impact on the Arab world, especially when he started to write about his social issues in 1960. Besides that, the earliest fictional works of al-Nassir are influenced by Pan-Arab nationalism which influenced many Arab novelists such as Jurji Zaydān, al-Ṭāib Ṣaliḥ, Jabrā Ibrahim Jabrā, Ghazi al-Quṣaibi, and Turki al-Ḥamad. Therefore this influence is taken into account in interpreting and analysing al-Nassir's social texts.

On the other hand, this thesis also attempts to benefit from many social studies that focus on Saudi society to locate the work of al-Nassir in its socio-cultural context. Many modern social studies and statistics are used in this thesis, such as studies about Saudi society in general, social problems in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi family and its challenges and problems, the social trends of the young Saudi generation, the Saudi culture and its challenges, and studies about developments in Saudi Arabia and its demographics.

## **2.4 Conceptualising the Social Novel**

The social novel is a narrative subgenre that is also known by other names. For example, it is also called the 'social problem novel' or the 'realistic novel'. This multiplicity in names indicates the breadth of the term 'social novel', which extends to these various names, while discussing these names clearly reveals the social novel's nature. However, the term 'social novel' is one of the most complex terms in



critical narrative studies. This complexity comes from the composite nature of the term, the novel as a literary genre, and society as the major theme with its related economic, political, intellectual, and cultural issues. The direct relation to society as a theme leads to the overlap with several other subgenres, such as the political novel, the economic novel, the industrial novel, the historical novel, and the autobiographical novel.

There is a major debate about the terminology of the social novel in critical studies, with many attempts to define the term. This debate appears through the use of the term in many critical studies, with slight differences in the concept according to the nature and aim of these studies.

Warren French's study (1966) of the social novel explores the complexity of the term and is forced to narrow it to serve the aim of the study. French claims that in the social novel "almost all fiction dramatizes the relationship between the individual and society". French focuses on the relationship between the individual and the community, which is a dialectical relationship. The social novel charts the progress of the individual in society and, in contrast, it also shows the progress of society around the individual.

Despite considering this relationship as one of the social novel's essential features, the value of the individual in the social novel appears through his relationship to society and not separately, so that the social novel "does not deal primarily with individual relationships, but captures and depicts the interaction between the individual and society" (Boscaro et al., 1991,p.36). Thus, the social novel deals with the individual as a part of society. On the other hand, the main function of the social novel is to "describe entire societies" (Henkle, 1977,p.22), so the individual alone without his relationships to society is not the major consideration in the social novel, which emphasises "the importance of external phenomena of life rather than the inner world of individuals" (Boscaro et al., 1991,p.37).

It is therefore clear that this definition only illustrates the relationship between the individual and the community and not, of course, the personal aspect of the individual. It deals instead with the individual as part of society, so the individual does not appear as the main focus in the text. The social novel does not focus on the

personal biography and preferences of individuals as much as it emphasises their relationship with the community as a whole.

The term 'social novel' is used in French's study (1966,p.7) only in a very limited sense. By 'social novel' he means "a work that is related to some specific historical phenomena". This use, besides helping to achieve the aim of French's study, also discusses the socio-political content and the structure of *The Grapes of Wrath* through some historical phenomena; it also shows the relationship between the social novel and history. This relationship is embodied through describing the social novel through facts, events, and transformations in a fictional form.

French's definition looks at the social novel as an historical document due to the role of the novel in preserving and portraying major social events and issues. However, there are differences between the historical novel and the social novel. Historical novels are set in times prior to the mid-20th century and their authors are writing from research and not from personal experience (Johnson, 2005,p.1). Thus, the novelist writes a social novel based on his-own personal experiences while the historical novel, in contrast, usually contains historical personages and focuses on a period of history.

An event such as calling for Saudi women's education and the social attitudes towards this issue are found in a novel such as '*Adhra' al-Manfā*' which illustrates the issue from many social aspects, so the social novel has an ability to record the social events for history. Ibrahim al-Nassir confirms that his writing is considered as an historical social document (al-Nassir, 2010). It is worth mentioning that the social novel is closer to social reality because the novelist is writing about contemporary events whereas the historical novel is based on historical sources which could contain some incorrect events or inaccurate information, especially if the historian mixes these real-life events and information with his own interpretations and builds an incorrect image.

The historical aspect is also clearly shown in many of al-Nassir's novels. For example, chapter one of *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (1961,pp.5-162) portrays the status of the Arab countries during World War II. The events of the novel are set in a small border town that used to be quiet. The novel shows the impact of the war on the citizens, in particular the fairness of the war and the division of society in

supporting the Axis powers or the Allies in World War II. The media played a key role in this war to win global support. During the war, the radio station Voice of the Arabs from Berlin persistently had tried to gain Arab public support through broadcasting promises about Arab issues. It promoted Hitler as a friend of Arabs, and that led to spreading propaganda about Hitler converting to Islam, which gave Hitler great public sympathy in some Arab communities.

The novel also focuses on various social events during this time, such as the social cohesion among citizens, the turmoil in making decisions, and the increase in religious activity during the war. However, understanding these events is part of understanding the history of World War II, but in a way that is more focused on society, especially the social attitudes towards the war and the impact of the war on social lives. The historical aspect in the social novel reveals, without any doubt, the overlapping between the social novel and the historical novel. Thus, understanding the novel which contains some historical events is conditional on knowing the historical context of those events.

Meanwhile some critics assert that the term 'social novel' should be used in a more restricted sense due to the breadth of the term, for example the study by Louis Cazamian (1973). In his study, Louis Cazamian (*ibid.*,p.7) faced a problem in the selection of the social novel types for discussion.

Cazamian (*ibid.*) offers a broad definition of the term 'social novel' claiming that "every novel dealing with human customs is a social novel". This general definition does not give a good vision of the term, as there are not many clear limitations so this definition relies on describing only one aspect of the social novel's many aspects. Cazamian's study (*ibid.*,p.8) further suggests that this definition does not help to select works for discussion due to the breadth of the concept, so the term is used in a more restricted sense.

By social novel we mean a 'novel with a social thesis': a novel which aims at directly influencing human relations, either in general, or in reference to one particular set of circumstances. Of course, private manners and public affairs are too closely connected for the former to be altered independently of the latter. Every moral critique has its social repercussions.

This definition focuses on some aspects of the social novel such as the intellectual aspect, but completely neglects the literary aesthetics of the novel. According to the definition, the social novel seems to be a social discussion that provides many ideas and opinions about society. The definition also ignores the works which focus on the private failings of individuals in society “which do not assert their reformatory intention” (ibid.). Even though the definition refers to some important features in the social novel, the definition is designed to serve the aim of the study in following the development of interventionism. Some researchers, though, still realise the importance of Cazamian in illustrating the definition of the term, such as Martin Coyle (1991,p.544) who states that:

Cazamian’s definition is, however, useful. It not only brings together a group of works with a shared concern but different emphases, including ‘the condition of England’, ‘the industrial’ and ‘the social problem’ novel, it also identifies the way in which they approached their subject.

Roger Henkle (1977,p.22) suggests four major types of novel, which include the social novel, the psychological novel, the symbolist novel, and the new romance novel. But these types he refers to may not include all kinds of novels. Henkel (ibid.) takes into account that there are other types of novels that did not fall under these major sections, since with “everything else in literature, the categories are almost never pure”. Limiting the types of novel to these four major categories comes from the widespread popularity of these types of novels, especially in Henkle’s time, social novels:

Describe entire societies, have varied casts of characters, are filled with action, and depict life over a period of time. These are novels that seem realistic, recreating a world resembling ours and with people much like us. [...] The social novel presents lifelike characters in recognizable probable social situations (ibid.).

Hinkle here refers to 19th-century novels, such as the works of Charles Dickens, Leo Tolstoy, Thomas Hardy, and Honoré de Balzac, who devote their novels to talking about a community and its problems. However, Hinkle’s definition of the social novel seems more comprehensive. It gives a general picture of its role and a

description of the novel's elements such as place, time, characters, and events by revealing the features of each element in the social novel.

It is important to note that there is no clear interest in defining the term 'social novel' in most Arabic critical studies. In addition, some studies that attempt to clarify the social picture in the Saudi novel through the social novel refer only to the term 'novel'. These studies also use the term 'social novel' regularly without any reference to its concept or call it, rarely, the 'realistic' novel. This use is demonstrated by Ibrahim al-Daghriri (2007d), whose study also shows the same theme between 1420-1424 AH, although the models chosen for both studies are social novels as it that of 'Abumalḥah (2007), who studies the image of Saudi society in the Saudi novel.

Al-Daghriri's study (2007d,p.4) adopts a general definition for the novels which are going to be studied. The study focuses on the novel which is "based on showing the deep civilisation in a society and depicting the human crisis in this society". In fact, this concept refers particularly to the social novel and not to the novel in general; besides that, all the selected novels in this study are social novels. 'Abumalḥah (2007,p.11) also adopts the same type of novel, referring to the same term 'novel', whereas his study is based only on social novels. Thus, both studies use the term 'novel' to refer to the social novel.

However, many critics, such as Cazamian and French, realise the breadth of the concept, whereas other critics try to define it through describing its elements. Arab studies have so far not shown any interest in defining the term. However, 'society' appears in previous definitions as the main topic. Thus, determining the social novel as a narrative subgenre relies upon the clear presence of society with its movements and transformations in the text, as the social novel's primary interest is in describing society, which is considered the main function of this subgenre.

It is clear from the previous discussion that the social novel is a realistic literary subgenre which has a social thesis and deals with human relationships, customs, and morals. It portrays a prevailing social problem that is usually generated by a conflict between traditional and modern social values and depicts aspirations of society.

## 2.5 Origin and Development of the Social Novel: Factors Contributing to the Emergence of the Social Novel

The social novel emerged in Great Britain and the United States in the mid-19th century during the Victorian era. Works such as *Hard Times* (1854) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65) by Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) are some examples of the early social novel in the 19th century (Baldick and Baldick, 2008). These novels generally play a role in providing a picture of English society in this age. Due to this role, Thomas Carlyle coined the phrase 'condition of England' in the introduction to *Past and Present* (1843), referring to this type of novel which depicts social and political inequalities (ibid.). In addition, the phrase reveals a strong relationship between the novel and society, as these novels are considered a realistic description of English life at that time.

*Ruth* (Gaskell, 2006), as an example, depicts the life of a 'fallen woman' who was an orphan and now wants to adjust to society and obtain a respectable social position after she has committed a grave sin. The novel describes the life of this woman as she tries to live her life peacefully; however, the community does not forgive her. The novel deals with more than just her individual case, referring to social issues which emerged following the increase in the level of prostitution, particularly in London. In this way, novels like this can be considered to be representation of social movements of the era.

This transformation in English novel writing to focus on social themes seems to have been influenced by several factors that drew the attention of English novelists toward social issues. The Victorian era (1837-1901), which witnessed the birth of the social novel, is known as the golden era of the British Empire, due to the major economic and social developments and the great industrial and technological revolutions at that time. Faizal Risdianto (2011) in his study refers to the impact of the era on Oscar Wilde's writing. Risdianto describes the era, saying: "It was a long period of peace, prosperity, excellent sensibilities and national self-confidence". However, transformations in several areas were emerging during this era, such as the increasing size of the population, the education, health and commercial sectors, and others. This transformation in many aspects of life due to the economic boom at that

time had a corresponding impact on literature. The novelists who noticed these rapid transformations in their lives did not neglect them; thus, their novels became representations of such societal transformations.

Despite the high degree of development created by the economic boom, some new and disturbing social issues emerged in this period, such as that of “fallen women”, street children and crime, and issues related to the working and poorer classes. These issues were paid great attention by Victorian novelists, and therefore these novelists embodied the issues of their society in narrative works such as *Ruth*.

These significant changes had some positive impact on individuals, on other social levels, and on society in general; however, they also created some social problems, especially when social justice was, to some extent, absent. Thus, the social novel emerged as a means to depict the serious social issues that had resulted from the impact of the economic boom, as the novel is considered the best literary genre to depict life and society, due to its capability of portraying issues, problems, and transformations (al-Daghriri, 2007a,p.25). In fact, the economic boom in England in particular, and in Europe more generally, effectively contributed toward changing the image of the social structure which was accompanied by a change in European thought.

Similarly, economic factors have effectively contributed toward the emergence and development of the social novel in Saudi literature. Saudi Arabia, one of the largest petroleum-exporting countries and the largest economy in the Arab world (Metz and Library of Congress. Federal Research Division., 1993,p.134), has witnessed transformations in many aspects of society. The noticeable decrease in mortality rates and the marked rise in the population, as well as the advanced services that are provided in the fields of education, health, and construction, are all clear signs of the rapid transformations in Saudi Arabia, as demonstrated in Chapter One. In addition, the transformation of Saudi society, which used to be mostly composed of scattered villages and deserts, into an advanced civil society within the span of a century has been a major transformation in itself.

Despite the rapid development which was caused by the economic superpower of Saudi Arabia, many social issues have emerged, some of which are related to the status of women. The economic boom has changed the status and function of Saudi

women in particular, who have shown a strong desire to participate in the new prosperity of the culture. The status of women in Arabia has changed significantly from before, when their role was limited to housework. Now there are many women working in various fields. These images of the new status of Saudi women are clear in a novel such as '*Adhra' al-Manfā* and *Dam al-Barā'a*'.

The Saudi economic boom has also raised issues related to other nations and cultures and questions of identity, especially with the increasing numbers of foreign workers who are now seeking job opportunities in light of this economic development. Whereas other issues are related to the working class, whose social problems are also highlighted in Saudi narrative discourse, the economic boom has been the primary source of the presence of this new class with its unique problems. Additionally, social relationships comprise part of these social issues, especially those issues related to the Saudi family. Saudi novelists have felt compelled to write about these social issues in works such as the novel of al-Nassir *Ghuūm al-Kharīf*, which shows the impact of the economic boom on the Saudi social classes and families.

However, the impact of the economic boom in social narrative discourse has not been limited to these emerging social problems in Saudi society. It has also raised the level of awareness and education among citizens and writers, making them interested in discussing and highlighting social issues in various fields, and through various channels such as the social novel, because the economic boom "works to improve the social culture of the peoples and develops its humanitarian roles" (al-Mahdi, 2010,p.11).

In summary, it is clear that the economic boom is considered a major factor that contributed to the appearance of this literary subgenre, owing to the effectiveness of this factor in causing many changes throughout British society. These changes in social structure and thought also had an impact on art and literature, as many critics have noted (Badur, 2000,p.193).

Globalisation also plays an active role in the prevalence of some social demands. People from different parts of the world are beginning to share the same concerns and social beliefs, values, and ideas such as liberal thought, the search for freedom, human rights, and social justice. These social values and ideas have also played a



central role in the emergence and development of the social novel. Freedom, for example, which is “an achievement of liberalism” (Mises, 2002,p.20), is one of the most important foundations of society advocated by liberal thought. This invitation to freedom in society has dominated the world of the arts, including literature. Writers clearly defend their rights and the rights of citizens to freedom, and so it has therefore become an important theme in many literary works.

Al-Jasim (1999,p.57) in his study refers to freedom which is considered the most human value that the protagonists in all of al-Nassir’s novels were searching for. Al-Nassir’s protagonists are always on a journey in search of freedom. For example, the protagonist of *Thuqbun fi Rida’ al-Layl* (1961,p.6) tries to get rid of parental authority and finds that the social customs in his small village limit his progress and dreams, so moving to the city will give him more freedom.

Social justice also plays a part in many of al-Nassir’s novels. *Thuqbun fi Rida’ al-Layl* (ibid.,pp.222-228), for example, highlights some images of social injustice such as the military power which is used to suppress freedom. The protagonist rejects this situation. In addition, the novel *Safinat al-Ḍayā’* (1989,pp.149-154) shows some other portraits of social injustice such as the right of the working class to receive promotion. The protagonist believes in social justice so he supports the workers' rights and starts to guide them. Then, the protagonist is fired from his job for inciting workers to strike.

It is clear from the previous discussion that the economic boom and globalisation are considered two important factors that have generated many transformations, not only in society but also in the arts. The social novel as an art form is a representation of reality. It is important to notice the relationship between the novel in general and social transformation. In fact, the increase in social activities and transformations was usually followed by an increase in the number of novels that are a result of these social activities and transformations. Proof of this point is the general number of Saudi novels written before and after the second Gulf War. This war was accompanied by many transformations in Saudi society. The number of Saudi novels published between 1930 and 1989 is 125, whereas the number published in the period between 1990 and 2008 is 354 (al-Ḥāzimi and al-Yūsif,p.56). It is expected that the Arab literature will witness a huge rise in the number of novels published in

Arabic over the next two decades due to the Arab Spring revolution that changed the face of Arab societies.

However, the emergence and development of the social novel attracted a number of Arab critics to follow the factors that led to the emergence of the novel in Saudi literature in particular and in Arabic literature more generally. Sultān al-Qaḥṭāni (2009,p.43), in his study, lists four factors that led to this emergence: education, the press, printing and publishing, and the educated class. Without a doubt, the new education system in Saudi Arabia, after establishing many educational schools, institutions, and universities, has played a significant role in cultivating Saudi culture, and art in general has been affected by this increased level of education. Education plays a prominent role in forming the mind-set of Saudi novelists, as the majority of Saudi novelists, especially those who are from the first generation of Saudi novelists, are male. There is no doubt that the delay in the emergence of the novel in Saudi Arabia was due to the low level of public education as “the novel is written to be read, and this requires a high level of education” (‘Abdu al-Ghani, 2005,p.25).

The press also played an important role in the emergence and development of the Saudi novel. This role can be divided into two important functions that contributed to the emergence and spread of the novel. The first function was publishing the translated works of the world’s greatest writers and thinkers, which influenced many Saudi intellectuals and novelists. The press also became a channel for communication between Saudi novelists and readers. The final function is embodied in encouraging Saudi novelists to publish their literary works in newspapers and magazines.

The press has led an important role in the evolution of the novel through daily newspapers, weekly and monthly magazines and periodicals, so people got to know the novel through these kinds of media channels. (ibid.,p.53)

The Saudi press gives many writers the opportunity to publish their literary works. In addition, it supports the Saudi writers by financial inducements to attract them to publish works in newspapers and magazines. However, the role of the press in the emergence of the Saudi novel in general, and of the social novel in particular, must

not be overlooked. The press also contributed to the dissemination of the novel in Saudi literature and introduced this new narrative style to the Saudi community. Al-Nassir (2009,p.14) emphasises the strong impact of the press on the expansion of the novel throughout Saudi Arabia. He refers to the Saudi press as “the way of expressing his feelings”.

Printing and publishing have had a similarly strong impact on the emergence and development of the social novel. Printing and publishing houses have published many Arabic and translated foreign social novels, such as Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *A Christmas Carol* (1843), which thereby became accessible to Saudi readers and intellectuals. These publishing houses have also published many Arabic novels, such as those by Najīb Maḥfūz and other famous Arab novelists. It is worth mentioning that the number of printing and publishing houses in Saudi Arabia has now reached more than 5000, according to al-Qaḥṭani’s study (2009,p.63).

The educated class also played a significant role in the emergence and expansion of the social novel in Saudi literature. Reading the literary works of many novelists and evaluating the impact of these readings, especially the novel, which was previously an unknown literary genre in Saudi literature, inspired their desire to try writing in this new literary genre. The formidable intellects of this class, as al-Qaḥṭani’s study (ibid.,p.65) mentions, qualify them to write novels employing various types of literary approaches. The Saudi novelists who were a part of this class were capable of expressing and depicting their own social issues using the novel.

In fact, there are other important factors to consider, such as foreign educational scholarships which have had an impact on some Saudi novelists such as Ghazi al-Quṣaibi in his novel *Shuqat al-Ḥuria* (1999), which is set in Cairo between 1948 and 1967. The role of the translation of foreign novels into Arabic also plays a role in introducing this subgenre to Arab readers. Great social narrative works by Charles Dickens, Maxim Gorky, Victor Hugo, and Honoré de Balzac were translated into the Arabic language (al-Nassir, 2009,p.14).

Furthermore, a relationship exists between nationalism and the prevalence of the social novel. The impact of nationalism can be seen as stemming from the emergence of the social novel, even though some scholars and critics consider nationalism a disease of the contemporary era: “nationalism is an infantile disease”

(al-Jasim, 1999,p.99). In fact, this view comes from the negative impact of nationalism, which has led to major global problems, such as discrimination against other nationalities, as well as bigotry.

Nationalism contributed to the emergence of social novel in both Arab and Saudi literature. Pan-Arab nationalism (1913) or which then called Naṣiri nationalism,<sup>6</sup> as some critics have labelled it, was established to gather the Arab countries under one banner to face the danger of foreign powers. The concept of Pan-Arab nationalism met with great approbation from many Arabs, and the call for nationalism has strongly impacted on Arab writers and intellectuals who tried to reshape Arab societies according to the objectives of the call through their critical and literary works.

Some critics refer to the clear relationship between nationalism and the emergence of the Arab novel, considering the latter to be an essential factor that led to this emergence, due to the dominance of Arab national thought on the themes of Arabic narrative discourse (‘Abdu al-Ghani, 2005,pp. 23,26). Al-Nassir (2010) does not deny this idea, and confirms the impact of Pan-Arab nationalism on his novels. This sense of nationalism clearly appears, for example, in *Thuqban fi Rida’ al-Layl* and *Safinat al-Ḍayā’*.

The Realist movement in art in France in the 1850s, which coincided with the emergence and development of the social novel, is also another considerable factor that led to the expansion of the social novel. This movement was a reaction against Romanticism, which had dominated French art in the 18th century. The Realist movement contributed to the expansion of the social novel along with many other realist literary works, bringing about a huge transformation in literature after the domination of Romanticism. Many social novels appeared after the establishment of the movement and adopted realism as a way to describe and depict society. In addition, the movement contributed toward creating a closer relationship between literature and society by focusing on reality in literary works; therefore, literary

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<sup>6</sup> This refers to the former Egyptian President Jamāl ‘Abdu al-Naṣir (1918-1970), who politically called for Pan-Arab nationalism, and who established the political foundations of the call in Arab countries.

works became more attached to society by depicting the actual existence of ordinary, contemporary life.

The last factor that contributed to the emergence and development of the social novel is the novelist's belief in social responsibility, and his efforts to perform a function for society by writing about social issues. Al-Nassir (2009,p.89), for example, considers his writing about social issues a duty towards society, and proposes that every novelist has to perform this duty. Thus, feeling responsible towards society is another factor to consider.

## **2.6 Development of the Saudi Social Novel: Literary Accomplishments**

Arabic poetry was once called '*Diwān al-ʿArab*', meaning the Arab archive which contains knowledge and information about life, such as places, history, lineage, proverbs and idioms. It also catalogues people's lives, traditions and morals, and depicts their pain, hopes and aspirations. Thus, this literary genre played a major role in preserving and saving Arab heritage, and that made it the most important literary genre in Arabic literature. Moreover, Arab culture in early times had an oral tradition, and so the poetic form founded on metre and rhyme made the poem easier to memorise without neglecting its poetic aesthetics, which also are a strong factor that stimulates the mind to remember the poem. All these reasons contribute to this literary genre's importance over other genres.

In the modern era and after widespread communication between the East and the West, the novel has become more important than any other literary genre. Najīb Maḥfūz, in an article cited in Jabir 'Aṣḥūr's work (1999,p.11), claims that poetry prevailed in the era of myth and antiquity, but this modern era of development and industry requires a new literary genre which can depict the ambitions and aspirations of the modern human. Maḥfūz sees narrative as the right genre for this modern era, as it is able to convey human concerns, problems and facts. It also combines fantasy with reality. 'Aṣḥūr describes the modern era as "the age of the novel", as many literary works translated into other languages are novels. In addition, 'Aṣḥūr sees the novel as the most prevalent literary genre in Western and Eastern literature (1999,pp.33-35). In his study about novels in the Arab world, 'Ali al-Ra'ī refers to the novel as the modern *Diwān al-ʿArab*, because the novel reflects the Arab tongue.

According to al-Ra'ī, the novel is capable of playing the same role as poetry in preserving Arab human experiences and experiments in life. The novel is also considered a historical, social, political, humanitarian and cultural document due to the diversity of its themes (1992,p.3).

The novel plays a major role in depicting modern Arab life with all its challenges and transformations (‘Aṣṣūr, 1999,p.42). The writer has sufficient space to highlight several aspects of life and encompass humanitarian expertise and experiences. Moreover, the large number of published novels has increased sharply. For example, 271 Saudi novels were published between 2000 and 2008, whereas Saudi novels published before this period (1930 to 1999) did not reach half that number (al-Ḥāzimi and al-Yūsif, 2008,p.56). In contrast, many Arab critics defend the role and importance of poetry, including the poet ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād, who always decried the value of the novel in comparison to poetry.

Both genres have a wide presence in the Arab literary scene. However, the relationship between Arab modernism as a movement and the novel as a literary genre is one reason why some Arab writers belittle the novel; significant attention is given to the novel by many Arab modernists, even writers and critics such as Najīb Maḥfūz (the greatest Arab novelist), Jabir ‘Aṣṣūr (a critic), ‘Abdullah al-Ghathami (a critic) and ‘Abdu Khāl (a novelist). Arab Modernism has not gained acceptance in traditional thinking; critics consider it a kind of Occidentalism which attempts to blur Arab and Islamic identities. ‘Awaḍ al-Qarni strongly criticised the movement, considering modernism a kind of apostasy from Islam (1988). The study focuses on modernism in literature, although al-Qarni is an Islamic preacher and not a literary critic. That leads him into many misunderstandings due to his ignorance of the literary nature, as many other critics claim, including al-Ghathami, who declines a discussion with al-Qarni because he did not know the nature of the literature in his book (al-‘Arabia, 2005).

The movement of Arab modernism relies on novel more than poetry. It also considers novel as a modern literary discourse and a type of modernisation within Arab literary discourse. The anti-modernist movement considers novel as a modernistic achievement that attempts to blur the identity of the known literary

discourses in Arab literature. In particular, novel is an innovation designed by the westerners.

However, novel is a literary genre that is naturalised according to its themes and issues, so it has many subgenres, including historical, science, political, mystery and social. In fact, the social novel is the most popular narrative subgenre, especially in Saudi literature, as most novels are considered social novels. There are many reasons behind the great attention given to this discourse, especially in Saudi Arabia. The first concerns the nature of the novel. The novel as a modern genre has multiple literary features, such as its ability to absorb many of the events due to its textual breadth; thus, this textual space enables the novel to absorb social changes, events and issues. In addition, the multiplicity of characters in novels is much like multiple personalities in reality, as the novel consists of many characters with major or secondary functions just as in real life, so it is not difficult to create a narrative community within the novel that is much like real communities. Thus, the social novel is the best literary genre through which to portray these social transformations widely in various forms and types.

The conditions in Arab societies, which are considered underdeveloped in many aspects compared to developed countries, are recognised as motivating the novelist to write about those societies. Thus, the novelists try to depict society and highlight its crucial issues and problems. Secondly, the prevalence of this discourse in modern Arab literature is a result of the influence on Arab novelists of Western social novelists such as Charles Dickens.<sup>7</sup> In addition, in a personal interview on 28 December 2010, al-Nassir claimed that the reader is affected by social reality, and for this reason his writing focuses on society and its issues in order to consider reader expectations (al-Nassir, 2010). The reader, as al-Nassir claims, is keen on this narrative subgenre which describes a part of his or her society. Finally, the rapid social transformations with their negative or positive impacts on many aspects of life create multiple social attitudes towards these transformations, and open up wide social debates between supporters and opponents. Thus, these transformations are clearly presented in many Arab and Saudi narrative works.

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<sup>7</sup> Many studies refer to the impact of the Western social novel on Arab literature. This impact is discussed in Chapter Three.

Many critics refer to the great attention given in the social novel to social transformations. ‘Aṣfūr recognises the obsession with change in the Arab mind-set which still dominates Arab novels. He also refers to the attention given to social transformations in Arab narrative discourse (1999,pp.42-51). Mohammad al-Shanṭi, in his study of Arabic narrative discourse, also stresses the interest of the Arab novel in depicting the progress of social transformations (2004b,p.299).

Dating back to the 1930s, the publication of *al-Taw’ amān* (The Twins) in 1930 by ‘Abdulqudūs al-’Anṣari (1994) is considered the first emergence of novel writing in Saudi literature. The novel describes the lives of two Saudi brothers, Rashīd and Farīd, who received almost the same care and love from their parents. Rashīd studied at a local national school, which resulted in his achieving significant success in his life and work. In contrast, Farīd chose to study at a foreign (Western) school, and this decision negatively influenced his whole life. The ending of the narrative can be predicted from the start of the events, which are biased against Farīd. Rashīd, who studied at a national school, became a leader of his nation, whereas Farīd died a tragic death at the door of a Paris bar. The aim of the narrative is to provide a picture of two types of education, Western and national, with their outcomes particularly related to morals and customs.

In fact, the work did not receive much attention as the first Saudi novel at the time of its publication. Moreover, it met with harsh words from the author’s contemporaries, such as Mohammad ‘Aūād (1981,p.369/1) who criticised the very poor structure in the work. However, there has been a resurgence of interest in the work by scholars in search of the emergence of novel writing in Saudi literature. Many critics agree that *al-Taw’ amān* represents the initial phase in Saudi novel writing, even though it is an educational novel. Literary critics refer to the emergence of the artistic phase in 1959 when the first novel of Ḥāmid Damanhūri (1980), *Thaman al-Taḍḥiya*, was published.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Many studies refer to the work as the first novel in Saudi novel writing. See, for instance: AL-ḤĀZIMI, M. 1981. *Fan al-Giṣa fi al-’Adab al-Su’ūdi al-Ḥadith*, Riyadh, Dār al-’Ulūm li al-Ṭiba’ā wa al-Nashir . p. 36 and DĪB, M. 1989. *Fan al-Riwaya fi al-Mamlaka al-’Arabiya al-Su’ūdiya bain al-Nash’ā wa al-Taṭawur*, Cairo, Dār al-Ṭiba’ā al-Mohamadia. p. 26.



On the other hand, some critics reject the notion of linking the emergence of Saudi novel writing to the publication of *al-Taw'amān*, due to the marked differences between the work and the novel in structure as it is known in Western literature. 'Abdu al-'Aziz al-Subaīl (2003,p.86), for instance, in his work about the emergence of Saudi novel writing tried to find another work with the features of the modern novel; thus, he considered *Thaman al-Tadhīya* as the first Saudi novel. In fact, this issue occupies significant space in the narrative of critical studies about the Saudi novel. However, the critics who refer to *al-Taw'amān* as the first Saudi novel do not consider the work to be a real novel; they consider it only as the first attempt in the history of the Saudi novel and take into account its historical value. Al-'Anṣari himself (1994,p.1), in the introduction to the novel, refers to his work as an attempt at writing a novel, and admits that he was not successful. On the other hand, al-Subaīl investigated only the history of the novel without any consideration of other attempts at novel writing.

Many studies (al-Ḥāzimi and al-Yūsif, 2008) claim that novel writing has been through three stages: the first stage is the novels which were written between 1930-1959, as there were about 15 novels were published during that period. These novels have an educational purpose such as *al-Taw'amān*. The second stage is 1959-1989, which witnessed a new development in novel writing as there were about 110 published novels in this period. These have a new style in structures and themes as can be seen through some novels of al-Nassir which were published in this time such as *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl*. The last stage starts reaches from 1990 until the present when many young writers started to write their fiction. This stage witnessed many narrative works with diverse themes.

As can be noted, there has been a scarcity of specialised studies of the Saudi novel, especially over the last decade. In fact, this new type of prose has not been considered to be of equal importance to other kinds of poetry and prose such as Ghazal (romance), Madīḥ (Panegyric) and story. The first specialised study of the Saudi novel was published in 1989 after more than 80 novels had been published; its title was *Fan al-Riwaya fi al-Mamlaka al-'Arabia al-Su'ūdia bain al-Nash'a wa al-Taṭūr* (The Art of the Novel in Saudi Arabia, The Origins and Evolution) by Mohammad Dhīb (1989), whereas the first Saudi novel, *Thaman al-Tadhīya*, was

published in 1959. This study refers to the history of novel writing in Saudi Arabia, starting from early attempts to write novels to the stage of development and innovation in the writing. The study also focuses on certain types of Saudi novels, such as the romantic and social novels written before 1989, and highlights features of Saudi novels, such as multiple themes and methods in writing the Saudi novel, the reliance of Saudi novelists on the realistic approach, and many issues Saudi novelists have addressed related to society originating in the impact of social transformations.

Before the previous study, the study of Saudi novels formed part of works in prose, such as the work of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥāzimi (1981), *Fan al-Giṣa fi al-'Adab al-Su'ūdi al-Ḥadith* (The Art of Fiction in Modern Saudi Literature). As the title indicates, this study is a general study of Saudi narrative works. Chapter One discusses the landmarks of innovation in Saudi literature, linking the innovation to the emergence of King 'Abdu al-'Aziz as ruler. The second focuses on Saudi novels, especially the works of al-Nassir and Damanhūri. The last chapter illustrates the features of innovation in Saudi short stories such as those of al-Nassir, which are considered representations of Saudi society. In addition, the study examines the representations of social themes in Saudi narrative discourse and the attention given to these themes by Saudi writers.

Several reasons might explain the huge gap between publication of the first Saudi novel and the first specialised study of the Saudi novel. The novel often depicts explicit sexual relations, regarded as a delicate subject in Saudi society and not acceptable for some classes and groups. In his historical study about the Saudi novel, al-Qaḥṭani (2009,p.9) refers to the insubstantial number of published novels, suggesting that there were not enough to start narrative critical studies. In fact, at that time, Arab, and especially Saudi, critics did not have enough critical tools and approaches to study the novel, and for that reason such studies were late to emerge. Currently, research is flourishing in the form of books, academic articles, journals and conferences about the Saudi novel.

## 2.7 Social Novel and the Social Context: The Relationship between the Social Novel and Society

Talking about the relationship between the social novel and society is generally a part of talking about the relationship between literature and society, which forms a large part of critical studies. Some critics claim that “What happens in a society is reflected in literary works in one form or another” (Dubey, 2013), and thus the social novel mirrors society. Many other critics notice the strong relationship between them, such as 'Aḥmad Farrāj (2003), who refers to literature as a reflection of society and considers it a social activity. However, considering the social novel as a social activity does not overlook the idea of literature as a linguistic activity, but rather sees this literary value as coming after the fact. Furthermore, “language is interpreted from a social perspective before it is interpreted from any other perspective” (ibid.,p.96). There is a clear relationship between literature and society which is based on intertextuality and so literature derives its themes primarily from the multiple fields of life. Jabrā Ibrahim (1988) confirms the deep relationship between the novelist and his daily social life meaning he can not be isolated from his society even if he tried because he expresses the conscience of humanity. In fact, this expression requires a strong ability to embody the reality in a fantasy style, and this ability is embodied in the great narrative works.

However, the relationship between literature and society is not an innovation of the contemporary era. Greek philosophers referred to this relationship. Despite Plato's pessimistic view of art, which he viewed as useless and dangerous, he was the first scholar to explicitly mention this relationship. He believed that “art is essentially an imitation of nature” (Kharrbe, 2009,p.190).

Plato's *Republic* is one of the most important ancient philosophical works to have focused on so many aspects of society: issues such as social justice, virtue and morality, personal values such as bravery, and issues of good and evil. These social issues are discussed in twenty-eight philosophical dialogues divided into ten books as Plato's *Republic* (2007). Nevertheless, society is the main axis in these dialogues, beginning in the first and the second books, which portray the importance of justice and its application in the community. The fourth book addresses the issue of wealth and poverty, as well as the importance of education and its impact on society. In

addition, it touches on many intellectual and ethical terms such as wisdom, bravery, moderation, justice, and injustice. The fifth book delineates the composition of the community, the equality of men and women and their roles in society, and focuses on how to achieve happiness in society. Discussions about society as a theme are concentrated in the seventh book, which illustrates the virtuous republic, and the establishment of states and their relation to the nature of the citizens as the state emanates from its citizens' nature. Plato refers to different types of republican systems and explains the variations from system to system, as well as the circumstances of people in each of these communities. The importance of knowledge is also highlighted in this book, as knowledge is the basis for building a happy society. The eighth book discusses social problems such as tyranny and "unnecessary pleasures", as Plato calls them, which have a negative effect on human lives. Finally, the last book examines the importance of punishment and rewards in society, which help to guarantee a fair life. Plato's work represents a search for an integrated society and offers a critique of the state of his society. It also searches for ways to achieve social justice.

It is clear that many of Plato's intentions are reflected in the social novel, especially in the inclusion of issues related to social justice. As has been noted, searching for social justice is considered a fundamental goal of many social novels, such as the English social novels which focused on the social rights of child labourers or the working and poor classes in general. This search for social justice can also be found in many Saudi social novels, especially with regard to the issues of Saudi women and their social rights. Al-Nassir, for instance, focuses on issues related to Saudi women in two of his novels, '*Adhra*' *al-Manfā* and *Dam al-Barā'a*. These novels, factually, are searches for social justice for Saudi women.

Generally speaking, Plato's work searches for an integrated society and provides a critique of the state of society. Social novelists perform the same function by focusing on social problems and presenting social issues through their works. The social novel also aspires to correct the course of society and search for solutions to various problems. This literary function leads some critics to consider the social novel as a social thesis because it presents a social issue and highlights some of its important aspects.

There are many other philosophers who have adopted these views, for example Aristotle, Marcus Tullius Cicero in his work *On the Republic*, and 'Abu Naşir al-Farābi, especially in his book, 'Arā' *Ahl al-Madina al-Faḍila* (The Views of the People of Utopia). Ibrahim al-Nassir (al-Nassir, 2009, pp.13-14, 29) refers to the impact of Socialist thought on Saudi novelists in particular, and on Arab novelists in general. Socialist thought served as the focus of many Arab thinkers, writers, politicians, and educated people, especially among the youth. Socialist thought dominated Arab culture, especially after the publication of the work of the Socialist writers and theorists, such as Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837), Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), Maxim Gorky (1868-1936), and Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852).

Translation has also played an influential role in the transfer of Socialist thought to Arab culture; furthermore, Arab publishing houses, particularly in Beirut, where there is no strict censorship over their publications, played the same role in introducing Socialist ideology to Arab culture. These publishing houses published many translated works that conveyed Socialist thought, including stories, novels, and scientific studies. Some of the Socialist ideas were welcomed by many Arab novelists who adopt some of these ideas in their writings such as Najīb Maḥfūz, 'Abdu al-Raḥmān, Ghazi al-Quṣaibi and al-Nassir, especially with regard to the issue of social equality among the classes. Al-Nassir (ibid., p.17), who wrote the second Saudi novel, does not neglect the important role played by literary socialist realism, especially with regard to novels, in motivating him to adopt a narrative writing style.

Many studies have referred to the complexity of the relationship between the novel and society. Al-Daghriri (2007a, p.26) in his study asserts that the complexity comes from the challenge of how to classify the relationships between them and finding a clear explanation for such relations. His study concluded that any change to the community would have an impact on the novel in general. Even so, the study does not delineate the reasons for the complexity.

One major reason for the complexity is the dialectical relationship between reality and fantasy. This dialectical relationship is embodied in conveying the social issues, events, and transformations from a real world to a fantasy world and the way of recreating the social elements in a realistic art such as in the social novels. It is

known that novelists do not convey reality as it is so reality comes in another, different form that could be more attractive or uglier because the function of literature is not describing reality as it is with all its details but rather involves providing a parallel image of reality. A recent study by Rafif Şaidawi (2008) focuses on several Arab novels to highlight the relationship between reality and fantasy in the narrative text. His study shows that the boundaries between them are unclear; however, the study claims that the narrative texts are based on mixing fantasy with reality to convince the reader that the events are real. H̄aji Jabir (2012) refers to the difficulty of finding a dividing line between reality and fantasy in the narrative text. The narrative text, as Jabir claims, lies between two levels, reality and fantasy, and the novelist in his writing tries to retrieve some events that are located in his subconscious so he uses his imagination to create a new reality. However, it is clear from the differing ideas about the relationship between reality and fantasy that narrative work, especially the social novel, is founded on two important elements, fantasy as a tool of expression and reality with its breadth and aspects as a material.

A number of critical studies claim that the relationship between literature and society is reciprocal. Some studies propose that “literature is a social phenomenon; it is produced in the context of a given society and it has its effect on that society” (Potter, 1989,p.177). Potter’s idea explores the impact of society on literature and vice versa, so this reciprocal impact gives the social text an active continuance. Al-Nassir emphasises the reciprocal effects between the events of the novel and reality. He said that he “watches the events in the novel which are, of course, influenced by reality and in turn the events affect reality” (al-Nassir, 2010).

There are also some studies that view literature as a social activity from a different angle, so when a writer writes a literary text, it is considered a form of social communication: “it involves one person (an author) talking to others (his or her readers)” (Barlow, 2009,p.16). This view also confirms the reciprocal relationship between literature and society. Thus, if literature is influenced by society, then society is in turn affected by this literary discourse. Nevertheless, the appearance of images of society in the social novel depends on the strength of the relationship between the novelist and society, and therefore if the relationship between the writer

and the community is strong enough, the appearance of society will be clearly reflected in his literary works, and vice versa (Lukacs, 1972,p.10).

The term 'social novel' clearly refers to this relationship between the social novel and society itself. The term is a composite of two words: 'social,' referring to society as a general theme, and 'novel' as a literary genre. Thus, the relationship between literature and society seems to appear more clearly in this literary subgenre. Additionally, the definitions emphasise that society is the main axis defining the term 'social novel'.

From a practical standpoint, society clearly appears in the social novel. A novel such as '*Adhra*' *al-Manfā* portrays the lifestyle in Jeddah city. Many places are described in this novel, such as the inner city and the modern districts which are full of villas and palaces. The novel depicts the modern lives of rich Saudis and the high standard of living. Despite the social development in Saudi Arabia and the many, rapid social transformations there, Saudi society still suffers from many traditional ideas which remain unchanged in the minds of the majority of Saudi citizens. The novel also features characters from many different social classes. In addition, the novel conveys community attitudes towards many social issues such as women's rights in education and work.

*Ghuūm al-Kharīf* presents many characters that resemble normal people in our everyday lives. The novel describes the lives of the working class in the capital city, Riyadh, and shows the differences between them and the upper class. The novel refers to many social issues such as the relationship between the classes. It also sheds light on the marriage of young girls, which is considered a crime. The novel also represents life inside the closed world of Saudi hospitals which are not gender-segregated. The need for health care allows society to be more open so mixing genders becomes more acceptable for the educated younger generation.

In summary, the relationship between the social novel and society runs very deep, as can be seen. Also, the social novel is a representation of reality rather than a reflection. However, the social novel as a literary genre is regarded as the clearest confluence of literature and society due to its combination of the many different forms of societies and literary aesthetics.

## 2.8 The Aesthetic Features of the Social Novel

The previous definitions of the term 'social transformation' clearly reveal some aesthetic features of the social novel. Some of these features include dealing with human customs and relations, changing current social thought, and being a social discussion. In addition, there are two other important elements – namely, realism and freedom of speech – that enable this subgenre to depict a society from many perspectives.

The relationship between the social novel and human customs is very common in any social novel and is considered one of its essential characteristics. *Ra'shat al-Zil* (al-Nassir, 1994,p.29), for example, focuses on human customs in rural and urban societies. The novel shows how rural citizens cling to old customs and resist change. The village does not have any nightlife, so everybody goes to bed after dinner. The protagonist's mother wakes up in the early morning to prepare a simple breakfast, beginning by milking the goat and making fresh bread while the children are still sleeping. The village starts gradually to come to life. After feeding the children before they go to school, the mother starts doing the housework. The protagonist describes life in this village as being very simple, although the world around it has become more open and sophisticated.

The novel also presents the changing habits and customs in the city as they are affected by globalisation and economic power. It also presents the diverse cultures that have been introduced to the city by foreigners. The city life forces the protagonist of *Ra'shat al-Zil* (ibid.,p.13), Faliḥ, to deal with new technology that he did not use in his rural life:

في زقاق جانبي وبين تلك المنازل وقف شقيقه بالقرب من أحد الأبواب فضغط على زر مثبت في الجدار في نهايته سلك طويل طويل يمتد إلى الداخل. بدا حائرا بعض الشيء إذ لم يكن يدري لماذا لم يطرق الباب واكتفى بالضغط على ذلك النتوء البلاستيكي. وقد تبددت حيرته حين انفتح الباب وظهر أمامه وجه لم يكن غريبا عليه وهو جارهم نصار.

In the side of an alley, His brother stopped in front of a house. He pressed a button that was installed next to the door. The button connected with a long wire running into the house. Faliḥ seemed confused as he did not know why his brother did not knock on the door and just pressed the button. His



confusion was dispelled when a man opened the door. It was his neighbour Naṣār from his village.

The scene above shows how the new life imposed by the city on the protagonist impacts human customs. The normal custom of knocking on doors is changed by the presence of modern technology. However, there are some customs that remain fixed in the urban society, such as hospitality:

رائحة الهيل في القهوة تجلب الانتعاش وهي تداعب الأنف وكأنما مذاقها يبدأ من الشم...رن الجرس... فتمتم فهاد وصل لافي... نهض لاستقباله، تعانقا بحرارة. نظر لافي إلى شقيقه فهاد قائلا وهو يضع يديه على أذنيه: أين الباع؟ مقلدا صوت الخراف. ضحكوا من حركته بينما أجاب فهاد مبتسما أبشر بالخير الصباح رباح.

The smell of cardamom in coffee brings exhilaration and caresses the nose, so tasting coffee starts from the nose by smelling [...] the bell was ringing. Fahhād was expecting his brother, Lafī. Lafī was at the door [...] Faliḥ stood up to meet him. They hugged each other closely and Lafī looked at his brother and jokily pulled his brother's ears and said: "where is the baa?" (He was imitating the voice of the sheep). They were all laughing and his brother answered, "We will have it, God willing" (ibid.,pp.14-15).

This scene confirms the existence of some traditional social customs in the city that have not changed. The Saudi traditions of hospitality begin with serving Arabic coffee, then serving a whole cooked sheep as a sign of munificence, and also as an expression of warm hospitality. In addition to demonstrating the stereotype of hospitality and generosity in Saudi society, the novel also sheds light on Saudi stereotypes of dressing:

وأبصرا رجلا تجاوز العقد الخامس من عمره يدخل المكان بجسمه الممتلئ وقامته المديدة يلفها عباءة زاهية. يتوج رأسه عقالا فوق شماغه الأحمر ووجهه الأبيض يتوسطه شارب ضحك ولحية خفيفة.

They saw an overweight man who was more than fifty. His huge figure was covered by a bright cloak.<sup>9</sup> He was wearing a *Shimāgh*<sup>10</sup> and an *Iqāl*<sup>11</sup> on his head (ibid.,p.34).

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<sup>9</sup> Known as 'Abā'ah in Arabic language, it is a traditional Arab men's woolen cloak that is very popular in Arab countries, especially in the Gulf countries.

<sup>10</sup> This is a traditional Arab headdress usually worn by men and made from cotton.

As noted in the previous passages, human customs, habits, and traditions are given great attention in the social novel. The previous examples provide clear evidence of the deep relationship between human customs and the social novel. The social customs that can be seen in this passage, as in other social novels, are a fundamental element in the narrative construction to show events in their social context.

Another important feature of the social novel deals with various human relationships, such as the relations between men and women, fathers and mothers, parents and children, friends, colleagues, and people from different societies or different cultures. In addition, these human relations are characterised by multiple forms, such as love and hate relations, cooperative relations and friend relations. Moreover, human relationships are measured according to their strength, so both deep and superficial relationships are presented.

However, the construction of the social novel is based on a set of human relationships that are generated by the interaction between the characters. Critics such as French notice the variety of human relations in the narrative discourse through the role of characters in building the events, so they divide these characters into types, such as major and minor characters, protagonist and antagonist, dynamic and static characters, and so forth.

The social novel focuses great attention on human relations. This attention can clearly be seen in the relations among characters in the text. The human relations in the narrative text seem like the normal relations in our real lives, and the characters look like normal people around us, however, there are many differences between our real lives and the characters' lives. Sometimes, the characters' lives are clearer than ours due to the ability of novelists to reveal the hidden lives of the characters (Forster, 1927,p.46). Thus, the nature of human relationships between characters in a narrative text can sometimes be clearer and easier to understand than relationships in our real lives.

The novel usually represents these human relations in their different contexts, which help the reader to understand them clearly, whereas the contexts of these

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<sup>11</sup> This is an Arab men's accessory worn on the top of the *Shimāgh* to keep it in place. It is a black circle of cord made of wool.

relationships might be unclear in our real daily lives. For example, the relationship between the protagonist and his father in *Thuq̣bun fī Rida' al-Layl* is very clear. The reader is able to understand the dimensions of this relation between a father and his son. The protagonist loves his father, who tries to protect and save him from the risks of city's life. However, the relationship also seems to be unstable as the protagonist is usually forced to follow his father's opinions and orders without any objections. His authoritarian father thus becomes a source of concern for the protagonist, as he limits his progress, aspirations, freedom and hopes in life. This relation clearly appears through the internal monologue in which the son blames his father for the problems in his life: "But, my lovely father, is it not enough that I have sold you myself, my freedom and my dreams" (al-Nassir, 1961,p.48).

It is noted that the narrative context in *Thuq̣bun fī Rida' al-Layl* portrays many events in which the authoritarian father causes negative feelings in his son. These events provoke a clear perception in the reader's mind of the type of relationship that exists between the father and the son. Thus, understanding human relations seems easier in the narrative text than in real life, owing to novelists' ability to revealing them.

*Ghuūm al-Kharīf* (al-Nassir, 1988) is based on many human relationships between the protagonist, who works as a businessman, and others such as his wife, children, and friends in light of the new economic life that changes many social and human aspects. These changes have affected the level of human relationships such that a person's social status depends on his financial status. The protagonist realises the social changes around him after the economic boom in Saudi Arabia, which has had a negative impact on the relationships of Saudi families as parents have become busier and thus had to relegate the task of childcare to servants.

Many critics have noted the importance and the role of the social novel in changing current social thought (Boscaro et al., 1991,p.36). This impact allows the social novel to extend outside the boundaries of the text, often as a result of readers' sympathy with the protagonist or with one of the other characters. '*Athra' al-Manfā*, for example, clearly shows the important role played by the protagonist in trying to influence Saudi public opinion about women's issues. In this case the protagonist "follows his own personal school of thought and he is very loyal to his ideas" (al-

Nassir, 1978,p.4). Since achieving an impact in any society requires power and authority, the protagonist's job as supervisor of the women's issues section in a Saudi newspaper helps him to have an impact on society, especially after he has noticed the hidden desire of some people in society to publicly discuss the issues. This consensus gives him a strong desire to start influencing Saudi public opinion by writing about women's issues. Moreover, the novel describes the progress of society with all its customs, habits, traditions and rules, as well as how the protagonist was affected by this movement as one of the main defenders of women's rights in society.

The events of '*Athra' al-Manfā* (ibid.,pp.24-25, 126,80-90) shed light on the progress of social rules and thoughts around the protagonist, who theoretically believes in women's rights. Mixing genders was totally forbidden in Saudi culture; this is one of the main reasons for the social struggle over women's issues, especially in education and the workforce, as this mixing might lead to other Saudi-prohibited relationships (e.g., falling in love before marriage or having an affair). At the time of the events of the novel, educated and employed women, who were very rare, were likely to have doubts about their ethics and morals due to mixing. In the novel, the protagonist begins to have suspicions about his wife, who had previously studied abroad in a free country that forced her to mix with men. Confused by the prevalent social norms and ideas about educated and employed women at the time, he finds himself in conflict between social reality and what he believes. At the end of the events, he has rejected all that he used to believe about women's rights when he first experiences the new social reality. The progress of society, with its traditional social restrictions, has made it difficult for him to face the social reality, as marriage with an educated woman was rare at that time. The protagonist's family refused this marriage initially for social reasons, as Saudi men at that time were expected to look for a woman with a simple education who was able to do the housework and look after her husband and children. Ḥasan al-Ḥāzimi (2008,p.115) comments on these events, saying that there is a huge gap between what the protagonist believes and what he does.

Despite the fact that the social novel is a literary genre with literary aesthetics, it also serves as a social discussion that provides many ideas and opinions about society.

Al-Nassir's novel, *'Adhra' al-Manfā* (1978), mainly describes the status of Saudi women within society. It also discusses some important issues related to them, such as their right to education and work. The novel shows the traditional status at the time of Saudi women, whose role was confined to parenting and daily housework. In addition, it sheds light on the movement of social transformations related to Saudi women's status, and it points to two major reasons that contributed to changing society's perception of women. The novel shows the effective contribution of the press to the Saudi community's awareness of the role of women and their right to education and employment. It does this by focusing on women's issues and publishing many articles about their new role in the modern world. The novel also shows the impact of foreign scholarship on society. In addition, the novel describes some intellectual transformations in society and shows the community's attitude towards the new status of Saudi women. The novel also explains the reasons that contributed to their right to education and work.

A novel such as *Safinat al-Dayā'* (al-Nassir, 1989) presents the readers with many social issues related to modern city life. The novel reveals the existence of varying social classes in Saudi society and shows the differences in their lifestyles. Then, the novel sheds light on many social problems, such as marriage problems, mixing genders, freedom of women, inequality between workers, and so on. The protagonist believes in the need for social reform and seeks to enact it. At the end, however, the protagonist decides to change his life and resigns from his job to look for another job that will give him more freedom.

The social novel is characterised as having a realistic style. Many critics claim that the social novel presents an imaginary society rather than the real society (Henkle, 1977,p.22); however, realism as a literary concept and not as a movement varies widely according to the different understandings of the realist theorists and the critical schools of thought. Realism has been defined as an "approach that attempts to describe life without idealization or romantic subjectivity" (Baldick and Baldick, 2008). This approach shows life not by directly depicting real life as it is, but rather through illusionism (al-Saīd, 1998,p.201). Thus, the social novel, which relies on this literary approach, is not a photographic copy of society, as the act of making a direct depiction of society would be contrary to the nature of literature (al-'Awfi,

1987,p.12), which relies on creativity and craftsmanship; therefore, the novel is instead a reproduction of reality in an aesthetic, literary way (al-Daghriri, 2007a,p.28).

Accordingly, the role of novelists in the social novel is to recreate society in a literary style and not merely to portray the truth as they see it. Nevertheless, the appearance of images of society in the social novel depends on the strength of the relationship between the novelist and society; thus, if the relationship between the writer and the community is strong enough, the appearance of society will be clearly reflected in his literary works, and vice versa (Lukacs, 1972,p.10).

Ḥasan al-Ḥāzimi (2000,pp.57-142) divides the Saudi novels into three types in relation to the protagonist. These types are romanticism, realism, and romantic realism (which includes elements of both romanticism and realism). Al-Ḥāzimi (ibid.,p.177) claims that a number of Saudi novels combine the romantic approach with the realistic, so these novels have clear features of the both approaches. He cites three novels of al-Nassir (ibid.,pp.136-142) – *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl*, *Safinat al-Ḍayā'*, and *'Adhra' al-Manfā'* – and shows the romantic and realistic elements in each novel. Al-Ḥāzimi (ibid.,pp.137-138) refers to some elements of the romance novel, such as the love relationship between the protagonist and his neighbour Mufidah. However, this relationship failed.

Tal'at al-Sayed (1988,p.81) is the first critic to refer to this overlapping between the elements of both these approaches in Saudi narrative discourse. Al-Sayed notes that many Saudi writers could not get a ride from the romantic approach which still exists in their writings, especially when they started to write realistic stories; in particular, he mentions some works of Mohammad al-Shaqḥa, which have both a realistic style and romantic vision.

Because the dominance of realism in contemporary literature came after the dominance of the romance, the appearance of romantic elements is highly expected in some literary works. This dominance of the romantic approach is clear in many Saudi literary works, especially in poetry. Many other narrative works, including fiction, were also romantic until recently. Ibrahim al-Nassir, for instance, wrote many romantic stories among his early fictional works before changing to a more

realistic writing style (al-Yaūm, 2004) because it draws the reader in more than any other approach (al-Nassir, 2010).

In fact, love relationships are one of the life's necessities and cannot be ignored. The existence of these relationships in narrative works is normal, because the social novel is founded on many types of human relationships, including love relationships. However, such love relations should not have controlled the development of events to such an extent as to become the major issue of the novel, so this relation has to be narrated in its social context, which carries a social sense.

In *Thuq̣bun fī Rida' al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961), the love relationship between the protagonist and Mufida appears suddenly, without any forces from the narrator. This relation started after the migration of the protagonist's family to the city. Though out many events occurred previously, there is no indication of the beginning of the relationship. Additionally, the protagonist did not even think about being with anyone in the first large section of the novel, and the relationship does not take up a large portion of the text. Moreover, this relationship occurs in a social context to show that love is one of life's necessities, despite conservative society's rejection of it. Also, the novel uncovers facts about unwanted relationships inside society.

The protagonist of *Thuq̣bun fī Rida' al-Layl* is very nervous and upset at facing many social transformations, problems, and issues. This tension in turn is reflected in the text, so the love relationship plays an active role in alleviating the tension. In fact, none of the love relationships in al-Nassir's novels have happy endings, as one would expect to see in a romantic novel.

Similarly, dreams and musings, which are presented in the form of interior monologues, also do not take up a large portion of the text, and they also come in a social context. The protagonist dreams about a just and peaceful society and many of the interior monologues carry a social sense, as the protagonist is not only thinking about himself. The protagonist, in some interior monologues, is looking for freedom, which is regarded as a social demand (ibid.,p.40), or trying to be free from the authority of parents (ibid.,p.46), which is also regarded as a demand of the younger generation.

As can be seen, the existence of these elements in the realistic text does not affect the level of realism in the text. It also does not affect the identity of the text. On the contrary, the presence of these elements confirms the realistic approach of the text as long as these elements come in a social context.

Finally, freedom of speech<sup>12</sup> is one of the most important features of the social novel. Two factors contribute to freedom of speech. The wide space of the social novel undoubtedly contributes to giving novelists the freedom to include and discuss several social issues. This valuable feature attracts al-Nassir to write novels, as he used to confine himself to writing short stories. He says:

I found my short stories expressed society from many aspects and covered many of its events and movements. Then, I found that the novel as a genre is the best way to contain all these aspects, events and movements. I tried to write long stories but I found writing novels more helpful to express and discuss anything I want (2009,p.77).

The major social transformations caused chiefly by globalisation and a strong economy require a literary genre that can contain some of these transformations. Thus, the social novel, with its literary features, is best suited to play this role. Not only does the wide space of the text give freedom to novelists to include several social issues, but also realism increases “the freedom of novelists to include issues in their fiction” (Plietzsch, 2004,p.183).

## **2.9 Key Themes Addressed by the Social Novel**

The themes of the social novel vary depending on the nature of society, which is shaped by political, economic, religious and cultural factors. The limitations of freedom, the cultural composition of the community, the changes that occur in society, the impact of modernity, and the challenges faced by the community all influence the themes of the social novel. Generally speaking, Western and Arab social novels focus on three primary themes: gender, race and class. However, it is

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<sup>12</sup> The right to communicate one's opinions and ideas without fear of government retaliation or censorship



clear when reading many Arab novels that there are two other important themes: identity and freedom. These themes are especially prevalent in many Saudi novels.

### **2.9.1 Gender**

Gender still dominates in Saudi narrative discourse due to the lively social debate over feminist issues and the new status of Saudi women, especially in the light of globalisation and the impact of the economic boom. Saudi media play a prominent role in highlighting this kind of national debate by provoking feminist issues and presenting the views of supporters and opponents, focusing on the views of intellectuals, clerics and politicians while noticeably overlooking the views of other social strata.

The most commonly mentioned issues related to Saudi women in the media are women's education; women's work; and the issues of women driving cars, mixing genders, pay for women in senior management positions, and the wearing of the veil. However, despite some dissenting voices that represent a hard-line religious current in Saudi Arabia that is trying to limit the role of women in society, the Saudi Government has contributed toward the resolution of many women's issues, especially crucial issues that require governmental action.

Many government decisions have contributed positively toward changing the status of Saudi women. The first and most important of these decisions was made on 22 October 1959, when the Saudi Government opened the General Presidency for Girls' Education in Saudi Arabia. Female education for girls was previously very limited, restricted to a small number of private schools located in some Saudi major cities (Dihish, 1999).

The issuing of the Royal Decree is the beginning of a new era in the education process in general, and in girls' education especially. The decision made a big impact on the country as a turning point that opened a path to rapid development and the growth of success for girls' education (al-'Amrū, 1999).

This courageous decision transformed the status of Saudi women to that of educated females who have a strong desire to participate in the development of society. Thus, the traditional role of Saudi women, confining them to housework, is no longer seen

to fit with their aspirations. The most recent government decision supporting the role of women in society allocated 20% of the seats in Majlis al-Shūra to women, marking the first time in Saudi history that women have held political positions (Sālim, 2013).

Saudi narrative discourse focuses on Saudi women's issues in light of the rapid transformations of Saudi society, and these issues have dominated a large number of Saudi social novels. "The Saudi novel provides testimony to the stages of such rapid changes, especially in relation to the status of women and their rights and position in a new life" (al-Ḥāzimi, 2000,p.105).

Al-Nassir's novels pay great attention to Saudi women's issues. *'Adhra' al-Manfā* and *Dam al-Barā'a*, for instance, focus on women's issues as a major theme. *'Adhra' al-Manfā* describes the status of Saudi women seeking a new role in the era of new social transitions. For example, Buthaina, a main character in the novel, tries to change her social function from that of a housewife to a new professional role as a journalist. She tries to raise awareness of new roles available to women in modern society, supporting women's education through her writing, which shows the importance of this for women. The novel also portrays the traditional role of women and reveals some of the unchanging concepts in the culture of the community; Buthaina, like other supporters of female education, has faced many social problems related to traditional social customs and ideas, such as being confined to women's roles within her home and family. The novel features two other main female characters, the protagonist's mother and sister, who both embody the typical image of Saudi women at that time, especially before the rise of education.

While Buthaina tries to raise women's awareness of the importance of education, the male protagonist has the same goal. The dialogue between the editor-in-chief of the newspaper and the protagonist clearly reveals the desire of the educated class to spread awareness about the importance of women's education and the necessity of women participating in social development. The editor-in-chief states:

خدمة المجتمع من الجنسين واجب وطني وعلى الفتاة المثقفة خاصة دور كبير في توعية بنات جنسها [...] . إن حضارة أمة أو شعب – في يقيني – لن تبرز أو تثبت وجودها مالم تتضافر جهود الجنسين في كافة الميادين.

Serving society is a social duty for both genders. Educated women especially have to play a major role in raising the level of Saudi women's awareness [...] the civilisation of any nation or public – in my mind – will not stand out or will not prove its existence unless both genders work together toward this goal in all fields (al-Nassir, 1978,p.15).

*Dam al-Barā'a*, as another example, searches for social justice in women's issues, such as mixing genders (which is prohibited) and the family's fear that unmarried girls will engage in sexual intercourse, as the virginity of daughters is seen as a symbol of a Saudi family's honour, worth and purity. The novel also depicts the life of a Saudi woman in a small village that is still clinging to old customs and traditions, which make women's lives restrictive and difficult.

### **2.9.2 Race**

Race is a clear theme in the Saudi social novel in general, and especially in al-Nassir's novels, which include some depictions of racism. Al-Mawla Maḥfūz, a secondary character, is still single due to his unknown descent, as the traditions of the villagers and Bedouin do not allow them to marry their daughters to a man from a lower or unknown lineage (al-Nassir, 1961,p.16). Even though this tradition is against the values of Islam, which seeks to make all people equal and fights against racial discrimination, society sometimes gives more importance to tradition than to religious mandates.

*Dam al-Barā'a* (al-Nassir, 2001,pp.20-23) also depicts racism in the personality of the Ottoman man, a minor character, who still lives with the memory of the glories of the Ottoman Empire. The events of the novel indicate that Ottoman rule in the Arabian Peninsula has ended, yet the man looks down upon the villagers as if they were uneducated or from a lower class. *'Adhra' al-Manfā* (al-Nassir, 1978,pp.87-90) also shows this type of social racism in terms of marriage relationships. The theme is embodied through Buthaina's relatives, who refuse her marriage to the protagonist, since he is from a lower social class.

Racism as a theme was not the concern of the Saudi social novel for a long time. While there are some scenes of racism in Saudi social novels, racism has not often appeared as a major issue in the structure of the novel due to the impact of religion

on some customs and traditions that deny racism. This is also due to the racism experienced by the first generation of Saudis under Ottoman rule, which created an aversion to racism and served as a factor contributing to the end of the Ottoman Empire (al-Şalabi, 2001, pp.531, 494-535). It can be said that the racism practised by the Ottoman Empire created a psychological factor in the structure of Saudi society until recently. Moreover, the theme can be a taboo subject in Saudi society, and thus discussions on this topic may encounter opposition from the community, which considers itself the representative of Islamic principles.

However, race as a major theme in Saudi social discourse has become a noticeable phenomenon recently. Some Saudi social novels written at the beginning of the century take racism as an axis of the events in the novel. *Ḥilat al-ʿAbīd* (al-Ḥidar, 2009), for instance, discusses some patterns of racism in Saudi society and how some Saudis, especially those belonging to the well-known Arab tribes, look down upon people from other countries, races or ethnicities. Another example from the Saudi social novel is *ʿUnthā tashtur al-Qabilah* (Shaḥbi, 2002), which shows racial discrimination in Saudi society through marriage relationships. The tribal customs prohibit marriage of tribal girls to men who are of unknown descent or who do not belong to a well-known tribe, as is customary among the known Arab tribes. The novel describes the courageous attitude of the protagonist, who breaks the tribal traditions and allows the marriage of his daughter to a man who is sincerely in love with her. The protagonist is deprived of his social rights in the tribe and becomes despised after violating the tribal system, but he considers it a sacrifice worth making for the happiness of his daughter. Thus, Saudi novels “rely on the theme of marriage as a convenient way to address racial dilemmas” (al-Nuʿmi, 2011).

### **2.9.3 Class**

The Saudi social novel pays attention to class as a theme as well. Many researchers deny the existence of social classes in Saudi narrative discourse as it is not exist in the Saudi society. Nora al-Mari (2006,p.42) chooses the term ‘social contrast’<sup>13</sup> instead, and claims that “the concept of class does not appear in Saudi narrative

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<sup>13</sup> Al-Mari, by using this term, tries to show that Saudi society does not consist of social classes. According to the author, the study does not deny some differences between people in society; rather, the purpose in using this term is to bring the social levels closer.

texts”. Al-Mari (ibid.,pp.61-62) cites another reason for choosing this term – namely, the nature of Islamic societies rejects the kind of social discrimination that is embodied in the idea of class. For that reason, Islam imposes *zakat*<sup>14</sup> on every Muslim who is able to pay it so that led to the disappearance of class in the structure of Muslim Saudi society. Al-Mari (ibid.,pp.42,80) borrows the term ‘social contrast’ from another critical study; however, that study employed many phrases related to the term ‘class’ – including ‘middle class’, ‘bourgeoisie class’, ‘working class’, ‘poor class’ and ‘aristocracy class’ – to show the structure of Saudi society. There are no clear differences between the term used and the idea of social classes. However, the study of al-Mari denies the idea of social classes while at the same time the study is employing the levels of social classes in the study to show the present social structure of society. Moreover, the study takes the novels of al-Nassir as a case study, as these novels are clearly founded on the idea of social classes and the conflict among them. In addition, in his bibliography, al-Nassir (2009,pp.104-107) frequently refers to issues of social class and does not deny the existence of such classes in the Saudi social structure. He also refers to his concerns about the working and poor classes.

However, using the term social contrast is only a manipulation of words, and there is no clear difference between the terms. In fact, using this term refers to the prior ideal perspective about Muslim society, which is placed in this study and does not fit with the reality of the situation. Thus, the Saudi social novel confirms the existence of social classes in the Saudi social structure. The social classes are clearly depicted in these novels, which show the conflicts among them.

It is noticeable that the economic situation during the Victorian Age, in England, and contemporary Saudi Arabia have some similarities. The poor class appears in both societies; however, there is no official data about poverty in Saudi Arabia, and only a few indicators refer to the existence of poverty. Some Saudi newspapers, such as *‘Okāz* and *al-Madina*, publicise humanitarian causes that need to be supported.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Zakat is the third pillar of Islam; it is an amount of money, depending on the annual income, paid annually into a social fund. This fund is distributed to a defined set of needy and poor groups.

<sup>15</sup> *‘Okāz* is a Saudi newspaper with a weekly section called ‘al-Nās li al-Nās,’ which lists some human needs for accommodation, money or medicine. In addition to *‘Okāz*, other Saudi

King ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz, the King of Saudi Arabia, visited some places in inner city of Riyadh, the capital, to personally oversee the cases of needy citizens. After this surprise visit, the King ordered the establishment of a fund for poverty reduction, which was the first official statement by the supreme authority in Saudi Arabia about the existence of poverty (al-Rwsa, 2011). This is clear evidence of poverty in Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi social novel also clearly refers to the poor and working classes, as well as other social classes. The narrative of *Thuqbun fi Rida’ al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961,pp.10-22) is founded on three social classes – the poor, the working class, and the aristocracy. The protagonist receives special treatment from his teacher because of his father’s high social status, but he later rejects this kind of distinction, which is founded on social class.

*Safinat al-Ḍayā’* (al-Nassir, 1989,pp.149-161) depicts the status of the working class and its conflicts with the harsh administrative regulations and the authorities that try to exploit the workers. The novel also shows luxurious aspects of the wealthy class’s lives in the city of Riyadh and compares these lives to those of the lower classes. The protagonist, who is from the working class, shows sympathy towards the poor who work under his supervision, and he supports and encourages them to claim their rights. This encouragement is the reason he is fired. Thus, some conflict among the social classes does appear; moreover, in the rest of al-Nassir’s novels, class is very clear as a theme, as it is in Saudi social novels in general.

#### **2.9.4 Identity**

The question of identity is a clear theme in many social novels. Mu‘jib al-‘Adūani (2013), in his recent study, notices that the social novel is the literary genre that focuses most on the question of identity in the context of social transformation. The search for identity in the Saudi novel in particular is founded on five elements: ethnicity, gender, religion, language, and geographical boundaries. These elements are regarded as social links between people and form the cultural identity of any

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newspapers that also share the same interests, such as *al-Madinah* newspaper, also have this weekly section.

society. In addition, a society tries to maintain and preserve its identity in many other ways, such as the arts, which can represent the different social cultures.

It is clear through reading Saudi narrative discourse that the social novel shows three types of identities: Arab identity, national identity (patriotism) and Islamic identity. In addition, other topics related to identity are clear in the Saudi social novel, such as the impacts and conflicts of globalisation, colonialism and facing the Great Powers, and the topic of self and the other.<sup>16</sup>

Pan-Arab nationalism, for example, constitutes a major part of the structure of Saudi narrative discourse. This theme clearly appears in al-Nassir's first two novels, *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* and *Safinat al-Dayā'*; however, it does not appear clearly in the other novels that followed these two works. This disappearance indicates that the impact of the nationalist movement began to fade in Saudi narrative discourse.

The protagonist of *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961, pp. 175-177, 201-202) is influenced by the call of Pan-Arab nationalism, which influences most of his opinions about society and politics. He proceeds from the Arab nationalist perspective, which includes the idea of uniting all Arab countries under one command or a joint command, and he looks at social issues not only in his country but in all Arab societies. The impact of Pan-Arab nationalism is also embodied in the attitudes of many of the characters who support the Axis powers, which promised the Arabs a free Arab country under a Muslim leader in the Second World War.

The impact of Pan-Arab nationalism is clearly evident in the hopes and aspirations of the protagonist, who wishes for Arab countries to become productive rather than being merely consumers: "He smiled when he imagined an Arab product that bore the label: 'made in the Arab world'" (al-Nassir, 1961, p.244). Many studies find a relationship between the appearances of the theme in the Arab novels and the appearance of Arab events and issues ('Abdu al-Ghani, 2005, p.34). Thus, Arab issues and events are considered to be a contributing factor that led to the

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<sup>16</sup> The 'other' is used to distinguish between two groups of people according to their social cultures. The seventh chapter will shed light on this term to show the different understandings of the term.

appearance of the theme in Arabic narrative discourse. The studies also point out that the theme is no longer evident in the Saudi novel, especially after the second Gulf War between Iraq and Kuwait (ibid.,p.374), which led to turmoil in the relations among Arab countries.

In al-Nassir's first two novels, Pan-Arab nationalism appears in the defense of Arab identity against other identities, creating a conflict between them, whereas in some other novels this relation seems to be more open and accepting such as in *Ghuūm al-Kharīf*, which shows a good relationship based on dialogue.

Transformation in identity is an important issue in Saudi narrative discourse. A recent study (al-'Adūani, 2013,p.170) claims that *Ghuūm al-Kharīf* shows a protagonist who cherishes his traditions and customs but nonetheless lives outside them. Despite the fact that the novel is set in a foreign country, al-Nassir tries to evoke some scenes from the home of the protagonist to show the transformations in his identity. This transformation in identity, as the recent study shows, is clear in *Ra'shat al-Zil*, which describes the life of a villager who migrated to the city to look for a job. The novel shows the conflict between the identity of the village and the city through the protagonist's daily life inside the city.

### 2.9.5 Freedom

Freedom is another social theme evident in the Saudi social novel. This theme has been called "one of the most important things that al-Nassir's protagonists are seeking in all the novels" (al-Jasim, 1999,p.57). Al-Nassir depicts various types of freedom in his novels. Among them is the freedom of children to make decisions in their lives, which is shown through the protagonist's dialogue with his father.

ولكنك يا أبي – سامحك الله- تلهبني بسياطك اللاذعة من الأوامر الصارمة التي تخيف أحلامي و تجفل معها تخيلاتني التي تدور حول عالم تسوده روح المسامحة وغفران الإساءة. أتدري يا أبي ماهي أمنيتي في الحياة؟  
أن أعيش حرا طليقا في الحياة كالعندليب.

But you, Dad – God forgive you – give me strict orders like the stinging whips that frighten my dreams and make my imagination about the world of forgiveness disappear. Do you know Father, what my dream is in life? It is to live as free as a bird (al-Nassir, 1961,p.47).



This passage refers to the father's direct control of his child's life. The protagonist is dreaming about a free world in order to escape his father's control. However, the protagonist of al-Nassir's novel is seeking not only his own personal freedom but also the freedom of women to choose their own partner.

ما ذنب هذه الفتاة حين يزفونها لي دون أن يكلف أحد نفسه مشقة سؤالها فيما اذا كانت ترغب في بعلا أم لا!!  
كلا إن الدين وشريعة الله سوف تصرخ بي أنى اتجهت. أنت ملعون ... مذنب ... لص.

Why should she feel guilty about being married without asking if she will accept to marry me or not?! Religion and the law of God will shout at me everywhere I go: "you are cursed...guilty...thief" (ibid.,p.166).

This dialogue refers to the stolen freedom of the Saudi female in choosing her partner, as some of them cannot do so. The protagonist relies on the religious perspective to support his argument in highlighting society's error; however, al-Nassir's protagonist realises that the price of freedom is very high (ibid.,p.20).

It is clear that the Saudi social novel, to some extent, follow the same social themes that appear in Western literature. The above discussion highlights the belief of some Saudi critics regarding the disappearance of social classes in Saudi society, whereas this theme is very clear in the narrative text. Identity and freedom represent a major part of the Saudi social narrative discourse. These themes are clearly presented in al-Nassir's novels, as they represent the concerns of Saudi society.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

It is clear that the term 'social novel' is used in many senses in the literature according to the nature of the studies. The breadth of the term helps the critics to guide the term to the different aims of the studies. The term unites two elements, society and novel, and this uniting leads to the broadness of the term. This chapter attempted to provide the literature with a new definition of the term in a more inclusive sense.

This chapter has discussed the origins of the social novel in Western literature and the factors that led to the emergence and the development of this subgenre. Saudi literature is not isolated from the literary movements in the rest of the world, so

Saudi novelists are acquainted with this subgenre. The chapter has detected the modes of transmission of this subgenre to Saudi literature through many elements and factors. However, it is not only through translating the Western social novels that the social novel has emerged in Saudi literature. Other Arabic narrative works, such as the works of Mohammad Haykal, Tāhir Lashīn and ‘Abbās al-‘Aqqād, contributed to the emergence of the social novel in Saudi literature. The relationship between the social novel and society itself seems very strong and deep. This relationship is regarded as the most prominent point of convergence between society and literature and between reality and literature. The social novel is characterised by many features, of which society is the axis. It is clear from discussing some social novels that there are three major themes represented in them – gender, race and class. These are the themes presented most often in both Western and Arabic novels. In addition, there are two other important themes – identity and freedom – that are especially prominent in many Saudi novels. These two themes indicate two sources of fear and anxiety in the Saudi novelists’ minds - authority and the other.

## **Chapter 3: Social Transformations in Saudi Arabia**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to give a general picture of social transformations in Saudi Arabia. The chapter will begin with the fundamental role of government in order to gain an understanding of the nature of the Saudi regime. In fact, talking about the Saudi regime is to talk about the efforts of Mohammad ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb who tried to reform Islam after a period of social backwardness and weakness. These efforts not only resulted in a transformed Islam, but also a legal reformed government. Understanding the Saudi regime will give us a more detailed understanding of the progress of society. However, this chapter will also illuminate the most significant factors that contributed to social transformations. The chapter will show the wide impact of these social transformations on society by comparing the past and present. The impact of these social transformations on the individual and society will take part in this chapter. This chapter will illuminate the dimensions of the social transformation and answers preliminary questions that are crucial to the investigation ahead.

Unifying the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (al-Nu‘mi, 2009,p.7) has been regarded as the first and most important transformation in the Arabian Peninsula. This unification changed the demographics of the region from scattered tribes to a civilised country. After this new Kingdom was established, several rapid transformations changed all aspects of life.

### **3.2 Efforts of Ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb**

Mohammad ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb - May Allah have mercy on him- played an active role in reforming Islam in the middle of the 18th century. At the time, many Muslims worshipped trees, graves, and saints as intermediaries between themselves and God. During that time, Muslims often appealed to enchanter and swindlers for

wealth, health, and children, And these were some of the major signs of the deterioration<sup>17</sup> (DeLong-Bas, 2004,p.8).

The most effective way to start the reform was to find a leader who could promote its reformation politically. No one was able to support him politically and militarily at that time, except 'Imām Mohammad ibn Su'ūd - May Allah have mercy on him -, who was the prince of al-Dir'ia<sup>18</sup> and founder of the first Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1744. The aims of both men combined to reform Islam and found an Islamic country under the control of 'Imām Mohammad ibn Su'ūd. This was made official in the agreement of al-Dir'ia between Mohammad ibn 'Abdu al-Wahāb and the first King of Saudi Arabia, (Metz and Library of Congress. Federal Research Division., 1993,pp.13-16).

The reform has undoubtedly played an important role in the history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The goal of this reform was to return Islam to its correct form as approved by the Quran and the Sunna.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the reform was intended to unite the people of Saudi Arabia.

### **3.2.1 Ibn 'Abdu al-Wahāb's Educational Background**

Mohammad ibn 'Abdu al-Wahāb (1703 – 1792) was descended from a prestigious family of Ḥanbali jurists and theologians. His grandfather, father, and many other family members were judges for the Najd region. It is clear from the cultural frame of ibn 'Abdu al-Wahāb that his family played an active role in his education as he “was clearly placed in a strong family tradition of legal scholarship and its practical application” (DeLong-Bas, 2004,p.18).

Ibn 'Abdu al-Wahāb memorised the Quran before the age of ten. He studied Ḥadith, Quranic exegesis, jurisprudence, literature, and 'Ulamā'<sup>20</sup> writings (including

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<sup>17</sup> To read more about the status of Saudis before the reform, see: CORANCEZ, L. D. 2003. *al-Wahabīwon: Tarīkh ma Ahmalaho al-Tarīkh*, Beirut, Riyaḍ al-Raīes.

<sup>18</sup> Dir'ia is a Saudi town located to the north-west of the city of Riyadh. It was the capital of the first Saudi Kingdom.

<sup>19</sup> Sunna means here Ḥadith, which also means a report of what the Prophet Muhammad said or did on a certain occasion.

<sup>20</sup> 'Ulamā' means scholars

Fatāwa, 'Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, and 'Aḥmad ibn Taymiya) about the fundamental principles of Islam (DeLong-Bas, 2004,p.18).<sup>21</sup> He travelled to many regions to study Islamic sciences such as jurisprudence, theology, and Quranic exegesis (Durnigah, 2008,p.29).

A recent study about the reform has this to say about the sources of ibn 'Abdu al-Wahāb's work:

Ibn 'Abdu al-Wahāb never directly claimed to be a Ḥanbali jurist; he clearly drew inspiration from the teachings of 'Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal and had extensive familiarity with Ḥanbali jurisprudence and theology through both his family connections and his study. This does not mean that Wahābism has blindly adhered to Ḥanbali jurisprudence in a spirit of Taqlid... However, in general his methodology and legal interpretations are largely consistent with Ḥanbalism as both a theological and a law school (DeLong-Bas, 2004,P.110).

In contrast, Mohammad ibn 'Abdu al-Wahāb confirmed that he directly followed 'Imām 'Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal when he described his call in the following terms: "We are following Quran, Ḥadith, and the reliable narration of the first generation of Islam... our doctrine is based on 'Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's doctrine, who is the leader of 'Ahl al-Sunna and al-Jamā'a"<sup>22</sup> (Najib, 1994,p.38).

Ḥanbali is one of 'Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a's doctrines that does not have fundamental differences with the other three doctrines (Islamic jurisprudences)<sup>23</sup>, although variations can be found in some secondary issues, such as the issue of the Ḥijāb and pronouncing the name of God in prayer. In these questions, ibn 'Abdu al-Wahāb followed 'Imām 'Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal. However, by overlapping with the other three Islamic approaches, the reform could be able to have a more holistic view.

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<sup>21</sup> Known as ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziya

<sup>22</sup> 'Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a is an Islamic party which follows the tradition of the prophet Muhammad and the consensus of the Islamic scholars.

<sup>23</sup> 'Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a believes that there are four correct doctrines: Ḥanbali, Ḥanafī, Shafī'i and Maliki.

### 3.2.2 Criticizing the Reform

Mohammad ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb was not only the person who tried to reform Islam at that time. Indeed, “the 18th century is often described as the century of renewal and reform in Islam, a time when revivalist movements of various types arose in several locations” (ibid.,p.8). Similar Islamic movements emerged after this call in other Islamic countries that sought to reform Islam and fight colonialism. The most important calls were those of Jamāl al-Dīn al-’Afhāni (1838-1897), and Mohammad al-Mahdi (1843-1885) in Sudan, and Mohammad ‘Abdu (1849-1905) in Egypt, and Mohammad ‘Iqābl (1877-1938) in Pakistan, and ‘Abdu al-Ḥamīd ibn Badis (1889-1940) in Algeria so these calls have the same intellectual elements of ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb’s call. However, the term “Wahābism” is only applied to Mohammad ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb; no other popular names exist for the other callers, such as Afhānism or Bādissism. Wahābism is considered one of the most popular Islamic reforms that arose in the modern era.

Ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb’s reform is not a type of new religious doctrine or belief. This Islamic reform aimed only to correct Muslims’ beliefs at a time when they had changed for the worse. It aimed to return them to the Quran under an Islamic leader capable of advancing the development, progress, and prosperity of the community (ibid.,p.68). the reform was a religious movement whose followers believed that they had a religious duty to disseminate the call for restoration of pure Islam (Commins, 2006,p.vi).

However, this reform – like any other reform or movement – was harshly criticised by other Islamic and non-Islamic doctrines. A number of studies describe the reform as a fundamentalist doctrine that gives ground to terrorist movements, or as a colonialist plan that aims to create differences and divisions amongst Muslims.<sup>24</sup>

Sulimān ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb, Mohammad’s own brother, criticised the idea of accusing some Muslims such as the Shi‘is and the Sufis of polytheism (al-Qaṣimi, 2006,pp.207-214,266-272). However, this idea is not found in any of Mohammad ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb’s writings. In more recent times, some political analysts have made a link between the reform and al-Qā’ida’s tenets in Afghanistan (Aljār, 2002).

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example: ŞUBḤI, A. 1988. *Juthur al-Irhāb fī al-‘Aqida al-Wahābia*, Dār al-Munthir.

Yet, a recent study about Mohammad ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb’s ideas did not find any relationship his ideas and terrorist movements such as al-Qā’ida. Indeed, Mohammad ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb could not even be considered their godfather. For example, they lived in different contexts, which affected their opinions and views. Furthermore, they adopted different approaches to scripture. For example, ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb searched for intents and values of the texts (the Quran and Sunna), whereas Osama ibn Laden’s readings are more literal. However, some studies have emphasised that ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb was a voice of Islamic reform reflecting only mainstream 18th-century Islamic thought (DeLong-Bas, 2004,pp.282,289).

In fact, religion and terrorism work in opposite directions. “Religions are usually exposed to change and always start from simple rituals and pure morals that aim to find some supporters to continue” (ibid.,p.54). The main problem with a given religion usually stems from a negative perception of certain supporters and followers, whether unintended or intended. Meanwhile, terrorism is a human-made ideology designed to serve its proponents’ aims and objectives.

It can be noted that choosing the term “Wahābism” instead of Salafī or ‘Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā’a by some critics has a historical purpose. This name ‘Wahābism’ was chosen by some critics to create a kind of confusion between the reform of ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb and Wahābism which is a movement in the second century AH, which is regarded as a rejected Islamic belief, and the efforts of ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb in reforming Islam. There are political objections to using Wahābism as a name for this reform. King Salmān ibn ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz - Allah bless him- (ibn ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz, 2010), *The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques*, rejects the use of the term Wahābism. Instead, he believes the reform should be called Salafī instead of Wahābi. However, the previous studies which are against the reform are politically directed and no one of them attempts to discuss the texts of Mohammad ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb.

### **3.2.3 The Rise of the Reform**

After the death of Mohammad ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb, his family and followers continued the reform. The first Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ended when ‘Imām Mohammad ibn Su‘ūd was arrested and killed by the Ottoman Empire in 1818. Another Saudi Kingdom was established in 1824 and lasted until 1891. King ‘Abdu al-Raḥmān al-Su‘ūd - May Allah have mercy on him-, the last King of this period, was sent into exile with his family in Kuwait. However, his son King ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz - May Allah have mercy on him- was successful in establishing and unifying the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 (Metz and Library of Congress. Federal Research Division., 1993,pp.20-24). The modern Kingdom is based on the *Sharī‘a* system, which is fundamentally based on Ḥanbali thought.

Prior to the establishment of the modern Saudi Kingdom, the region had been crowded with many Islamic jurisprudential doctrines, beliefs, and approaches, especially in the Holy Mosques. The Kingdom established an important unity in the region as King ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz united all the followers of other doctrines in only one - Ḥanbali - which helped the system of law to follow one.

The primary goal after unification was educating citizens about the correct Islam. To achieve this goal, Mohammad ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb’s family worked with followers and supporters in educating the public. The limited understanding of the reform by some of these followers and supporters resulted in an extremist, particularly with respect to public morality or women. Furthermore, the other three Sunni Islamic approaches did not have much of a chance to cooperate with the Ḥanbali approach to expand the religious, educational, and cultural visions of the new Kingdom.

Ibn ‘Abdu al-Wahāb’s approach is the most open Islamic approach due to its compatibility with aspirations of the modern era. This can be seen in its compatibility with the aspirations of the Saudi leaders who seek to make this country a modern state open to the full range of humanity.

### **3.3 Factors of Social Transformation in Modern Saudi Society**

King ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz ibn ‘Abdu al-Raḥmān Āl Su‘ūd’s unification of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 was followed by many other important social transformations which changed the appearance of the desert. Several significant



factors, both internal and external, effectively contributed to transforming Saudi society. The internal factor was discovering oil, which changed the silence of the Saudi desert into an industrial region. The external factor was globalisation, which converted the whole wide world into a small village.

There are other episodic factors that increased the transformation of Saudi society Wars and conflicts, especially the First and the Second World Wars, the Gulf War, the September 11th attacks, and the events of the Arab Spring. However, the scope of this chapter will be limited to clarifying the impact of internal and external factors.

Before starting to discuss the impact of these factors, notice the great role played by King ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz, who changed society into a civilly developed, strong society. King Faīṣal ibn ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz - May Allah have mercy on him- (1964-1975) also played a crucial role in this development by applying the five-year plan, which developed many parts of the country. This plan changed Saudi Arabia (al-Fārisi, 1986,p.4).

In addition, The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahad ibn ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz -May Allah have mercy on him- (1982-2005) played an active role in building strong relationships with many foreign countries. The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz - May Allah have mercy on him- led the biggest developmental plan in the history of the Kingdom, changing many aspects of Saudi lives by establishing many new industrial cities.

In recent times, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salmān ibn ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz - Allah bless him- is playing an active role in making huge administrative reforms in many governmental sectors. The main goal of King Salmān, as he has declared, is serving the citizens.

### **3.3.1 The Ddiscovery of Oil**

The discovery of oil in 1938 can be regarded as the main internal factor affecting Saudi society. One year after the unification, the Saudi Government granted oil concessions to an American company allowing it to start petroleum prospecting and exploration. The first commercial oilfield was discovered in 1938 in Dhahran, and in 1944 the company changed its name from SABIC to ARAMCO, which stands for

Arabian American Company. This was regarded as a step towards the nationalisation of the oil economy in the Kingdom. The company discovered other oilfields between 1951 and 1956, including one considered to be the largest oilfield in the world. The Saudi Government took another step in 1973 to ‘Saudisation’ of the company by acquiring a 25% participation interest in Aramco; in 1980, it acquired 100% participation interest. In 1999, the Saudi Government inaugurated the Shaybah field in the al-Rub‘ al-Khali desert, which is one of the largest projects of its kind in the world. Moreover, Saudi Arabia also developed the potential to export natural gas (Saudi ARAMCO, 2010b).

Oil gave Saudi Arabia the economic stability to invest in infrastructure: new schools, universities, hospitals, etc. This gave the Kingdom greater global power, which ultimately contributed to transforming all aspects of Saudi life. This transformation in Saudi life is noted in many studies such as that of ‘Abdu al-Karīm ‘Abbās who focuses on the changes and development in the Gulf:

In terms of both pace and depth, the economic and social changes that have been brought by the discovery and exportation of oil in the Arab Gulf States are unparalleled in the modern history of any other region in the world. In a few decades, the economic and demographic structures of these countries have changed completely. From pockets of scattered communities in the desert and small coastal towns relying for their livelihood on animal husbandry, fishing, pearling and sea trade, oil has transformed the Gulf countries into ‘modern’ ones—with modern cities, infrastructure and social services (1999,p.25).

The educational system formerly fell under the auspices of the mosques and *Katātib*, which taught Islamic subjects and basic literacy skills. This was transformed into a formal education system run by the government. Education was previously not accessible to everyone. Today, Saudi Arabia has free education from pre-school through university for all its citizens. The formal Saudi education system covers modern arts and sciences, as well as traditional arts to help meet the Kingdom’s growing need for globally educated citizens.

King ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz was very interested in the development of education in his country and believed that the power of the state comes from the strength of education. Thus, the start of education in early 1930 came before the declaration of Saudi unification in 1932, which represented King ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz’s focus. The number of schools and students in Saudi Arabia increased significantly, from 226 schools with 29,887 students in 1951, to 33,469 schools with 4,948,496 students in 2008. In addition, the first university in Saudi Arabia—King Su‘ūd—was established in 1957. Other universities followed soon after. Today, there are 26 government-run universities, including some that specialise in petroleum and minerals (e.g. King Fahad University), in new technology and information sciences (e.g. King ‘Abdullah University), and in security sciences (e.g. Nāif Arab University). Many other colleges, centres, and institutes contribute to educating citizens as well (al-Ghāmdi and ‘Abdu al-Jawād, 2010).

The system of Saudi education is founded on *Sharī‘a*, which helps unite the goals of education with government policy and trends. However, the events of September 11th changed the world. As a result of the alleged involvement of a number of Saudis in this event, Saudi Arabia’s curricula have been discussed and reviewed by educational specialists, thinkers, scholars, and philosophers. Many discussions have focused on whether or not the curricula relate to terrorism. The Saudi Centre of National Dialogue, as an example, discussed the situation of fanaticism and extremism in the curriculum (Markaz al-Malik ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz lil Ḥiwār al-Waṭani, 2003) without defining the concept of terrorism. However, the national dialogue should have started on solid grounds by agreeing upon one concept, or by defining the limitations of this mercurial concept. In fact, the concept of terrorism can be shaped by political and religious groups to serve their aims.

However, the King ‘Abdullah Foreign Scholarship Programme, allowing students to study a variety of subjects in developed countries around the world, has provided the region with a wide variety of qualifications that have benefitted the development of education in many fields . This programme has undoubtedly changed the region.

Another sector that was clearly affected by the oil economy is medicine. In the past, Saudis – especially in Najd, the most underdeveloped region in Saudi Arabia – relied on traditional medicine as the only way to treat people. The state in Ḥijāz was very different as certain hospitals in Makkah and Medina had received attention

from the Ottoman Empire due to its religious position. King ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz gave an order to establish a general health presidency in 1925. Its goal was to improve health in the country by improving the hospitals in Ḥijāz and building new ones around the country. To do so, the government hired foreign doctors and sent students to gain better training in developed countries (al-Su‘ūd, 2009).

Currently, there are more than 220 government hospitals with 31,877 beds, and 127 private hospitals with 12,590 beds. About 3000 primary government and private healthcare centres now exist (Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia, 2007). International statistics also show that Saudi Arabia has achieved the third largest rise in life expectancy. Today, over 83% of Saudis can expect to live longer than 60 years. Another indicator of improved health is the great increase of life expectancy at birth from an average of 53.9 (1970-75) to 70.9 (1995-2000) (Ministry of Human Development in Saudi Arabia, 2009).

Oil has also played a major role in the development of Saudi construction. New cities, along with some petroleum and petrochemical factories, were founded around the oilfields. Instead of the Bedouin tents and small dwellings previously predominant in the region, modern-style structures were built.

Today, the majority of buildings in Saudi Arabia are made of reinforced concrete and meet very high quality specifications. In addition, environmentally friendly tools and materials are often used to construct these buildings. The Saudi Government has contributed significantly to these improvements by establishing a construction fund for citizens who intend to build their own houses (or for Saudi investors who intend to construct new buildings). These are non-interest loans. The fund has changed and developed Saudi cities with many modern buildings. Nearly four million houses, villas, and flats have been built since 2004—an increase of 34.7% since 1992. Moreover, the government provides these cities with modern essential services, such as electricity, water and security (Ministry of Economy & Planning in Saudi Arabia, 2010).

The Bedouin lifestyle involves searching for grazing to feed their animals and for water in the desert. Thus, King ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz designed and planned a very important and successful project to settle Saudi Bedouin in the new cities or in

settlements called '*Hijra*'. Many Bedouin have moved into the new cities, while others have preferred to stay in their villages. The government provided the Bedouin with schools, health centres, and essential services.

The government also helped the Bedouin improve their agriculture by providing modern tools, machinery, and loans to develop the agricultural sector. As a result, Saudi Bedouin lifestyle has changed dramatically, and they are now producers of goods rather than merely consumers. Furthermore, the project maintains the security of the country by providing good income opportunities for citizens, especially Bedouin who fought over food and agricultural resources prior to unification. This helped to convert the Bedouin's lives from a nomadic life to a more settled existence.

Modern Saudi industrial development started after oil was discovered. This furthered the economic development that had previously resulted from crude oil revenues. Though Saudi's fortunes remain very much tied to oil, the past decade has seen a significant amount of diversification in the economy. To date, the most significant single departure from dependence on the production of crude oil has been the development of petrochemical plants at the two major industrial cities, Jubail and Yanbu (Johany et al., 1986,p.179).

After the rise of the Saudi economy, more factories were established to contribute to industrial development. The Saudi Government played an integral role in this development by giving support and facilities to Saudi investors (e.g. imposing very low charges on land, water, fuel and electricity). Some of the fourteen industrial cities in Saudi Arabia remain under-construction. The Kingdom intends to increase this number to 24 industrial cities. By allowing national and international investments in those cities, the Saudi Government hopes to promote transformation. Currently, about 8800 factories are located on industrial estates around the Kingdom (Ministry of Commerce and industry Affairs in Saudi Arabia, 2006).

One example of Saudi industrial success is SABIC, one of the biggest factories in Saudi Arabia and a leading manufacturer of chemicals, fertilisers, plastics, and metals (SABIC, 2010a). SABIC's net profits reached more than US\$6 billion in 2008, and it employed more than 33,000 workers (SABIC, 2010b).

The commercial sector has also been strongly developed, especially after Saudi Arabia joined the WTO in 2005 – a great achievement for the commercial field in particular. Yet, joining the WTO also involved some changes, and the government has planned a strategy to adjust to the WTO's terms and conditions. Membership of the WTO came after long discussions about Saudi Arabia's judicial system, including whether the system is suitable for commercial issues or not, and whether it needs specialised courts to deal with trade matters and disputes. In the past, the process of decision-making in Saudi Arabia took a long time due to the need to reconsider decisions made on the basis of consensus (*'Ijmā'*).<sup>25</sup>

The government took action, and now the decision-making process is carried out quickly; even some commercial organisations and authorities are empowered to make decisions, such as the Supreme Economic Council and the General Investment Authority (Yamāni, 2006). Giving this power to other government organisations makes the system more flexible and helps developments in the commercial field. In fact, WTO membership has increased foreign direct investments in the region, generating significant competition from the largest foreign companies, according to the World Investment Report 2008 – UNCTAD. Since the 2000 liberalisation and Saudi Arabia's accession to the WTO in 2005, Foreign direct investment has grown strongly from an annual average of US\$245 million between 1990 and 2000 to reach US\$24.3 billion in 2007, up by 33% from 2006 (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade).

In addition, the Kingdom's investment environment rank increased from 67<sup>th</sup> to 38<sup>th</sup>, ranking ahead of France, Portugal, and Italy (Yamāni, 2006). Thus, the discovery of oil has clearly affected Saudi Arabia's commercial and industrial developments, yet such gains were not achieved without good planning. One important transformation has been Saudi society's acceptance of work in factories as technicians, and in other commercial jobs that need manpower. The Bedouin used to consider such work shameful, calling those who worked as carpenters and blacksmiths '*Ṣāni*', meaning 'maker' or 'worker'. Nowadays, that concept has started to disappear in light of the high income generated from such careers.

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<sup>25</sup> This refers to the concept of participation in *Sharī'a*.

The discovery of oil also helped to develop Saudi transportation and communication. Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula, covering over 2,149,690 sq. km, approximately four-fifths of the Peninsula (Metz and Library of Congress. Federal Research Division., 1993,p.xiv). A huge road network has been established to link cities, towns, and villages. This network has grown from 239 km in 1953 to 120,700 km at the end of 2006. This includes 44,807 km of asphalt roads and 75,893 km of rough roads (Ministry of Transportation Saudi Arabia, 2007).

The road network links Saudi Arabia with its neighbouring countries, such as Bahrain (via the Saudi-Bahraini Bridge).<sup>26</sup> Transportation development also affected Saudi Bedouin camel usage as this long-standing means of transportation has diminished tremendously. The traditional use of camels is associated with many meanings and values, including fidelity and loyalty, acumen and intelligence, and glory and dignity. These meanings and values have inspired their life in the desert, as well as their thoughts and emotions.<sup>27</sup>

The discovery of oil has also contributed to the expansion of work in Saudi seaports. Prior to 1938, crude oil was exported by barges to Bahrain; however, in 1939, the oil company started loading and exporting petroleum in tankers. By 1984, the company had acquired its first four super-tankers (Saudi ARAMCO, 2010a). About 95% of Saudi's imports and exports pass through the Kingdom's eight seaports (Saudi Ports Authority, 2003); in other words, the Kingdom relies almost exclusively on sea transportation for exports and imports. Cultures, traditions, and ideas are also imported and exported through these seaports.

Airports are not isolated from the effects of the oil discovery. The first civilian airplane, a DC-3 Dakota, landed in 1934 after an oil company established a runway in the Saudi desert near Jubail city. Soon, two additional aircraft of the same model were added. The Government has since made special efforts to develop civil aviation by establishing airports in many cities. In total, the Kingdom is home to 26 airports, including four international airports in Jeddah, Riyadh, Dammam and

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<sup>26</sup> A 25 km-long suspension bridge links Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

<sup>27</sup> This relationship between man and environment is described in Classical Arabic poetry.

Medina, as well as five regional and seventeen national airports (General Authority of Civil Aviation in Saudi Arabia, 2010).

Saudi Arabia is linked to other countries and cultures via land, air, and sea. Extensive changes have occurred on the Saudi coasts, in its skies, and on its land, as lifestyles have been transformed from simple to complex and from quiet to loud. Coasts are full of ships, tankers, machinery, and workers, while the landlocked areas are heavily populated as well.

The effect of oil is also evident beyond the boundaries of the Kingdom, as embodied in the strong relations that quickly developed between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other countries. Prior to the influence of crude oil, “the Arabian Peninsula was so isolated that it had virtually no relation with any outside power except occasionally with Turkey and Egypt” (al-Fārīsi, 1986,p.36).

The discovery of oil helped the Kingdom establish new relations with many countries, particularly the United States. The Government had offers from Japan and Germany, but it preferred to continue its oil concession with the American company due to the lack of associated political liabilities (Lenczowski,p.46). Furthermore, the United States’ international position – especially after the Second World War – and its historically strong economy made this relationship very secure. Saudi Arabia also has strong relations with the West through a series of collaborations and partnerships.

A good example of such cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the West followed the Shah’s fall and the Iran-Iraq War. During 1980 and 1981, at the request of the United States and Europe, Saudi Arabia increased its oil production to 10 million barrels per day to reduce the pressure caused by high demand for oil. Saudi Arabia benefited from this increase in terms of revenues, but it also made a concerted effort to reduce the impact of the resulting oil crisis. Saudi Arabia also cooperated with Western governments in efforts to stabilise the oil market, to aid developing oil-importing states, and to create a stable pattern of investment in the West (Cordesman, 1987,p.30).

Thus, the discovery of oil has improved the relationships between Saudi Arabia and other countries. Yet these relationships do not rely only on this single source; more



important factors than the strong economy have contributed to these good relations. For example, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was not involved in the First and Second World Wars, which created ongoing antagonisms and hostilities between those countries which were involved.

In addition, drawing the boundaries between Saudi Arabia and its neighbours has contributed to strong relationships. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia is a founding member of OPEC, which was established in 1960 to secure oil prices from further price cuts, after petroleum companies decided to lower oil prices without prior consultation in 1959 and 1960 (al-Fārīsi, 1986,p.52). This founding membership gives Saudi Arabia an active international presence and standing, resulting in strong relations with other foreign countries.

Thus, it is clear that discovering oil has had both a direct and an indirect impact on Saudi Arabia. Oil has strongly contributed directly to the social development of Saudi education, health, industry, commerce, transportation, and other sectors through the establishment of new schools, hospitals, factories, houses, malls, ports, and the Saudi infrastructure in general. Meanwhile, the indirect impact can be seen in some social transformations related to customs, beliefs, traditions, behaviours, thoughts, ideas and relations. These latter transformations have had more serious implications for the Arab and Islamic identity of the Saudi people as will be seen in this thesis.

### **3.3.2 Globalisation**

Globalisation has affected the entire world. Whether events occur in the Middle East or in the West, the world sees them unfolding at the same time. Brand name products such as McDonald's and Coca-Cola are ubiquitous and shared at Sunday dinners, as well as in Bedouin tents. The world has been transformed into a small village. However, the world – particularly the developing part of it – has been shocked by the impact of globalisation, which affects political, industrial, and commercial fields, as well as culture. The expansion of international trade activity and the emergence of events such as the United States Charter in 1945, the European Convention on Human Rights, adopted in 1948, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 have further contributed to globalisation.

Globalisation is a modern phenomenon. However, some studies call it a “historical process of growing worldwide interconnectedness” (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004,p.122). It is incorrect to confine globalisation to the modern era, as evidence indicates that this is a historical process. At the level of literature, Plato’s hypothesis of simulated reality has affected all literature. On the commercial level, global trade has existed for centuries. Furthermore, many studies shows that the early Islamic state took the system of *Diwān*<sup>28</sup> from Roman culture to regulate government affairs (al-Dwri, 2008,p.162). Globalisation is a historical process, but it has been particularly strong in the modern era. This had led some to mistakenly conclude it is unique to the modern era.

Globalisation has many definitions. For example, “globalisation refers to all those processes by which the people of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society” (Albrow and King, 1990,p.9). Globalisation “simply refers to the widening, deepening and speeding up of global interconnectedness” (Held and McGrew, 2003,p.67).

According to the previous definitions, globalisation consists of principles such as sharing, mixing, combining, and generating interconnectedness in all aspects of life. It also refers to a kind of a universal cooperation without limitations. Politics, the economy, and society are three fundamental pillars that might be affected by globalisation as the outcome of any continuing conflict between two or more cultures. The final outcome usually has the features of the strongest, while it is less affected by the weakest.

Some definitions view the impact of globalisation in a highly controversial manner. Some people understand it as a force for good. Peter Marten in *The globalization reader* (2000,p.12) writes:

I would like to address the profoundly moral case of globalisation. It can be summarised in a single sentence: the accelerated integration of previously marginalised societies is the best thing that has happened in the lifetime of the post-war generation.

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<sup>28</sup> *Diwān* was the name given to an Islamic office which is responsible for the regulation of financial and military affairs in addition to other affairs related to government and citizens.

Others see globalisation as a new form of colonialism – a change from premeditated murder into mercy killing after the underdevelopment caused by the colonisers. The concept of globalisation is known by many different terms according to one’s point of view: “Call it Americanism, call it westernization, call it cultural imperialism” (Lechner and Boli, 2000,p.284) As such, the concept of globalisation can be influenced by dominant forces—whether these are countries, such as America, ideologies, such as capitalism, or religion.

Globalisation has led to many social transformations as there are many demands such as democracy, increased freedoms, social justice, and other perceived human rights. However, globalisation generally spreads through the media and new technologies. Due to the possibility of increased exposure to unveiled women, satellite television, videos, and the Internet were prohibited in Saudi Arabia especially following unification. They are gradually becoming accepted. Thanks to government encouragement and support, the Saudi media are slowly establishing newspapers, broadcasting corporations, and even television stations. In addition, the religious opinion in Saudi Arabia has begun to accept the media, because they can help to educate and develop the country. Religious scholars are now in direct contact with broadcasters, which has opened up a space for discussion of important social ideas and issues.

The impact of globalisation in Saudi Arabia is particularly evident in three aspects: political, economic and social. Saudi political life has been the least affected by globalisation due to its nature, whereas the economic aspect has been the most affected. Three examples in the political field highlight the impact of globalisation on local politics. The first is the establishment in 1992 of Majlis al-Shūra, the Saudi consultative council. This formally promotes public participation by studying most government regulations and decisions, and presenting any findings to its members, who then vote.<sup>29</sup> The council is supposed to address public needs, but membership of the Majlis al-Shūra is based on government selection, which might not clearly reflect the public’s desire to participate in decision-making.

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<sup>29</sup> The types of issues discussed do not reflect important issues of Saudi society. Subjects discussed in Majlis al-Shūra can be found at the following link:  
<http://www.shura.gov.sa/wps/wcm/connect/ShuraEn/internet/General+Subjects/>

The second manifestation of globalisation in politics is municipal elections, which clearly reflect public participation in decision-making. Elections take place every four years. Any male citizen, who meets the established requirements, can nominate himself for office.<sup>30</sup> Currently, no female participation is allowed in voting or nominating.

The last manifestation is the King ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz Centre for National Dialogue, which discusses important issues in different fields. Participation is open to all members of society, including children,<sup>31</sup> but people can only read the results of the discussions. In addition, participants are still chosen by the Centre.

Globalisation has significantly affected economic life. For example, joining the WTO opened the Saudi market to many international investors. The best results of economic globalisation have been the rapid development of local private sectors, due to increased economic competition internally and with international companies. Another important aspect is the reduced costs for consumers as a result of intense competition in the Saudi market. Although international companies and factories have contributed to the increase in the rate of unemployment in Saudi Arabia—which rose to 11.5% in 2008—the Saudi Government took action, which lowered the rate to 9.8% in 2009 (Husain, 2009). Moreover, the Government created a national strategy for the Saudi labour force.

The Sa‘ūada project is one of the strategies aiming to change negative ideas about technical, professional, and other jobs. The project offers courses and programmes to prepare the Saudi labour force and help workers find jobs. In addition, the Saudi Government has imposed a regulation requiring a minimum quota of employment of Saudi labourers in any international or national factories, companies, institutes, etc. (al- Ḥamla al-Waṭania li al-Tadrib wa al-Sa‘ūada, 2004).

Global economic changes have also been accompanied by increased participation of Saudi women in many aspects of society. The Saudi Government has supported this

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<sup>30</sup> For more information about this council and its role, follow the link: <http://www.bcm.gov.sa/news.php?action=show&id=2>

<sup>31</sup> For more information about the King ‘Abdu al-‘Aziz Centre for National Dialogue, follow the link: <http://www.kacnd.org/eng/default.asp>

trend by establishing a ladies' committee to encourage Saudi businesswomen in any field. Saudi businesswomen are also able to nominate themselves to Saudi commercial and industrial chambers (Council of Saudi Chambers, 2007). Saudi women are allowed to work in banks and other monetary institutions, though in a section separate from men.

Globalisation has led to social changes in Saudi Arabia. For example, the establishment of the National Society for Human Rights in 2004 shows a global aspect of Saudi society. The National Society directly received support and encouragement from King 'Abdullah ibn 'Abdu al-'Aziz. A careful reading of the Society's annual report highlights its role in covering various issues in many human fields (Saudi Human Rights, 2009).

Globalisation and its impact affect society in other important ways. For example, the Saudi family has changed in terms of responsibility, authority and lifestyle. Many mothers now work, while the majority of fathers are also busy with careers. This has led to an increase in non-parental childcare. Such a shift may have some long-term effects.

The Saudi family is generally large, with strong relationships among its members. Traditionally, members lived together in one village or in a particular area, working together and marrying within the same clan. However, globalisation has led many family members to leave home to find work. This often results in a breakdown in communication. Furthermore, the decrease in arranged marriage has contributed to changing the family structure—as has the introduction of foreign labourers in general.

A recent study (al-Shikh, 2008,p.287) demonstrates the impact of globalisation on the values of Saudi youths based on trends. In general, young Saudis are attracted to freedom programmes. They feel like they belong to a global culture. Teenage rebellion is a new phenomenon in Saudi society. Parents seek to mould their children in their own likeness. The concepts of 'we used to' and 'we were,' referring to parents' pasts, can be annoying to teenagers, given the significant differences between then and now. In fact, such rebellion is a result of a generational conflict

that has affected society as a whole. For example, the majority of Saudis can now choose their marriage partners, which was traditionally the decision of their parents.

Globalisation has affected language use as well. Saudis tend to learn other languages, such as English, French, Turkish, and Persian. Consequently, spoken Arabic is becoming less formal. Some foreign words have made their way into Saudi spoken language, such as the word *Ascenseur* (lift) from French, *Bousa* from Persian (a kiss), *'Abla* from Turkish (a female teacher), and many English words such as supermarket, break, gear, automatic, television, radio, discount, and democracy. New technology, especially the Internet, has introduced the vast majority of these new words since the most used language on the Internet is English (Farsi, 2009,pp.77-83).

Women's rights in Saudi Arabia have been dramatically affected by globalisation. Prior to unification, Saudi women did not travel abroad, although women from the upper classes were able to travel to obtain medical treatment. During unification, some Saudi families—especially those in Jeddah—sent their families to foreign countries such as Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt for education or health treatment. Economic developments have introduced new reasons to travel. Some Saudi businessmen have invested money in other countries such as Egypt and often take their families to spend holidays in these locations. As Saudi women have been exposed to other cultures, they have changed some of their habits, such as their style of dress and the use of the Western style in dining (e.g. with tables, chairs and modern plates) (Alturki, 1986,p.18).

The status of women has changed due to globalisation in important respects: education, work, clothes, and general participation in public life (al-Munajjed, 1997). The Saudi Government opened many schools for both genders, ignoring some who claimed that women's education “could lead to corruption of their morals and destroy the foundations of the family” (ibid.,p.62).

King Su'ūd - May Allah have mercy on him- ultimately decided to start formal education for women in 1959. Today, women enjoy all aspects of modern education, which “has introduced fundamental qualitative changes to the traditional status of

Saudi women. Major outcomes indicate that, to a certain extent, education has a determining factor of social changing for Saudi women” (ibid.,p.104).

Another result of increased educational opportunities for women is finding appropriate jobs for them. Nowadays, many Saudi females work as doctors, nurses, lecturers, teachers, etc. Although some prejudices remain about women who work in hospitals, due to the lack of gender segregation, these roles will eventually become accepted as normal jobs.

Meanwhile, daily activities have also transformed women’s status. Wearing a veil is one example. In fact, the issue is quite controversial as the Ḥanbali approach, which is followed in Saudi Arabia, requires the wearing of a veil. Some Saudi women have rejected this view and follow other Islamic approaches. The Government has given all female citizens the freedom to don or eschew the veil.

The expansion of women’s participation in Saudi society is clear. Some women have made crowning achievements in developing the country. However, they have faced some resistance from religious institutions concerned about the spread of corruption and immorality in society. Other Saudi religious scholars have argued that gender segregation is not obligatory in Islam as long as it does not result in prohibited actions such as sexual relations outside of wedlock.<sup>32</sup>

### **3.4 Impact of Social Transformation on Saudi Identity**

Both external and internal factors have resulted in numerous significant transformations since the unification of Saudi Arabia. However, it can be argued that the Saudi identity has been negatively affected by these transformations, as three predominant problems have emerged: alienation, nostalgia, and double standards.

Alienation, in *Oxford English dictionary* (2009), refers to the action of estrangement or feeling of estrangement. According to a recent sociological study involving Saudi university students (El-Dhaba and Āl Su’ūd, 2009,p.46), a higher degree of alienation has emerged as a result of the social changes and impact of globalisation.

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<sup>32</sup> For example, ‘Aḥmad al-Ghamidi’s new fatwa which states that mixing of genders is not prohibited. The fatwa was published in many Saudi media; see the following link: <http://www.okaz.com.sa/okaz/osf/20090528/Con20090528280640.htm>

There has been a very significant shift in Saudi identity over the course of the decades. Although Saudis cannot live in that past, it is difficult for some to keep up with the rapid pace of transformation.

Such alienation (2009) leads to nostalgia, a form of melancholia caused by prolonged absence from one's home or country, or severe homesickness due to transformation in the region. People miss the way things used to be. This feeling is reflected in the fact that during holidays many Saudi families prefer to spend time experiencing in the desert environment of yesteryear.

Today, Saudi identity is suffering from the double standards implicit in their beliefs. A difference of opinions in religious discourse has played a significant role in causing such problems. For example, certain behaviours prohibited by the religious Ḥanbali parties are currently being questioned by those opposed to their interpretation of Islam.

Gender segregation, which is strictly prohibited in Saudi society, is a good example. This issue is almost acceptable from the citizens' point of view, but religious scholars remain divided. Such religious issues have resulted from the numerous rapid social transformations that have required abrupt changes in religious views to keep pace. However, these religious arguments, disagreements, and conflicts have had a negative impact on Saudis, who are generally confused by the need to follow tradition while living in an increasingly globalised and constantly modernising world.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I attempted to explain social transformations in Saudi Arabia by looking at the establishment of the Saudi regime, which is founded on *Sharī'a* law. The reform of Ibn 'Abdu al-Wahāb played an active role in shaping the current government. The reform would receive less criticism if it was more open to other Islamic doctrines and not only limited to the views of Ḥanbali scholars. Some of Ibn 'Abdu al-Wahāb's followers misunderstood the reform which impacted negatively impacts on this progress, causing some people to be opposed to this.

Oil and globalisation have greatly impacted on Saudi society. The government has focused on establishing a strong infrastructure and developing integrated



government and private sectors in Saudi Arabia. These changes transformed the solitude of the Saudi desert into an industrial area. In addition, Saudi society has become more open to the world thanks to new technologies that have made the world a small village. I have also discussed negative impacts on the individual and society. These impacts are often related to the nature of the human soul during these transformations and the conflicting views about modern life.

## Chapter 4: Al-Nassir's Literary Career: Thematic and Stylistic Issues

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces an important literary figure in the history of Saudi literature, focusing on his literary works, especially his novels, which are used in this thesis as a case study. In addition, the chapter will shed light on al-Nassir's literary works by comparing them to works by other Saudi writers who have written on social themes. Some important stylistic issues related to al-Nassir's literary works will also be discussed in this chapter.

### 4.2 Biographical Details

Ibrahim al-Nassir al-Ḥumaidān (1934-2013) was born in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. His father, Nassir, was a businessman. He moved with his family to Iraq, as the economic situation at that time was better there than in his own country. He returned to Saudi Arabia after the country became popular with workers looking for jobs after the discovery of oil. He settled and married 'Umm Ṭariq, who died two weeks after he did. Together they had six children, Ṭariq, 'Abdullah, Nassir, al-'Anūd, Muna, and Mohammed.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4.2.1 Education and Cultural Background

Al-Nassir (al-Nassir, 2009) received a traditional education in a *Kutāb*.<sup>34</sup> He studied the Quran, as well as other basic and Islamic subjects. He gained a high school degree, which was seen as a very high level qualification at that time. Many other factors played a role in forming his mind-set. As mentioned in his autobiography, the most important factor was his grandfather's personal library; he spent a vast amount of time reading books and often borrowed books from the library so that he

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<sup>33</sup> This information about al-Nassir's family is taken from his son's account on Twitter. The researcher tried to contact Ṭariq, al-Nassir's oldest son, but he has not responded to the messages.

<sup>34</sup> A *Kutāb* is a traditional elementary school for teaching children basic subjects such as writing, reading, grammar, math, and Islamic subjects.

could read them at home. The library contained many books on multiple topics, including translated fiction, philosophic and literary studies, and Islamic books.

Al-Nassir was keen to read literature, so (al-Nassir, 2009,p.14) he began to educate himself by reading Arab and Western novels such as those by Charles Dickens, Maxim Gorky, Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, Badir Shakir al-Saiāb, and Najīb Maḥfūz. In his autobiography, al-Nassir refers to his strong relationship with the Jeddah Library, where he spent most of his time reading and writing. He also refers to the role of the mosque in his life and the impact of tradition. He (al-Nassir, 2009,pp.27-30) was intrigued by ideas from the Socialist revolution and the concept of nationalism; in addition, al-Nassir refers to his interpretation of literary realism as serving his motivation to write about his own society (al-Nassir, 2010).

#### **4.2.2 Career**

Al-Nassir (al-Nassir, 2009) helped his father in his shop, even though he did not want to become a businessman like him. When he returned to Saudi Arabia, he worked for the Trans-Arabian Pipeline Company (Tapline). He left this job after a fire broke out in the labour camp where he lived and he lost all of his savings. After the fire, he worked in the Saudi health sector and then for many Saudi publications as a writer, moving from one newspaper or magazine to another until he retired (al-Nassir, 2009,pp.120-125). Al-Nassir did not stop working after his retirement; he published many different forms of literary work, including works of fiction, novels, and journals. It is possible that he drew on his own experience as a journalist to portray the protagonists of *‘Adhra’ al-Manfā* and *al-Ghajarā wa al-Thu‘ban* who work in this profession.

#### **4.2.3 His Personal Life**

Not much information is available about the personal life of Ibrahim al-Nassir al-Ḥumaidān except for the information from existing studies on al-Nassir, such as Nora al-Mari’s (2006) study on the features of the Saudi environment in al-Nassir’s novels. Two other important sources provide more information about aspects of his life, such as his speech at the ceremony in his honour on 19 January 2003, which was held by *’Ithnayniyat* Sheikh *‘Abdu al-Maqṣūd Khawja* in Jeddah, one of the most popular privately funded cultural centres in Saudi Arabia. In addition, his discussion of his experience of writing narrative works in a symposium held by the al-Qaṣim Cultural Club in Saudi Arabia (2003) clarified a few facts about his

personal life (al-Nassir, 2003). All of this information has been collected in his latest published work, his autobiography entitled *Ghurbat al-Makān* (al-Nassir, 2009).

In an interview with al-Nassir (2010) for this study, an indirect attempt was made to collect more data about various aspects of his life that might clarify events in his novels, but he proved evasive in many of his answers, especially those about his personal life. Al-Nassir's health condition, as evidenced in his voice, was another reason for avoiding some questions. The interview achieved some of its aims, such as establishing the extent of his awareness of the social novel, his narrative approach in writing novels, and the reason for his attention to society and its transformation. However, at the end of the interview, when directly asked about his life in general, he replied, "I wrote an autobiography that provides most information about my life" (al-Nassir, 2010).

It is true that *Ghurbat al-Makān* contains important information about his personal life. However, some questions about his personal life remain unanswered, such as why he was arrested<sup>35</sup> by the Saudi authorities. His autobiography (al-Nassir, 2009, pp.47-67) states that he was a member of a secret organisation holding views which differed from prevailing Saudi governmental trends. The reason for his arrest seems to be his liberal views, which did not suit the Saudi authorities and especially the governmental and religious authorities at that time. In the interview, al-Nassir expressed his hatred towards the irresponsible attitudes of some religious authorities who, as he said, "poke their noses into things that are none of their business and they do not understand these things" (al-Nassir, 2010).

'*Adhra*' *al-Manfā*, which was published after al-Nassir was released from prison (al-Nassir, 1978), reveals some of his liberal ideas, such as his search for freedom, criticism of traditional social customs that restricted the role of females in society, and his quest for justice and equality among the social classes. These liberal ideas were wrongly understood as a kind of Occidentalism, which was refuted by many people in Saudi society; thus, anyone who held such ideas was exposed to social opposition that might lead to their being considered a traitor. Interestingly, there is a

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<sup>35</sup> The date is unknown. Some evidence such as his novel '*Adhra*' *al-Manfā* suggests that he was arrested before publishing this novel in 1978 and after publishing the first edition of *Safinat al-Ḍayā*' in 1969

connection between the title of the novel, *The Virgin of Exile*, and the part of his life in the present when he was arrested; the period of his arrest had an impact on his work, as is clear from the title. In fact, the virgin could embody al-Nassir's visions and ideas, which still remain in his mind and not accepted in society; thus, the exile in this novel refers to society with its old traditions and customs.

#### 4.2.4 His Literary Works

Ibrahim al-Nassir is regarded as one of the creative narrative pillars in Saudi literature and "a major pioneer novelist in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where novel writing of this kind was unknown before the late 1950s and early 1960s" (al-Ḥāzimī et al., 2006, p.327). However, in 1959 *Ummahatuna wa al-Niḍāl* (Our Mothers and the Struggle) became the first published literary work to introduce al-Nassir to the Saudi and the Arab literary scene. This work is a collection of short stories; a year later, his first novel, *Thuqḅun fi Rida' al-Layl*, was published. Four years later, al-Nassir published *Arḍun bila Maṭar* (The Dry Land), which is also a collection of short stories. All of his short stories were later re-published in one book entitled *Mujallad al-'A'māl al-Qaṣaṣiya al-Kāmila* (The Collected Short Stories) (2004a).

An important point here is that al-Nassir began his literary journey as a short story writer. After publishing his first collection of short stories, he published his first novel. In contrast, most Saudi prose writers were known as short story writers; they started to write novels due to similarities between the genres. However, there is a clear intertextuality between some of al-Nassir's short stories and his novels, such as the similarity in events between his short story *Tajrubat al-Mawt wa al-Safāḥūn* (Death Experience and Slayers) (2004a, pp.91-98), and the first part of *Thuqḅun fi Rida' al-Layl*, (1961, pp.5-8), which is set in a village. The same setting is used in both works; also, an event similar to one in the story occurs in the novel. It is clear that Saudi novelists benefit from their short stories. Thus, ideas in some short stories have inspired the writer to start a novel. However, this phenomenon raises an important question about the reason why some writers repeat the same story or events with slight differences in both narrative contexts, even if the narrative text is an open one.

After al-Nassir's death, scholars become more interested in studying his vast collection of great literary works. The last work al-Nassir published was his autobiography, *Ghurbat al-Makān* (2009), in which the author portrays himself as someone who is still on a journey seeking facts and freedom. A feeling of alienation is the sense which controls the events of his life.

As shown in the data, al-Nassir wrote eight social novels focusing on Saudi society and its struggles. Moreover, he also contributed to many newspapers and magazines, such as *Majalat al-Yamāma*, *Majalat Qurish*, and the newspapers *al-Jazira* and 'Okāz. He published some of his short stories in these publications and wrote about some social problems and literary issues that arose.

### **4.3 Representing Saudi Society: Al-Nassir's Fiction in the Context of the Work of Modern Saudi Novelists**

Searching for the relation between al-Nassir and the other Saudi novelists in light of interpreting society is based on clarifying the similarities and differences between them. Novelists such as 'Abdu al-Raḥmān al-Munif (1933-2004), Rajā' 'Alim (1970), Ghazi al-Quṣaibi (1940-2010), Rajā' al-Ṣani' (1981), like al-Nassir himself, paid great attention to Saudi society, each writer having his or her own vision and way of presenting and interpreting culture. This attention, which generates different interpretations, indicates that society goes through many significant social transformations; otherwise, the novel would only convey images from the normal life into the literary field. Thus, there is no doubt that social changes have attracted many Saudi novelists to focus on society in their narrative works, as a novel is regarded as "the text of social transformations" (al-Manaṣira, 2008,p.215). The impact of oil, for instance, has generated many rapid transformations, thus stimulating a novelist such as 'Abdu al-Raḥmān al-Munif to write about his own society in the light of the transformations it has experienced. For example, *Mudun al-Milḥ* (Cities of Salt) shows the far-reaching impact of the discovery of oil on Arab societies, especially in terms of politics and economics.

Many studies claim that al-Munif attempts to look at society from a political perspective in his novels such as in *Mudun al-Milḥ*, *Indama Trakna al-Jisr* (When we Left the Bridge), *'ARḍu al-Sawād* (The Dark Land), and *Sharq al-Mutwasit*

(Eastern Mediterranean). Nabīh al-Qasim (2005) studies the setting and the place in al-Munif's novels and considers al-Munif as one of the most important Arab novelists in the modern Arabic literature who best reflects the socio-political Arab condition. Most of al-Munif's novels are a protest against the tyrannical practices of the Arab governments, which spread the culture of fear and inflict defeat on their citizens by using imprisonment and torture as tools of suppression. According to the study, al-Munif's novels offer a socio-political interpretation of society, whereas the novels do not focus on this aspect only.

These novels "reflected the social, political and economic realities of modern Arab society" (Jiad, 2004), and that means the novels offer two important elements for interpreting society; politics and economics. *Al-Tīh*, the first volume in *Mudun al-Milh*, describes the impact of the new economy on society at the time of the discovery of oil and the misguided political acts toward citizens. This work reflects a new era of economic colonialism by the foreign companies, which only looked out for their profits even at the expense of Saudi citizens.

The novel starts by presenting a picture of the economic status of the village (al-Munif, 2012, pp.9-18). The narrative context shows the importance of this place to merchants and trade caravans, as it is considered a free and safe area for commerce and financial deals. The narrative text provides a great canvas on which to depict the social behaviour demonstrated in buying and selling. The text also shows the financial status of the citizens in Wadi al-ʿUyūn who are generally poor but live with dignity, even though they squander money when they feel rich. The work provides some symbolism that emphasises the economic outlook in society such as the palm trees and the springs, which are the most important sources of sustenance in Arab culture, especially among the Bedouin, who cannot live without dates and water. Furthermore, the work presents a number of characters who were struggling with the policies of repression and acquisition. Mutʿib al-Hathāl, the protagonist, embodies the opposition to the political and economic conditions.

As noted, al-Munif presents a negative perspective on the social transformations that took place in locations such as Ḥarrān, which witnessed major developments that transformed the area from a traditional village into a modern commercial city. In the second volume of *Mudun al-Milh*, Mohammad ʿĪd (al-Munif, 2005, pp.180-184),

who came back to settle in Ḥarrān, did not easily recognise the place after its development. Ḥarrān used to be a seaport for travellers and fishermen, but today it has changed. People of many nationalities, religions, and races speaking different languages now dwell there. Everyone appears to be running around, without knowing why and to where; the old places had been demolished to make way for modern buildings instead. ‘Id was upset about this modern development; while wandering in the market he commented on the new city: “The smell is unbearable, it smells like dead bodies”. Ḥarrān becomes an insufferable city for the novel’s protagonist, with its new commercial atmosphere.

Thus, al-Munif was interested in following social transformations and modern developments in a place such as Ḥarrān, which is depicted in the first and the second volumes; but he adopts a negative perspective for various reasons. The Bedouin personality of al-Munif influenced the negative representation of the modernity of Ḥarrān, which seems to be unproductive. It seemed that it would have been better for the place to have maintained its old nature rather than to be transformed by the foreign companies, which only seek to fulfil their own interests. Thus, he considered them as the main enemy of Arabs in general.

Al-Munif’s novels suggest that every place has its own character; in *Mudun al-Milḥ* al-Munif usually included some imaginary places which did not exist on the map, using them in a symbolic manner. It is clear from its description and the events which take place there that Mwrān in *al-Tīh*, for example, represents the capital city of Saudi Arabia.

On the other hand, in *Mudun al-Milḥ* al-Munif did not create most of his characters. He includes many important political figures who were involved in governmental decision-making during that time, giving them symbolic names. Thus, his novel focuses on this level of society. However, in *Mudun al-Milḥ*, al-Munif depends on two major elements in interpreting society -authority and money- to reflect what he thought of the misuse of these two forms of power. Al-Munif deals with these elements through his own perspective.

Rajā’ ‘Alim approaches society from a different perspective, and she makes the narrative social text appear to depart from real life by making extensive use of legends, myths, and superstitions, which are fixed in historical or public memory.



By using this method, 'Alim attempts to build a different reality which resembles some of the elements of real life. A recent study (al-Ḥusain, 2005) highlights some other features that make 'Alim's writing seem different, such as the overlapping among the events, characters, times, and places. Thus, the events in 'Alim's narrative works do not follow a chronological sequence; instead the places overlap, and there is conflict among the characters. 'Alim's writing has also been enriched by the Sufi trend, which concentrates on the depths of the human soul.

The narrative text in 'Alim's works is a complex and superficially chaotic mix of narrative elements. This blending is sequential, particularly in her latest narrative work *Tawq al-Ḥamāma* (The Dove's Necklace), which was awarded the 2011 Arabic Booker Prize jointly with the Moroccan writer Mohammed al-'Ash'ari. *Tawq al-Ḥamāma* is centred on the issue of a murdered woman in Mecca, so the narrative text attempts to identify the anonymous body and uncover the criminal who committed this heinous crime.

The narrator in *Tawq al-Ḥamāma* ('Alim, 2011) tries to take the reader far from the crime scene into other intellectual contexts related to the crime, such as the status of women, which is restricted by traditional social customs. 'Alim uses a style which resembles that of myth or legend to portray the reality of the setting and the characters. This technique also enables the text to mix and blend the narrative elements logically. Mecca is used to represent multiple locations, and it combines characters and historical eras. It is clear from reading *Tawq al-Ḥamāma* that 'Alim attempts to interpret society from many perspectives such as historical, political, economic, literary, and cultural, so all of these can be seen in her narrative discourse. She uses a variety of sources to give readers an understanding of the socio-cultural attitudes and trends in this region.

It is possible to examine society from the viewpoint of the protagonist in any of Ghazi al-Qusaibi's novels. A recent study (al-Qurashi, 2003,p.183) shows that the protagonist plays many roles in these novels and that means the other characters remain less important, including the female characters. Al-Qurashi's study does not explore the reasons for this central importance of the protagonist in the narrative construction. Al-Qusaibi's own personality may have generated this phenomenon as he worked in various administrative positions, the last of which was as Minister of

Labour in Saudi Arabia (2004-2010). Thus, his leadership personality is reflected in the distribution of social roles inside the text, meaning that the intellectual and cognitive load in his texts is centred on the protagonist. For example, Fu'ād, the protagonist of *Shuqat al-Ḥwrria* (al-Quṣaibi, 1999,p.36), describes himself as a mixture of the personalities of his four friends and he displays some personal features that overlap with those of these other characters. Thus, it is possible to reflect the other characters in the protagonist's personality.

The narrative text in al-Quṣaibi's novels (al-Qurashi, 2003,pp.17-82) has three main dimensions which form his interpretation of society: religion, Pan-Arab nationalism, and history. Thus, these dimensions can be seen in his novel *Shuqat al-Ḥwrria*, which “offers the experience of Arab reality, during the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century, from a symbolic perspective which embodies the intellectual, political and social storms that swept the Arab nation” (al-Sha'lān, 2013). The characters in *Shuqat al-Ḥwrria* (al-Quṣaibi, 1999,pp.76-77,79,215-216) deal with the social transformations by focusing on religious culture, which also have an impact on the protagonist's family. Moreover, the novel shows the impact of the multiple schools of thought and the philosophical doctrines that dominated the Arab mindset in that time, such as brotherhood, socialism, capitalism, and finally the Pan-Arab nationalism which occupies a major part of the novel. The novel represents a historical framework for the narrative events with each chapter being dated. The narrator also referred to some events by giving an exact day, month, and year. However, al-Quṣaibi (ibid.,p.65) did not intend to make the text a historical document, but rather to show the impact of these events on society.

Rajā' al-Ṣani' provided a bold interpretation of the status of women within the conservative society of Saudi Arabia. *Banāt al-Riyāḍ* (Girls of Riyadh) (al-Ṣani', 2005) uncovers the reality of modern Saudi society, highlighting the many contradictions between social beliefs and reality. It also describes the lives of Saudi women who live under male domination, so the novel focuses on female characters in order to show the lives of modern Saudi women within the conservative society. This resulted in the emergence of two types of female literary characters: those who struggle for freedom and those who conform to the will of conservative society. In addition, it is very much a novel of its time (al-'Aṭawi, 2007,p.173), as it reflects the

many social transformations taking place due to globalisation and the modern methods of communication, which have led to cultural hybridity. The setting also plays an active role in revealing the nature of society, such as using Riyadh as a stage for the events to imply that it represents the status of women in any other Saudi city.

Al-Ṣani's novel about Saudi society was the subject of a great debate between those who supported and those who opposed her work. Mus'īd al-ʿAṭawī, in his study about the novel, took it upon himself to defend the chastity of Riyadh's girls and the honour of Saudi Arabia, which led him to look at the novel from a narrow perspective. On the other hand, on the novel's cover, Ghazi al-Quṣaibi claims that the Saudi novel should be like *Banāt al-Riyāḍ*. However, in her writing, al-Ṣani' relied on direct shaming to uncover some negative social attitudes toward women. Although this style is considered to have an element of suspense, it also leads the text to lose, to a certain degree, its depth in interpreting society. However, the comments and the reactions of the readers after each chapter, which were included in the novel, give the text added value as a means of understanding the various trends in contemporary Saudi society.

Ibrahim al-Nassir is an intellectual writer, and he possesses a vast quantity of knowledge. Al-Nassir's texts draw on many sources, such as history, politics, economy, religion, philosophy, literature, and culture. Thus, his writing is more open to different social aspects and appears more inclusive. His novels attempt to uncover social defects and problems like al-Ṣani' but indirectly, so the narrative context produces the scandals, and he intends merely to chronicle them. For example, all of the events of *ʿAdhraʾ al-Manfā* represent an attempt to address the problem in the relationship in the Arab world between the traditional man and the modern educated woman, so the recipient learns about this problem through these events. This feature gives depth to the writing. Al-Nassir has balanced boldness in his social writing, especially when representing difficult or sensitive issues such as those which relate to traditional social customs.

Al-Nassir does not depend on a central character like al-Quṣaibi does. The characters of al-Nassir work together in the development of the text, for example Buthaina in *ʿAdhraʾ al-Manfā*, plays an equally important role to the male

protagonist. Furthermore, the major characters, including the protagonist, display a high level of knowledge, so they contribute, through their conflicts and actions, to building intellectual depth into the text. On the other hand, al-Nassir pays close attention to the settings of his novels. He describes the setting in terms of its geographical, historical, and cultural aspects and this is often shifting and changing reflecting the social transformations, such as the village in *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl*, which has been somewhat affected by modernity. This novel also sheds light on the old and modern Saudi cities, those built during the discovery of oil, so the reader can see how they develop over the course of the narrative (al-Nassir, 1961, PP.240-244).

There are some common characteristics among the previously mentioned Saudi novelists. First and foremost is freedom as a theme. This has great significance in the Saudi social novel; everyone is searching for liberty which has been restricted due to long-established social traditions and customs. In addition, the authors agree that the individuals are the basis for development and that the authorities need to give them room to grow. Furthermore, the writing pays close attention to the various social transformations and social problems which they have generated. The Saudi social novel can be regarded as a literary discourse that attempts to raise social awareness about the importance of reform. Moreover, Pan-Arab nationalism is clearly reflected in these social novels, especially those set before 2000. All the elements of the novel contribute to produce the characteristics which are essential within any narrative social writing.

#### **4.4 Stylistic Issues**

Saudi critics have highlighted some important stylistic issues in al-Nassir's narrative works, relating to characterisation and dialogue. Many critical studies have focused on these two narrative elements, as al-Nassir has his own distinctive way of creating characters and dialogue.

##### **4.4.1 Characterisation**

There is no doubt that the central protagonist in any novel can be used to represent a particular social type or attitude. The protagonists in al-Nassir's novels have special features that entice researchers to study them. In his study about al-Nassir's novels,

al-Jasim (1999) focuses on two dimensions of the protagonist through: the external and the internal. Although al-Jasim also notes the existence of a third dimension – the social dimension – (ibid.,p.16), he only describes two in his work, totally neglecting the social dimension, which is described perfectly in al-Nassir's novels.

For example, in *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl*, 'Issā (ibid.,pp.11-22), the main character, is from an upper-class family in his village. His father works as a businessman who has authority in the village and his prestigious position has an impact on 'Issā's social position, as the villagers treat him like his father. However, 'Issā hates this treatment and wants to be independent and not bound to his father. He is also the oldest son in his family, which gives him an important social position inside the family. This example provides a vivid image of the social dimension, as it is clearly described through the protagonists in al-Nassir's novels; these novels show the general social ambience as well as its educational and social levels. Thus, the social novel should represent this dimension, due to its importance in helping readers uncover more aspects of the characters' lives in their societies.

However, there is a great debate, especially in Saudi literary criticism, about the frequent neglect of the external appearance of the protagonist, and this has become a narrative phenomenon in Saudi narrative works. Ḥasan al-Ḥāzimi (2000,pp.472-473), who studied the representation of the protagonist in the Saudi novel, noticed that Saudi novelists pay scant attention to description of the external appearance of their protagonists. The study refers to many Saudi narrative works such as *Thaman al-Tadḥiya* and *Wa Marrat al-'Ayām* by Ḥāmid Damanhūri, all the novels of Mohammad Yamani, most of the novels of Ghalib 'Abu al-Faraj and 'Iṣām Khūqir, etc. Al-Ḥāzimi does not give any reason for or comment about this noticeable phenomenon.

Al-Jasim (1999,p.27) refers to this phenomenon in al-Nassir's novels in particular and claims that none of his protagonists are given a detailed description of their physical appearance. However, this is not the case in *Ghuūm al-Kharīf* (1988,p.43), which describes the physical appearance of Muḥisin, who is in his forties, although he looks younger; he has brown skin, dark eyes, an oblong face, a slim frame, and a trimmed mustache and beard. However, this description does not appear until later in the text. Thus, al-Nassir does not pay attention to the external

appearance of his protagonist, although he does describe his other characters. Al-Jasim (1999,p.28) attempts to find a convincing explanation for this phenomenon, claiming that there is a great similarity between al-Nassir himself and his protagonists, and that the author tries to hide himself by failing to clearly describe the physical appearance of the protagonist.

This idea suggests an overlap between the novel and the author's own life, which is often a subject of literary criticism. Some Saudi critics (al-Ḥāzimi, 2000, al-Jasim, 1999) claim that many Saudi novels are autobiographical due to similarities between some aspects of the author's life and that of his protagonist. When *Shuqat al-Ḥuria* was banned al-Quṣaibi claimed that there is no relationship between the author and the characters or events, even though some critics (al-Ḥakami 2006,pp.414-426) claim there are clear similarities between al-Quṣaibi and his characters.

In her study about the overlap between novel and autobiography, 'A'isha al-Ḥakami (ibid.,p.683) explores the overlap between the narrative elements of the both texts such as setting, time, language, and characters, all of which make some novels appear to be autobiographical. On the other hand, Ṣāliḥ al-Ghamidi (2003) highlights how this critical approach of studying the novel through the author's biography can be overused and could lead to an incorrect interpretation. Al-Ghamidi claims that this type of interpretation limits the creativity of the novel. Al-Nassir (2010) denies that he has based his characters on himself but he agrees that novelists benefit from their own experiences when writing a novel.

Using this approach leads the recipient to read the novel from outside the text by focusing on the personal life of the author, whilst paying total disregard to the aesthetics and semantics of the narrative text. Thus, this interpretation does not give the reader any hint concerning the details about the writer's personal life. However, with regard to the external characteristics of the protagonist, it could be argued that the impact of socialist thought, which does not pay attention to the individual outside the social system, might have led to a lack of attention to the external appearance of the protagonist, with novelists instead paying more attention to the other dimensions. The prevalence of the stream of consciousness in al-Nassir's novels could explain this phenomenon as this stream (2011) "changes the novelist's attention from the external appearance of the protagonist into the internal to

represent the hidden aspects of the character.” Thus the novelist is not primarily concerned with depicting the protagonist’s external appearance, but rather their internal state. Al-Nassir pays close attention to the internal dimension of his protagonist by using internal monologue.

The narrative text of *Thuqbun fi Rida’ al-Layl*, for instance, pays close attention to the internal dimension of ‘Issā through the use of internal monologue, which shows his deep psychological and intellectual dimensions. ‘Issā (al-Nassir, 1961,pp.5-7) dreams about a new society which applies the principles of justice and equality, using this as a means of escaping his current life, which limits his freedom and aspirations; however, he believes in the need to change that. ‘Issā is represented as a symbol of change and struggle against the social reality with its old negative mindset, which creates many social problems.

It is important in this context to refer to two important stylistic phenomena related to characterization, which are used in al-Nassir’s novels. As previously noted, his works contain many secondary characters who play limited roles. In *Ra’shat al-Zil*, for example, there are over fifteen secondary characters some of which make only limited appearances, such as Fahhād, the protagonist’s friend from his village. Roger Henkel (1977,p.94) observes that this phenomenon occurs frequently in the social novel, stating that:

The most obvious function of secondary characters is to populate the world of the novel. Since fiction presents human context, the secondary characters establish that context. We discover what the time and society is like by observing secondary characters going about their ordinary business. In the mode of the social novel, such life is important, for an objective of the social novel is to portray the social structure and its nature.

These characters have an important function in reflecting social reality, and they contribute to creating societies in various ways within the narrative text. Al-Nassir’s novels depend on many characters who are intellectuals, so the protagonist in many of his novels is highly educated. In her recent study about characters in Saudi novels, Maha al-Shay’ (2009) shows that they feature many educated characters, both males and females, who play active roles in deepening social awareness within

the world of the narrative. Al-Nassir's protagonists play a positive role in the narration. Zāhir, for example, is a very well-educated character who plays a positive role in challenging the social reality by attempting to raise consciousness about the need for women's education by editing a newspaper page about women's issues. He also shows great respect towards the women workers reflected in his daily dealings with them, as shown in the novel.

#### 4.4.2 Dialogue

Language is the tool which is used to convey reality. Al-Nassir generally uses communicative language which takes the form of direct, simple phrases that can be easily understood. There is some use of metaphor and other rhetorical devices in his novels, especially in the titles, for example, *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl*, *'Adhra' al-Manfā*, and *Hitān al-Rīh*. However, these metaphors do not conflict with al-Nassir's attempt to portray reality and social change, as they play an active role in conveying the reality in more concise style. For example, *'Adhra' al-Manfā* (The Virgin of Exile) suggests multiple connotations concerning the status of Saudi women in this conservative society with its traditional social customs.

Dialogue is an important part of the narrative language, reflecting the different social levels of interaction among characters in the text. Three levels of dialogue can be seen in al-Nassir's novels: *Faṣīḥ* (formal), *'Ammi* (informal) and a third intermediate level. *Faṣīḥ* is usually used in his novels, as it is the more acceptable written linguistic form for those Arab readers who are able to understand it, while *'Ammi* or dialect is the spoken regional variant of Arabic.

Formal literary language is frequently used in the dialogue in *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl*, between the protagonist's father (al-Ḥāj 'Ammār) and the teacher (al-Nassir, 1961p.14) and in the conversation between al-Ḥāj 'Ammār and his friend concerning social problems relating to everyday life, market fluctuations, and the Second World War (ibid.,pp.170-177). Noticeably, they use some political and military vocabulary in their conversation, which includes references to the Axis and the Allied powers, the international situation, victory, warship, aircraft carrier, and torpedo. The same level is maintained in dialogues between the protagonist and his family members (ibid.,pp.61-62), with his girlfriend (ibid,p.137), and with his friends (ibid.,pp.149-151).



'*Adhra*' *al-Manfā*, which is set in the Ḥijāz region, reproduces Ḥijāz dialectal terms in many of the informal dialogues and although many Arab critics condemn this type of non-literary language, it strongly evokes the sense of place in this novel. In the following extract, Zāhir (al-Nassir, 1978, pp.21-22) who has recently been given a managerial position in the newspaper, returns home to bring the news to his family:

وشخر علوي أبو النسر وهو يستمع إلى ابنه. ثم كشر عن أسنان كبيرة صفراء وأطلق ضحكة صاخبة. وقال وهو يخاطب زوجته التي كانت تقوم بإعداد التعميرة: سمعتي عن شطارة ولدك...؟ الواحد ما هو عارف ايش آخره الدنيا.

وجاء صوت السيدة زين عزت أجشاً من الغرفة الأخرى: ايش تقول تعالوا هنا.

وانطلقا إليها. وكان أبوالنسور يتمايل من الضحك وهو يردد ساخراً: والله زمان الحريم بتشتغل في الصحافة كمان؟! ايش آخره الدنيا ياربي؟

وتكلم الصوت الأجش: بتشتغل مع النسوان ياواد؟ قالت ذلك وهي تضرب على صدرها مما جعل فرائض زاهر ترتعد. انه يخشى لسان أمه السليط بل ليعترف أنه يخافها ويخشاها.

[...] يا أمي أنا قلت لأبوي إن رئيس التحرير زاد المكافأة حققتي وكلفني بعمل جديد هو الاشراف على صفحة تتولاها بنته بس ما عرف يفسر والا ما فهم قصدي.

[...] وقاطعته المرأة بإشارة من يدها: يعني ما فيه اختلاط بينك وبين البنت المسترجلة دي.

'Alawi 'Abu al-Niṣir snorted as he listened to his son, then he smiled with big yellow teeth and laughed loudly. Addressing his wife, who was preparing shisha, he said: "Did you hear about your son's cleverness? Who knows where this will all end."

The hoarse voice of Zain 'Izzat came from the other room: "What are you saying? Come here."

They went to her, with 'Abu al-Niṣir rocking with laughter and sarcastically repeating: "What a life! Women work in the press too?! Oh God, is this the end of the world?"

The hoarse voice said, “Are you working with women, lad?” She beat her chest, which made Zāhir shiver fearing his mother’s sharp tongue.

[...] “Mum, I told my father that the editor has increased my pay and given me a new job which consists of supervising his daughter’s page, but Dad didn’t know how to explain it, or he didn’t understand what I meant.”

[...] the women stopped him by raising her hand: “I take it for granted that there is no mixing between you and this tomboy girl.”

The dialogue contains many Ḥijāzi dialect words such as *Wād* (lad), *Kaman* (also), and *dā* (this) which are used daily in the social context there. This informal dialogue gives the reader a sense of place and also of the level of social interaction, suggesting the father’s sarcasm and his mother’s authoritarianism. The dialogue reflects the reality of this particular part of the Arab world, transporting the reader to a home in Ḥijāz.

The intermediate level of Arabic dialogue is less frequently used in al-Nassir’s novels, and can be seen in the dialogue between Buthaina and her father about the ideas of Qasim ‘Amīn (ibid.,p.78). Al-Shay’ (2009,p.163) considers this level unacceptable in this case since the characters are discussing an intellectual issue. According to al-Shay’, dialogue must match the context. Thus, a dialogue between two educated characters about intellectual matters should be conducted in formal Arabic, whereas the dialectal variant could be used in other social situations, such as everyday family conversations. In her opinion, the language used should be determined by the character’s educational level and social environment, and the nature of the dialogue even between father and daughter. Both al-Shay’ and al-Ḥāzimi (2000,p.449) criticise the use of language which mixes these forms, on the grounds that it weakens the text and confuses readers.

A great deal has been written in Modern Saudi criticism about the issue of formal/informal language in dialogue. The study by Muna al-Mudaihish (2005) applies a linguistic approach to language use in the Saudi novel as reflected in dialogue. She argues that the rapid changes in Saudi society have contributed to the

use of informal language in the narrative discourse in general (ibid.,p.109) since this is reflecting reality.

On the other hand, al-Ḥāzimi (2000,p.459) considers that literary Arabic should be used for dialogue, as this form can be understood by most readers of Arabic, regardless of their country of origin whereas many would struggle to make sense of dialectal variants. In addition, al-Ḥāzimi (ibid.,p.449) also suggests the use of what he calls Simplified Language, that only uses commonly known vocabulary. Maḥmūd Zaini (2003) considers the use of dialect in dialogue to be a literary error; and both he and al-Shay<sup>ʿ</sup> (2009,pp.357-358) agree with al-Ḥāzimi, viewing the use of standard Arabic as the foundation for any novel with literary pretensions.

Despite al-Ḥāzimi's (2000) stated preference for formal language especially in dialogue, he is still comments favourably on some of the informal dialogues in *'Adhra' al-Manfā*, on the grounds that they reflect social reality:

The dialogue in general – whether formal or informal – is short, light, and close to the usual everyday dialogue making it natural and not artificial. In addition, it reflects the views and the personalities of the interlocutors clearly. It also highlights their psychological, social and cultural dimensions (p.454).

Al-Shay<sup>ʿ</sup> (2009,p.358) also comments positively on the impact of using dialectal variants. However, those critics who fail to appreciate the use of informal language regard language as an aesthetic tool, whereas in novels this plays a fundamentally communicative role. It is problematic when studies attempt to apply the artistic standards used in other Arabic literary genres, such as poetry, to the novel, despite their very different nature; in order to be realistic, the novel must reflect real life, including how ordinary people speak. These studies ignore the important role which informal dialogue plays in the novel in representing contemporary Saudi society. Such critics also fail to acknowledge the existence of popular culture, which uses dialectal variants of Arabic and using a different linguistic form changes its basic meaning.

## 4.5 Conclusion

It is clear that al-Nassir had an extraordinary life, migrating with his family to Iraq when still a child and then returning to settle in his hometown during the economic boom in Saudi Arabia. The author has never discussed the details concerning his arrest on unknown grounds but his novels, especially *'Adhra' al-Manfā*, which was written during or immediately after his imprisonment, perhaps shed light on the objectives of the organization in which he was involved.

This chapter highlights al-Nassir literary career and his transformation from short story writer to novelist, noting that he benefited from this experience as these genres have similarities in narrative techniques. Critics have praised his work as some of the best written Saudi novels due to their proximity to reality and their ability to depict human relationships and social change (al-Ḥāzimi and al-Yūsif, 2008,p.28).

Al-Nassir, like other Saudi novelists who have attempted to interpret aspects of Saudi society, has developed his own distinctive style of representing contemporary social reality.

Many critics have attempted to draw comparisons between the many hidden aspects of al-Nassir's personal life and the protagonists in his novels who often remain enigmatic characters. Conversely, al-Nassir used direct, clear language to ensure that his discourse can be easily understood by his readers. He employed three types of Arabic in his dialogues between characters: standard, dialect and an intermediate form. Many critics argued that using standard Arabic is the correct way to ensure this discourse is accessible to all Arab readers, since the other forms could limit the audience. These critics view the novel as a literary work aimed at intellectuals, failing to understand that the use of dialect by the characters effectively reflects the reality of Saudi society. Many Saudi critics believe that the standards of Quranic language and classical Arabic poetry (*Faṣīḥ*) should be applied to these novels, whereas a key aspect of the social novel's construction is its attempt to reflect popular culture.

## **Chapter 5: Narrativising Identity: Self and the Other in the Fiction of Al-Nassir**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the relationships between Saudi identity and the other in al-Nassir's fiction to explore the changes that have taken place in this relationship by analysing the representation of this theme in al-Nassir's novels. The relationship between self and the other forms part of a theme reflecting the search for identity in the social novel. In al-Nassir's novels, as previously noted, Saudi identity has three clear dimensions: it is Islamic, Arab, and patriotic. This chapter will explore the nature of the relationship between Saudi identity and the other by focusing on three elements.

### **5.2 The Concept of Self and the Other in Modern Literary Studies**

In the literary field, three important terms are used regularly in studying the relations among societies: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the other. There is still significant debate surrounding the exact meaning of these concepts, with the second of these being particularly difficult to pin down, leading James G. Carrier (1995,p.viii) to refer to Occidentalism as "a protean concept". Carrier applied this term broadly to mean "a discourse among Orientals about the West" (ibid.,p.35). In other words, Occidentalism is the way in which Oriental thought frames the West in discourse, and more specifically, how it shapes the visions, ideas, and knowledge which the Arab world has about the West.

Both Occidentalism and Orientalism are used regularly in the field of Arabic studies in connection with the concepts of "self" and "the other". Edward Said, a literary theorist and intellectual, uses these terms to refer to Arab culture vs western culture in his groundbreaking book *Orientalism*, which has been translated into 36 languages (Said, 2003,p.xii). His study focused on the relationship between Arab and Western cultures (including that of the United States) and started by introducing three meanings of Orientalism. Said described the third of these meanings in the following terms:

The corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (ibid.,p.20).

It is clear from Said's study that the term "self" is used to refer to the Occidentalism, including the United States, which begin to impose its control in particular following World War II (ibid.,p.21). In Said's terms, then, the word "the other" is used in reference to Orientalism, especially the Middle Eastern countries that constituted the focus of the study (ibid.,pp.23-228). However, for Said the terms self and the other did not necessarily designate geographical regions, such as East and West. Rather, he used the term to refer to the clash between different worldviews in terms of thinking and culture.

In many recent Western and Arab studies,<sup>36</sup> these terms have commonly been used to distinguish between two groups, which may differ with respect to gender, race, religion, nationality, origin, social class, or political ideology. Thus, the terms "self" and "other" are used here in a more specific sense to differentiate between two social cultures, ideas, and visions to depict the nature of the relationships between them. Undoubtedly, there are points of convergence amongst all human cultures; however, each culture has its own characteristic features relating to social conventions and customs, language, values, and beliefs. Moreover, cultures can be said to converge or diverge on the basis of the extent of variation within these elements.

The word "self" is used here with three qualifications to analyse how identity (the self) can be influenced and transformed by various social-political factors. Here,

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<sup>36</sup> Many Western and Arab studies use the terms "self" and "the other" in the literary field. See, for instance, KNEŽEVIĆ, M. & NIKČEVIĆ BATRIĆEVIĆ, A. (eds) 2011. *The face of the other in Anglo-American literature*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars. HUTCHINSON, R. & WILLIAMS, M. 2007. *Representing the other in modern Japanese literature: a critical approach*, London, Routledge. In addition, literary Arabic studies employ these terms, such as AL-'AUDAT, Ḥ. 2010. *Al-Ākhar fī al-Thaqāfa al-'Arabia: min al-Qarn al-Sādis Ḥatā Maḡla' al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn*, London, Dār al-Sāqī. The term was also used in a study to refer to non-Arabs: see AL-MAZRU'Ī, F. 2007. *Tmthilāt al-Ākhar fī al-'Adab Qabil al-'Islam*, Dubai, al-Majma' al-Thaqāfi. Some studies focusing on gender also use the concept of self and the other, such as 'IDRIS, M. 2003. *Al-'Ana wa al-Ākhar fī al-'Adab al-'Unthawi*, Cairo, Maktabat al-Ādāb. See also AL-NU'MĪ, Ḥ. 2009. *Al-Riwaya al-Su'ūdiya Waqi'uha wa Taḡūlatuha*, Riyadh, Wazarat al-Thaqāfa wa al-'I'lām .

then, “self” refers firstly to Saudi society as part of Islamic and Arab society, then as a part of Arab society, and finally it refers to Saudi society as a nation. Accordingly, the word “other” is used here with three qualifications to refer firstly to Western countries, including all non-Arab and non-Islamic countries, then to any non-Arab countries, and finally to all other countries except Saudi Arabia. This is not intended to imply that Saudi society feels no strong ties of loyalty or common cause with other Islamic or Arab nations nor that it has no relations with other nations; rather, these divisions of self and the other reveal how Saudi identity has shifted in light of the changing economic, historical, and political conditions within Saudi society.

### **5.3 Self and the Other in the Saudi Social Novel**

Al-Nu‘mi (2009,pp.39-40) claimed that the image of the self and the other clearly appears with the emergence of writing novels in Saudi literature and that the first published Saudi novels were founded on this theme. Al-Nu‘mi refers to the first Saudi novel, *al-Tw‘man*, as an example of a work which explores the theme of self (Islamic conservative society) and the other (Western society). Mohammad al-Ghamidi (2007) had also noted this conflict between the self and the other in *al-Taw‘amān* and its prejudiced account of the West as the other.

The events of *al-Taw‘amān* (al-‘ANṣari, 1994) are clearly based on the conflict between these two cultures as a means of establishing the superior one. In line with this novel’s aim, to depict the negative impact of Western culture on the protagonist Fareed, the clash between cultural values is evident. Rasheed studied at a national school and became a leader of his nation, whereas Fareed died tragically in front of a pub in Paris. Such an ending is predictable within a narrative context that is clearly prejudiced against the Western other. However, the fact that this novel represents the other negatively goes against the project of modernity, which begins with the establishment of Saudi Arabia (al-Nu‘mi, 2009,p.43).

Al-Nu‘mi noted that this theme did not appear in Saudi novels after *Thaman al-Tadhīya*, which was first published in 1959 until it reappeared after 1980 (2009,p.49) and ‘Abdu al-Ḥakīm Baqais (2010) confirmed that the presence of the self/other polemic remains a major theme in narrative discourse of the Arabian Peninsula in general.

However, the theme of self and the other was clearly present in three of al-Nassir’s novels published in the period between 1960 and 1980. It is reflected in al-Nassir’s

first novel *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961) in the representation of the events of the Second World War. It also appears in his second novel *Safinat al-Dayā'* (al-Nassir, 1989), originally published as *Safinat al-Maūta* in 1969, and in *'Adhra' al-Manfā* (al-Nassir, 1978).

#### **5.4 Islamic Identity**

Saudi society in general is regarded as a religious society, since Islam plays a major role in identity formation there. History has played a major role in widening the gap between the Muslim self and the non-Muslim other. A recent study about the self and the other (al-'Awdat, 2010) shows that the wars between Europe and Arab Muslims have created a negative relationship between them which is represented in stereotypical images and has appeared in literature over the ages until the modern era. In this respect, the role of religion is not only limited to regulating the social behaviours but it also has an active political dimension.

Saudi narrative discourse represents this negative relationship between the self and the other, demonstrating the dangers of the other as a colonial power, ready to take advantage. The issue of colonialism plays a major part in Arab social novels generally, representing the negative impact of the colonialists who tried to obliterate the social values of those they had colonised who were considered to be savages with primitive customs in the eyes of the colonisers.

Reading some of al-Nassir's social novels, it is clear that the author usually attempts to represent a conflict between the values of the coloniser and the colonised to highlight the negative impact of colonialism. Social novels also represented the struggles which the colonised faced to gain freedom.

Given the international dimensions of the Second World War (1939-45), Saudi novelists devoted attention to this global conflict that reconfigured the map of the world. The events in *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* focus on this war and illustrate the changing relationship between Muslims and the non-Islamic other during the conflict. Initially, in World War II there was support for the Axis powers, then support for the Allies, and then thoughts turned to the end of the conflict. This is seen in the desire for an end to the disaster (al-Nassir, 1961,p.202) expressed by the protagonist who is opposed to war and his father who was negatively affected by the war professionally (ibid.,p.29).



The novel describes the support which some Muslims provided to the Axis powers as a result of Hitler's promises to improve the position of Muslims after the war and establish an Islamic state. Some religious authorities at that time urged Muslims to support the Axis powers, especially after the war approached the Arabian Peninsula, as the third-person narrator explained.

إن بعض المتعصبين للمحور كادوا يعلنون من على المنابر والمآذن أن على الجميع رفع رايات التسليم وتعليق أطواق النصر ابتهاجا بدخول المحور.

Some fanatics who support the Axis were close to declaring from the pulpits and minarets that everyone should raise the flags of surrender and hang out the flowers to celebrate the victory of the Axis (ibid.,p.31).

This passage shows that some Axis supporters believed that they would win the war, even though many Arab Islamic governments supported the Allies in World War II. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was pro-Allies, due to its historical relationship with Great Britain and the United States. As shown in Chapter Three, the Saudi Government later gave those countries contracts for oil exploration, although Germany and Japan provided tempting offers to other Arab Islamic countries, such as Iraq and Egypt, who also had strong relations during the war.

The novel also sheds light on the role of the media during this conflict through the dialogue between the protagonist and his friend 'Abdu al-Rahmān, who had religious tendencies, and said:

إنني أسمع كل مساء كلمة "حيوا العرب" من إذاعة برلين فأزداد إيمانا بأن رجلا عربيا يقف وراء دولة إسلامية قوية لا وراء مجرد محطة إذاعة نازية، ثم إن هتلر قد أصبح مسلما.

Every evening I listen to the sentence 'greet the Arabs' from Berlin radio station, and my faith in the announcer becomes stronger as he seems to be an Arab man standing behind a strong Islamic country not just a Nazi radio station. Moreover, Hitler has become a Muslim (ibid.,p.192).

The narrative text reflects the impact of the media on society and the role of the Berlin Arabic radio (1941) in mobilising support, especially in Arab countries. Their propaganda influenced the war and the rumour that Hitler had converted to Islam led to popular sympathy. The Balfour Declaration in 1917 had left many Arabs disappointed with the Allies. In addition, the Axis succeeded in using the media to

attract supporters especially in Arab Islamic countries by focusing on the Arab and Islamic dimensions of these societies. However, others did not feel secure with the Axis powers and their support was inspired by fear; the protagonist refers to the Nazis as being more greedy and brutal than the British (ibid.,p.175).

In fact, as shown in the novel, the Second World War deepened the hatred that Arabs had for the others, such as “the colonisers,” whose aim was to exploit the Arab countries and their other colonies, without attempting to develop the nations they had colonized or to raise standard of living there for the indigenous population. Mass destruction and a decline in the levels of health and education were seen to be the legacy of colonialism. Thus, the relationship with the other seems to be one of hatred and hostility.

The novel also shows that the war had a widespread effect on lifestyles. The protagonist and his friends used to play games by dividing those involved into two groups, one calling themselves the Axis, the other the Allies (ibid.); however, this symbolises the deeper psychological impact of the war on civilians. The relationship between Muslims and the non-Islamic others (i.e. Axis and Allied powers) took various, with some actively supporting the Axis, others the Allies as the lesser of two evils but most people simply longing for an end to the conflict. In this relationship, the other conjures up images of past subservience and humiliation or future dictatorship and authoritarianism; in both cases, the other is viewed as the coloniser, looking out only for their own interests.

The Saudi novel illustrates some negative beliefs about other religions, such as in *Ra'shat al-Zil* (al-Nassir, 1994,p.187), which describes the protagonist's opinion towards Judaism and Zoroastrianism:

يقال أن اليهود و المجوس هم أكثر الأقسام زرعاً للشكوك و الفتنة بين الناس حتى يتسنى لهم النفاذ من خلال فجوات الخلافات التي يثيرونها. وهو نفسه شعار فرق تسد والذي تتبناه الدول الكبرى للسيطرة على الشعوب المتناحرة.

It is said that Jews and Zoroastrians are the peoples that spread the most doubts and sedition among others, using the principle of divide and rule so that they can take over; that's the same motto adopted by the Great Powers to control warring communities.

This negative attitude towards the other is found in any culture where religious identity is of major importance and difference is viewed as a threat, thus widening the gap between followers of different religions. The only way to narrow this gap is to start and maintain inter-faith and intercultural dialogue, not only at the level of religious institutions but also at the social level to raise community understanding of the need for mutual respect.

### **5.5 Arab Identity**

Arab identity is the second dimension that forms Saudi identity, and is equally important as the Islamic dimension. Saudi society has a strong relationship with the other Arab societies, with all of them connected by factors including language, neighbourly relations, religion, social customs, and values. These links amongst Arab societies that motivated the establishment of the active movement called “Pan-Arab nationalism”.

The second dimension of self and other in the Saudi social novel is that of Arab and non-Arab other. A number of factors have contributed to the formation of this trend, including colonialism, the weakness of the Ottoman Empire, the World Wars, the continuing hostility between the Arabs and Israel, and the issue of Palestine.

One factor which contributed to the emergence of this movement was the establishment of the Young Turks, a Turkish nationalist party that attempted a process of Turkification of Arab countries by imposing Turkish as the official language for all countries under the authority of the Ottoman Empire (‘Aḥmad, 1987,p.422). This project motivated the establishment of Pan-Arab nationalism, which started officially in Paris in 1911 under the name of “the Young Arab Society” (*Al-Jam‘iya al-‘Arabiya al-Fatat*). When the Ottoman Empire came to an end, many Arab countries gained independence, and Arabs had a strong desire to create a movement which would preserve the unique identity and character of their people, and there was a call for a Pan-Arab nationalism which resulted in a short-lived political union between Egypt and Syria under the name of the United Arab Republic in 1958.

*Dam al-Barā’a* depicts the relations between Saudi society as an Arab nation and the Ottoman Empire as the other. Although the novel was written in 2001, long after the end of this Empire, it still depicts feelings of animosity towards the other,

although Saudis were once a part of this Empire. The novel starts by describing a large building in a Saudi village:

في الجزء الشرقي من القرية كان ينهض منزل حجري ضخم من طابقين، يثير الفضول لتمييزه وارتفاعه عن باقي المنازل الى جانب انفراده في ذلك الموقع المنفصل عن بقية المنازل. يقال إنه من آثار الأتراك حيث كان بمثابة مقر للقيادة لمنطقة كبيرة يتولون إدارتها بعد أن وضعوا أيديهم عليه من مالكة الذي كاد أن ينسى. ولأنه كذلك فقد كرهه الناس باعتباره ماضيا غير مأسوف عليه.

In the eastern part of the village, there is a huge stone house consisting of two floors. The house draws curiosity as it towers over the other houses and is situated away from the rest of the houses. It is said that it is one of the Ottoman remains and was the command headquarters for a large region during that time. The Ottomans had seized the house from its original owner, who is almost forgotten now and, because of that, people hate the house and consider it to be part of an unwelcome past. When we were children, we were forbidden to approach it (al-Nassir, 2001,p.3).

The symbolic depiction of the house makes it clear that the relationship between Arab and non-Arab Ottoman Empire was one of enmity. There is also hatred toward the people in the house, as it reminds the villagers of that miserable time. The novel uses personification of a place to represent the Arab villagers' relationship to the Ottoman Empire, with the house representing the Empire's history. The hugeness of the building also symbolises the size and the power of the Empire. In addition, the house is a painful reminder of seized possessions. Preventing the children from approaching the house reflects the desire of those villagers who had witnessed that era to forget those difficult times, a period when the dictatorial Ottomans stole the house from its true owner.

'Işmat Saif al-Dawla (2006) explored the history behind this troubled relationship between the Arabs and the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans originally started governing the Arab world by bringing justice and equality to all segments of society. However, this peaceful coexistence did not last, as the Empire began to look out for its own interests. The widening gap between Arabs and Ottomans led to a relationship of tension and animosity as evidenced in the Saudi social novel although no single depiction can succeed in providing a clear vision or capturing the

range of feelings about this relationship. Thus, it is useful to analyse the perceptions of the different social classes towards the Ottoman Empire).

Al-Nassir, in his novels, considered the Ottoman Empire as a State of colonization which colonised a part of Arabian Peninsula for ages. *Dam al-Barā'a* (al-Nassir, 2001,p.22) narrates a story of an Arab man, named 'Abu 'Aṭīa, who was arrested in Astana. He had an intense hatred of the Turks and would entice them into the desert or mountains to steal their weapons and clothes. He would then release them so that when they returned they would be charged with treason and possibly sentenced to death. 'Abu 'Aṭīa knew that some of them were homosexuals and he focused on this to entrap them. His story indicates the negative relation between Arab villagers and the Ottoman other.

The novel (ibid.,p.106) also illustrates the arrogance of the other, in the character of 'Abu Sāmīr. Originally from Turkey, he had worked as a teacher in a Saudi school and thought he should have priority to be the school director over his Bedouin friends, purely on the grounds he had graduated from Turkish schools.

As previously noted, the relation between Arabs and their non-Arab other seems to be founded on hate in al-Nassir's novels. The Arabs, including the Saudis, exhibited feelings of hatred toward the Ottomans, who are depicted as arrogant and dictatorial. However, after the end of the Ottoman Empire, Arab identity became clearer and stronger as Arabs realised they had an ideology, culture, tradition, and history of their own.

The Suez Crisis also contributed significantly to the reinforcement of the idea of Pan-Arab nationalism inside Arab societies. In 1956, France, Britain, and Israel invaded the Gaza Strip together with some parts of Egypt, namely, the Suez Canal zone, and Sinai. This war changed the vision that Arabs had about who constituted the other and many hostilities developed between them. The feelings of hatred towards non-Arab others were deeper than before.

Saudi novels deal with this war, such as *Safīnat al-Ḍayā'* (al-Nassir, 1989,p.21), which shows the impact of this crisis. The novel reflects the Saudi street movement, which lost intensity after the war started. At the time, many citizens volunteered to fight against these countries, especially Israel, which has been the object of much hate from the Arabs. The Saudi attitude towards Israel is depicted in the dialogue between the protagonist and his friends. He warns his friends, "...be ready to fight

against Israel because it will attempt to kill you all and dispose of you like human garbage”.

In his study, Al-Jasim (1999,p.112) refers to this attitude toward Israel in al-Nassir’s novels, reflected in some of his protagonists who consider Israel to be the most dangerous enemy. Indeed, Israel is popularly perceived as the main enemy for Arabs, meaning that it is common to find hatred towards Israeli policies in many Arab novels. A recent study about the image of Jews in Egyptian novels emphasised the generally negative image which they have in Egyptian narrative discourse, as the issue of Palestine is considered to be the major problem affecting perceptions of the other. However, the study does not ignore the positive aspects of the Jewish character, which are contrasted with the negative side in the narrative text. Al-Nassir (1961,p.60), for example, described ‘Issā’s family who works in the commercial sphere as a Jewish family, referring to the skillfulness of the Jews in business. This negative relationship between Arab and the Jewish other is likely to stay this way until both have a strong desire to be reconciled and to live in peace and end their hostilities.

The call for Pan-Arab nationalism had a strong impact on novelists who play a role in determining our relationships toward others. This call formed part of their intellectual and social life and also their hopes and dreams. *Thuqbun fi Rida’ al-Layl* shows great loyalty to the dream of Pan-Arab nationalism that is reflected in the narrative context via the protagonist, ‘Issā’s, stream of consciousness:

وسيح بخياله كأنما تصور بلاده قد بدأت تستغني عن مستورداتها شيئاً فشيئاً ابتداء من وسائل الترفيه كالسيارات الفارهة والمعلبات الضخمة وقشور الحياة الأخرى [...] وتتسع الصناعة حتى تبلغ الذروة في الاكتفاء الذاتي اكتفاء حقيقياً. وابتسم حين بلغ بخياله تلك المرحلة ان يقرأ صنع في البلاد العربية.

He was imagining his country beginning to gradually cut down its imports, starting with the means of entertainment such as cars, then canning, and other unnecessary things. Then industries would expand until they reached real self-sufficiency. He smiled when in his imagination he reached the stage when he could read the words “Made in Arab countries” (ibid.,p.244).

This passage reflects the dream of many Arabs who were looking forward to the possibility of achieving a united Arab nation when the call came. The protagonist sees self-sufficiency in production and manufacturing as the best way to achieve that

dream, especially after the lack of trust in the non-Arab other that had been generated by wars. As the previous passage makes clear, this vision seems to be founded on socialist principles which used to be one of the most effective social systems in Arab countries (Yaḥya, 2012). In the Saudi novel Arab identity is represented as being tied up with the hopes and dreams that Arabs will one day unite as one nation and become a major political and economic force, especially after having been colonised by non-Arabs, who attempted only to exploit them and leave their countries undeveloped. Even the Orientalist does not try to understand the nature of the desert, as he only seeks oil there (al-Nassir, 2008a,p.11).

Saudi policy has not encouraged Pan-Arab nationalism, on the grounds that any relation connecting Arabs should be founded on an Islamic link, which is considered more open to other cultures. For this reason, King Fiṣal (the third King of Saudi Arabia) supported the idea of establishing the Muslim World League in Makkah in 1962 (MWL, 2004). Nevertheless, as the social Saudi novel shows, Pan-Arab nationalism affected society, which in turn influenced issues of Pan-Arab nationalism. In one sense, Pan-Arab nationalism ended with the death of Jamāl ‘Abdu al-Naṣir, the second President of Egypt, in 1970 (‘Abdu al-Ghani, 2005,p.13). The main problem with this call for Arab solidarity is that it emerged from the attempt of Arabs to isolate them-selves from the rest of the world. If it had tried to establish diplomatic relations with other countries and unite the Arabs in their political attitudes and decision making, then it would still be alive.

## **5.6 National Identity**

This is the third dimension of Saudi identity and this patriotic trend has emerged after many political issues that led the Saudis to think first about the efforts which their society needed to continue its cultural development. Unifying the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was a major contribution towards building a civilised and modern country. However, for al-Nu‘mi (2009,p.50), it was the impact of the economic boom on Saudi society that it pushed it into actively changing. This social mobility increased the inevitability of coexisting with the other whether inside or outside the country, since the country needed many foreigners to work there to achieve its development projects. In addition, the impact of globalisation, media, and educational scholarships for citizens to study abroad have also made it easy for Saudis to communicate directly with many different forms of the other.

The Saudi social novel, including al-Nassir's works, pays close attention to this relationship between Saudi society and the other. Before analysing this relationship, it is important to refer to the national dimension of Saudi society which reflects the shift from tribal loyalty to Saudi patriotism. The efforts of King 'Abdu al-'Aziz's plans to settle Saudi Bedouin in the new cities and in settlements (*Hijra*), as explained in Chapter One, played an active role in inspiring national loyalty among the Saudis. Thus, the Saudi who used to be a part of his tribal group became a citizen of the modern Saudi state, transitioning from belonging based on a small entity to an identity related to a nation state.

There is deep awareness of this concept of patriotism in al-Nassir's novels, such as *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (1961,p.240). The protagonist claims that patriotism is embodied in the people's positive and active contributions to develop the country, as the government cannot do that without the participation of the community. Another dimension of this concept is represented in *Safinat al-Dayā'* (al-Nassir, 1989,p.130), namely, that Saudis have to feel responsible toward their society by ignoring purely individual interests. As al-Nassir's novels make clear, patriotism refers to social integration and cooperation among all strata of Saudi society to achieve comprehensive development without paying regard to individual interests.

*'Adhra' al-Manfā'* (ibid.,p.16) also shows the impact of this patriotic awareness on Saudi society, with Saudis making social changes to help develop society on the grounds of national duty. One of these developments includes transforming the role of women, as their contribution is considered a social duty that should unite the whole Saudi community, a national prerequisite imposed by the sense of patriotism. This sense of patriotism is represented as a social concern in the discourse of Saudi narratives, such in *al-Ghajarīa wa al-Thu'bān* (al-Nassir, 2008a,p.25), in which the protagonist emphasises national unity, which he claims is always: "the concern of the citizens".

It was not possible to build this sense of national quickly, as the Saudis are famed for their strong loyalty to their tribes. However, major achievements by the Saudi Government changed the map of the desert, engaging with the tribes, and planting a sense of patriotism inside Saudis. These actions also increased the respect for privacy in Saudis and made a strong attempt to ensure that every citizen's basic needs were met (i.e. religious needs, the needs of soul, body, and mind, and financial



needs). Attending to these factors have helped to build a sense of nationalism towards Saudi Arabia and its government.

The other takes many forms in the Saudi novel but is generally portrayed negatively in this literary genre (al-Nu'mi, 2010,p.163). A number of factors have helped to create these negative images including colonialism and Arab nationalism, which have influenced many Arabs' perceptions of non-Saudi, non-Arab and non-Muslim others. This impact is also noticeable in the work of Saudi writers who were also influenced by the Arabic literary scene.

A recent critical study concerning the representation of the other in Saudi novels refers to the fact that writers have inherited some of these negative and unrealistic images of the other (ibid.,p.165). The protagonist of *Ra'shat al-Zil* (al-Nassir, 1994,p.19) also demonstrates that the feeling of dominance of the other over developing countries is another reason why Westerners are viewed negatively in the minds of Saudis.

However, not all the images of the other in the Saudi novel are negative and al-Nassir's work contains both negative and positive portrayals of the other. His first novel conveys a negative picture about the other as it is set during colonial times, and the coloniser is only thinking about exploiting the region without making any attempt to build human relationships with the citizens (al-Nassir, 1961,pp.110-111, 270).

After the effects of the economic boom on Saudi society and the growing sense of patriotism, this wholly negative image of the other changes in *Ghuūm al-Kharīf*, as contacts with non-Saudis increase. After the boom, everything changes in the protagonist's life. He starts working in the real estate sector, and soon becomes very rich. Then, like any businessman, he travels in search of new sources of income. The protagonist and his friend are deeply impressed by the lives of those in the West. His admiration for Western culture is clear from the narrative context, which depicts his friend's feelings about the other.

Remembering his life in Saudi Arabia and the strict social customs and habits that limited his freedom, he comments: "Why do they push us to love the West [i.e. Western lifestyle]? Is it not our right to imitate them to feel freedom and the taste of life?" (al-Nassir, 1988,p.76). The narrative context includes another passage of admiration for the progress of civilisation in the West.

إنه هنا في أوروبا. يستطيع بلمح البصر أن يعرف ما يجري في بلاده وفي بيته أيضا. ولا يصعب عليه أن يعرف أي شيء يحدث في العالم. أي مكان في هذه الأثناء. هذه الأمور لم تتوفر للأجيال السابقة وحتى لأبائه.

He is here in Europe. He can know in no time what is going on in his country and also in his home. It is also not difficult for him to know what is happening anywhere in the world in the meantime. These things were not available to previous generations, even for his father's generation (ibid.,p.25).

This passage paints a positive picture of the Western lifestyle and the influence of globalisation and the fast pace of change thanks to modern technology. It also highlights the differences between the lives of the present-day and of older generations. The narrative context shows the protagonist (ibid.,p.26) comparing his life to that of the Western other and he claims that the main problem comes from unchanging traditions that are considered obstacles to achieving this stage of development. The protagonist (ibid.,p.59) also compares Saudi women to those in open societies, as his wife was not able to say "I miss you" on the many occasions when she called him, but he felt it. The novel refers to the social customs which prevented her from saying these words and the protagonist (ibid.,pp.46,98) likes the fact that his Western girlfriend is free and always makes him happy by showing her feelings toward him.

*Ghuūm al-Kharīf* also focuses on communication and the importance of understanding each other. The protagonist's poor language skills do not prevent him from communicating with Westerners, by smiling or even using gestures when he could not express what he wanted to say (ibid.,p.3). Globalisation affectively contributes to narrowing the gap between self and the other, as reflected in the events which take place on the cruise while he was heading to a tourist island.

اقترب منهم أحدهم وهو على متن الباخرة متجها إلى جزيرة سياحية. رجل طويل له شعر كثيف. أبيض البشرة في الثلاثينات من العمر. فسلم عليه قائلا: كيفك خبيبي. ابتسم محيسن. ثم قال له: انت تتكلم عربي؟ فرد عليه: شويه شويه خبيبي. وبدأ الأثنان يتحدثان بالعربية أحيانا وأحيانا ببعض الكلمات الانجليزية وأحيانا بلغة الإشارة حتى وصلا إلى الجزيرة. لقد تفاجأ محيسن عندما بدأ الرجل يغني أغنية الفنان محمد عبده ليلة خميس وهم في طريقهم للجزيرة.

A man came up to him while he was travelling by a boat to a tourist island. The man was in his thirties, tall and with thick hair. He said in Arabic: "how are you, my friend?" Muḥisin smiled at him and said:

“Do you speak Arabic?” The man answered: “a little bit, my friend.” They both started talking in Arabic and sometimes in English; they also used gestures until they reached the island. Muḥisin was surprised when the man started singing a popular Saudi song (*Thursday Night*) while they were heading to the island (ibid.,p.2).

This passage provides a positive image of the relationship with the other and the effect of globalisation on both characters who try to communicate with each other in different ways. Madisen’s smile is a clear sign of acceptance of the other, and the conversation between them confirms this. Muḥisin also tries to introduce his culture to the other when he and his friend meet two girls at his house and he promises to cook some Saudi food for them. They welcome his invitation, and want to try Saudi food for the first time as they feel it would be a good experience (ibid.,p.130).

It is clear from *Ghuūm al-Kharīf* that the wholly negative relationship between Saudi society and the other which was based solely on hatred in the first novel has been transformed into one of admiration and awe as a result of Saudis having opened up to the culture of the other, whether inside their own society or abroad.

Al-Qaḥṭani (2007,p.117) refers to the social transformations in Saudi society that have profoundly changed the representation of the other in some Saudi novels, viewing this from a positive perspective. It is important to point out here that *Ghuūm al-Kharīf* was written after al-Nassir’s first physical contact with the West. He settled in Greece for a period of time during a business trip, and then visited many European countries (al-Nassir, 2009,p.79).

The image of the other is sometimes linked to a certain historical event, which is the case in *Ra’shat al-Zil*, which comments on how the self perceives the other:

اقتربنا من مطار نيويورك. كنت أكره هذه المدينة لكثرة ما قرأت عنها. هذه المدينة شهدت مذابح الملونين في الأحياء الفقيرة البائسة. كان على أن أنسى هذه الانطباعات.

We are almost near New York International Airport. I used to hate this city because I have read so much about it. This city witnessed the massacre of Blacks in poor miserable cities. I should have forgotten these impressions (al-Nassir, 1994,p.202).

Here, there is a sympathetic portrayal of the other, as contemporary images are linked to historical events, and the killing of many Blacks in the New York City draft riots in 1863. This event still persists in the protagonist’s mind, but he tries to

forget it, believing that every period of history has its specific circumstances and we have to continue, despite the past. The final sentence here is indicative of the modern trend in the relation between the self and the other: the need to forget the past and start a new life and new relationships with the other. According to al-Nu'mi (2010,p.170) this passage shows the modern attitudes which Saudis have toward the other. Al-Nu'mi claims that this new relationship and modern outlook is the result of the major transformations which Saudi society has undergone which has also changed its perspectives on this relationship with the other.

As shown, identity for citizens of the Kingdom has three main dimensions: Islamic, Arab, and Saudi nationality and each of these elements helps to condition the Saudi response to the concept of the other. A new understanding of self brings a changed understanding of the other. *Al-Ghajarīa wa al-Thu'bān* illustrates three of the trends in Saudi society which are related to the protection and strengthening of self in the face of the challenges posed over time using a conversation which takes place amongst three characters in a newspaper editorial meeting:

كان السامعي في حوالي الخمسة والعشرين من عمره أسمر اللون نحيف الجسد حليق اللحية شاربه قصير، تبدوا عليه الحدية ويكون أكثر عصبية حين يتكلم فواصل قائلاً: الوحدة العربية قدر لهذا الجيل لا يستطيع التخلي عنها وطالما هناك قيادات تنادي بها فلماذا لا نبادر إلى تأييدها؟ أليس تاريخنا كله يتمحور حول هذه النقطة. [...] قاطعه كرولي وهو شيخ تجاوز الخمسين من العمر، أبيض الوجه مليء الجسد كث اللحية: الوحدة العربية تنفي القوميات الأخرى المسلمة ونحن نريد اتحادا اسلاميا يضم كافة الملايين في مشارق الأرض ومغاربها يا أخي.

- فرد السامعي: الوحدة الإسلامية بعيدة التحقق لأنها تتوجه إلى أقوام في بقاع مختلفة من العالم وينضون تحت لواء حكومات ليست جميعها اسلامية، ولهذا فهي مستحيلة التحقيق إلا بعد دهور لا نعلم مقدارها. وهنا تدخل الدسم مقاطعا: أرى أن نكتفي بالشعارات الوطنية ونعمل على تطوير وطننا ثم نرى مستقبلا ماهي مصلحتنا في تلك المجتمعات أو الشعارات التي نسمع بها.

Al-Sami'i, who is twenty-five years old, skinny, with cropped hair and a neat moustache, and serious, speaks earnestly: "Arab unity is predestined for this generation, which should not be abandoned, so why don't we initiate support for it? As long as it's advocated by leaders [...] this is a turning point in our history."

Krowley, who is over 50, with a white face, big body, and bushy beard, interrupted him: "Arab unity does not consider other Islamic nationalisms. Brother, we need Islamic union, which includes all of the millions of Muslims in the East and the West".

Al-Sami'i replied: "Islamic unity is still to be achieved because it involves many different nations all over the world, some of them are under the control of non-Islamic governments, so this idea is impossible to achieve. However, it might happen eventually, but we don't know when".

Al-Dasim, interrupting him, said: "I think that we should remain patriotic and work to develop our own country. Then, in the future, we'll see where our interests lie with these countries and which call beckons (Islamic unity or Pan Arabism)" (al-Nassir, 2008a,p.69).

The passage illustrates three important dimensions which have helped to form contemporary self-identity in Saudi Arabia: the individual's consciousness of being Arab, Muslim and Saudi. There is an agreement of sorts among the three speakers that patriotic interests should be given priority, since the time is not right for either of the other two concepts to flourish. However, as this analysis of these three dimensions of the Saudi personality in al-Nassir's novels has shown, these aspects of self-identity are conditioned by political, religious, historical and social circumstances and can vary in terms of their relative importance of shaping attitudes towards the other.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

It has been argued that the terms 'self' and 'the other' are generally used to examine the concept of identity and the basis on which we choose to distinguish self from the other and how this conditions and shapes the relationship between these two entities. The 'self and the other' is regarded as one of the most important themes in the contemporary novel and has a strong presence in Saudi narrative discourse. As previously clarified, Saudi identity has three principal dimensions, the importance of which may vary in terms of determining identity formation.

At the level of Islamic and Arab identity, the Saudi social novel generally presents negative pictures about those who represent the other in a religious or cultural sense, describing them as an enemy who threatens Islamic, Arab identity. Representations show how characters react to this threat by resisting cultural or religious assimilation or actively rejecting the other who is represented in a negative way. Political and

religious issues are usually seen to be factors that lead to uniting Arab and Islamic identities, a union which reinforces the rejection of the other.

More recently, however, the relation with the other has undergone a significant transformation from one of hatred to one of admiration as Saudi national identity had gained in strength. This transformation is largely due to the opening up of Saudi society to different cultures, as a result of foreign travel, economic prosperity, globalisation, and social mobility. In addition, the influx of foreign workers who have contributed to the Kingdom's development now comprise a large portion of the population, meaning there is much more contact with non-Saudis. Moreover, the provision of scholarships to Saudis to study abroad in Western universities has also given the younger generation a chance to experience life outside their own country and culture. All of these factors have contributed to changing the relations between Saudis and the Western other. As al-Nassir's novels show, Saudis become more tolerant towards the other when they free themselves from a restricted understanding of the Islamic and Arab dimensions of self-identity. Representations in al-Nassir's work suggest that Saudis are now more interested in the interests of their country (rather than in tribal conflict) and in peaceful coexistence with the other.

To close this chapter, it is worthwhile reflecting on recent events in Saudi Arabia that led to the creation of an international coalition against some terrorist groups in Yemen. Storm Packet, the name of this operation, gained support from many countries. This included western countries (Great Britain, USA, and France) together with many other foreign countries, some Arab and Islamic, who came together to maintain the security of the Gulf States including Yemen.

This event is an indication that Saudi leaders are open to all peaceful religions, cultures, and policies; otherwise they would not have received this kind of international support which met with opposition from only a minority of states. Moreover, this international support indicates the close relationship between Saudi Arabia and the other, and also reflects, to a certain degree, the openness of a large segment of Saudi citizens to the other. Saudi Arabia seems to have entered a new phase and it remains to be seen how and the extent to which this event and its aftermath will impact on and be reflected in the contemporary Saudi social novel, in particular on the ways in which novelists choose to represent Saudi self-identity and the relationship with the other.

## **Chapter 6: Narrativising Social Space: Village and City**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter analyses the relationship between city and village in Saudi narrative discourse and how it has been transformed by social changes together with examining the importance of the village as a setting in Saudi narrative discourse. The aim is to gain a detailed understanding of how social transformation at the level of place is reflected in Saudi narrative discourse. This chapter will also explore how the relationship between the village and the city is represented in the Saudi novel and the extent to which this provides a stereotypical or realistic account of life in rural and urban settings.

The chapter also addresses two important social phenomena related to the study of rural and urban societies, namely migration and alienation. Migration from the village to the city changes the nature of the demographic structure of society when these migrant newcomers join urban society; migration from the city to the village is also represented in a number of Saudi social novels. These moves often bring with them alienation, another important theme in Saudi narrative discourse. This chapter focuses on how these themes and setting are represented in al-Nassir's novels.

### **6.2 The Village as a Theme**

Many literary critics claim that the Arab novel is focused largely on the city. 'Abdu al-Ḥamīd al-Maḥādīn (2001,p.103) for example, claims that "the theme and the foundation of any [Arab] novel is the city". However, as 'Abdu al-Ghani (2005,p.26) notes, the village is a popular theme in the Arab novel generally and in Saudi narrative discourse specifically. Many Saudi novels are set in villages, such as *al-Ghiūm wa Manabit al-Shajar* by 'Abdu al-'Aziz al-Mashri (1989), *Fi Wojdān al-Qaria* by 'Abdu al-Raḥmān al-'Ashmawi (2001), *Kanat Muṭma'ina* by Ḥusān al-Qaḥṭani (2011), and three works by al-Nassir *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl*, *Ra'shat al-Zil*, and *Dam al-Barā'a*. These novels show the traditional rural culture within each village and the spaces in which people interact. They also focus on the customs

and traditions of rural society. However, these novels are not devoid of social criticism, and they do not portray the village in an idealistic manner, as shown in *Dam al-Barā'a*.

Jalila al-Majid (2002,pp.26-27) emphasises that both urban and rural societies are found in al-Nassir's writing; and he was one of the first Saudi novelists to use the village setting as a major theme in his works. In al-Nassir's narrative works village life features in three different forms; as a major theme, a comparative theme, and as an underlying theme.

*Dam al-Barā'a* is set in a small village and attempts to engage with some of the old traditions and customs in rural society which hold back progress and modernisation. The novel shows the villagers' interest in myths and legends, a sign of a traditional society. It also depicts the lives of women in the village and the rural customs and traditions that restrict their freedom and the roles they play including the oppression of women in marriage. In particular, it highlights the issue of family honour, which must be preserved by women avoiding any kind of prohibited relationships. As the events of the novel show, women in the village are more likely to be suspected of falling into sin, so they live in constant fear within rural society. In contrast, the same novel depicts the benefits of village life, such as the sense of community and solidarity.

A small number of Saudi novels contrast rural and urban existence as a comparative theme. Al-Nassir's first novel *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (1961) is divided into two long chapters. A major part of the first chapter is set in a village whose inhabitants rely on agriculture and animal husbandry but life there has been changed to a certain degree by the introduction of roads and electricity. This novel also focuses on some of the social problems within a seemingly quiet village, including illiteracy. The slow pace of change witnessed in the village which is seemingly resistant to transformation is contrasted with the second part of the novel, which is set in the city. Thus, the events in the village is progressing slowly whereas the events seems to be progressing faster in the city as can be seen through this novel.

The pace of change in *Dam al-Barā'a* is faster than in *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl*. However, *Dam al-Barā'a* is set exclusively in the village as its aim is to reveal the negative social aspects of this environment. Thus the novelist concentrates on this



aim, which makes events move faster when compared to the storyline of *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* in which the author deliberately contrasts the slow pace of change in the village with the rapid transformation of the city to explain the protagonist's strong desire to move to the city.

Rural life is an underlying theme in some Saudi novels which are set in a city, such as *Ra'shat al-Zil* (al-Nassir, 1994, pp.19,42,110,121), which represents the lives of migrants in cities who are nostalgic for village life. The protagonist always remembers his life in the village with his family, and even though he appears to have adapted slightly to urban life, he considers himself to be prisoner within the high walls of the city. Moreover, the conflict between the protagonist's rural values and those of the city evoke his former life in the village.

Novelists have different reasons for paying such close attention to the village in Saudi narrative discourse, one being their desire for innovation, as most novels have been about the city. In addition, most Saudi novelists are originally from rural societies including al-Nassir, 'Abdu al-'Aziz al-Mashri, and 'Abdu al-Rahmān al-'Ashmawi and Ḥusaīn al-Qaḥṭāni. A recent study by Sālim Boutqa (2010, p.42) which focused on the use of the village as a theme noted that there are still a large number of villagers in Arab society and since most Arab novelists are from a rural background, they naturally write about rural life.

Another reason for the prevalence of the village as a narrative theme in Saudi narrative discourse is the rapid transformations taking place in cities, especially as a result of the impact of globalisation and economic development. These transformations have created a feeling of alienation in the urban environment and nostalgia for the simplicity of the village lifestyle, and this nostalgia leads novelists to write about villages because they have changed less than cities and still maintain positive social values, unlike cities which have deteriorated in terms of some human and moral values. Therefore, the village is depicted as a refuge from urban life. The theme of alienation is more likely to occur when the village is evoked in an urban-based novel, as previously shown in *Ra'shat al-Zil*, when the protagonist was remembering his quiet life there.

### 6.3 Representations of Village Life

It is clear from reading al-Nassir's novels that the village is characterised by several features. The opening line of *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* describes an isolated place "which is totally surrounded by the desert" (1961,p.5). This description applies to many rural societies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where many villages are isolated or far from cities. In addition, there is an imaginary boundary which also separates the village from the city. This is a belief in the mind of the rural protagonist and the other adolescents in his village which has limited his strong desire to move to the city, the 'Legendary Paradise'.

الذي وأد التفكير الجدي من جانبي للفرار نحو الجنة الأسطورية هو ذلك البحر المترامي من الأرض السبخاء التي تفصل بيننا وتغمر المسافة كلها بطبقة سميكة من الأملاح التي تخلفها الأمواج المنسجمة بعد تكدسها أكثر فصول السنة، التي قيل لي أنها\_ أي تلك الأمواج\_ تفرز بعد انسحابها العسير أنماطا من الناس المتوحشين الذين لا يترددون في التهام من هم في مثل سني لو أمسكوا بهم منفردين.

The chasm that gaped before me (swallowing up all serious thought of feeling toward that legendary paradise) was also a broad sea, leaving behind it whole layers of caked salt as the waters receded, heaped up over many months. This harsh salt world was, so I was told, the haunt of ogres of every kind, who would devour boys of my age without a second thought, if they could only catch them unawares (ibid.,p.7).

This isolation was not only geographical but also psychological, meaning that people who had a strong desire to move into the city will not cross the village boundary, as they are afraid of the ogres there. The passage confirms the major role played by myth in rural thought and culture. However, these myths and legends protect the village from losing its population to the city, by implanting the fear of the city in the villagers' minds.

In *Ra'shat al-Zil* (al-Nassir, 1994), the village is also isolated from the modern technology found in the city. When the protagonist travels from the village to the city his surprised reaction at seeing the doorbell is normal (ibid.,p.13) as did not understand its function but when he saw his friend emerging from inside, he recognised the purpose of this technology.

As seen in al-Nassir's novels, personal relationships are strong within rural society. *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* and *Dam al-Barā'a* describe the social cohesion in rural communities:

المائدة كالعادة تتوسط غرفة الأب على الأرض المكسوة بحصير كبير من سعف النخيل وقد كسته سفرة صنعت هي الأخرى من أعواد النخيل بشكل دائري والجميع في شاغل بالتهام ما دونهم من الطعام والصبية يسرعون في حشو أجوافهم الصغيرة ماعدا الأب الذي كان يتأنى في الأكل.

As usual the dining table (a round table made from palm sticks)<sup>37</sup> is in the centre of the father's room on the floor, which is covered by a large straw mat. Everyone is busy eating what is close to them, and children are rushing in, stuffing their small bellies; the father is eating slowly (al-Nassir, 1961,p.60).

This passage conveys the texture of rural life. The circular dining table in the middle of the father's room with the straw matting, everyone gathered around the table, the movement of children, the way of eating; all give the reader a snapshot of the nature of rural life. The large straw mat symbolises this cohesive social relationship with its intertwined closely knit structure, draws the reader's attention to family relationships.

The previous passage also gives an impression of the simplicity of the rural lifestyle, another noticeable feature of village life. This simplicity is also reflected in the exterior form of the village with its houses and roads.

ويبدووا في الواقع أن هنالك تقاربا بين الصحراء والبلدة التي كانت منازلها الطينية العتيقة مغبرة دائما كوجه عجوز كالح رغم الأفانين التي يبتدعها الأهلون من أجل تجميل مظهرها مثل طلاء جدرانها بالجص من الداخل أورش سقوفها ببعض الألوان الفاقعة إلى غير ذلك مما يفعله البدائيون ممن يشدهم التزيق لا الجمال الفني.

There seems, indeed, to be a clear likeness between the desert and the town. Those old mud houses have always been dusty like an old man's drab face, in spite of all the embellishments devised by the townspeople to brighten up their appearance: adorning the inner walls with coated plaster, painting the roofs in vivid colour and other methods of primitive decoration, as opposed to artistic beauty (ibid.,p.5).

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<sup>37</sup> The traditional dining table is low and round without chairs.

This passage shows the simplicity of rural society reflected in the design of the village houses. On the one hand, the passage gives a negative impression of rural society, comparing it to the wrinkled visage of an old person but the scene also suggests the resilience of ancient traditions and their resistance to change. This passage makes it clear that the village in the Saudi novel symbolises tradition and it is linked to the desert, another symbol of the traditional lifestyle.

Saudi narrative works often depict scene of daily life in the village. *Ra'shat al-Zil*, for example, (al-Nassir, 1994,pp.19-20) portrays this simple life:

من بعيد سمع ثغاء أغنام وهي تتعارك فتذكر أمه تبسمل في البواكير ماضية إلى عنزتها حتى تحلبها وتحضر له تلك الرغوة المرتعشة. [...] عقب الإفطار الخفيف الذي تشيعه بركة الدعاء ما بين الرغيف الحار الذي تحرص أمه أن تقدمه لهم من التنور الذي أوقدته بالجللة والحطب مباشرة مع الحليب الفائر ينطلق إلى المطوع للدراسة مع رفاقه أبناء الحي.

From afar, he heard sheep bleating, fighting with each other. He remembered his mother starting her day in the early morning with the name of God and heading towards her goats to milk them. After a light breakfast, with a blessing of supplication, hot homemade bread, served directly from the wood-fired clay oven, and hot milk, he rushed to school with his friends from the same district.

This detailed description shows the reader a part of the texture of the Saudi rural life. Waking up very early, hearing the sheep bleating, starting the day with prayer, firing up the clay oven, milking, and having a light breakfast reflect the essential elements of village life and paint a vivid picture for the reader of the simplicity of everyday rural existence.

To a certain degree, the village appears to represent stability in Saudi social novel. There are three sacred aspects present according to the mindset of the village; the persistence of ancient traditions, following the teachings of Islam (according to the understanding of the village scholars), and being subject to tribal authority.

A novel such as *Dam al-Barā'a* (al-Nassir, 2001) shows the continuity of traditions, customs, and habits passed down from generation to generation within rural society, without any significant change, until such traditions become taboo. Some of these traditions restrict women's role in society, leaving them isolated. However, rural

society tries hard to preserve and follow this ancient heritage of traditions, customs, and habits which are considered the foundation of rural social cohesion (Dīb, 1989,p.149). There are many reasons for this continuity, including the subservience of the younger generation to their elders, or the fear of change.

It is clear that there is a strong relationship between some old traditions and Islam, and social customs are generally regarded to be a source of law in the schools of Islamic jurisprudence, even though these may vary from one society to another and from one region to another. These differences impact on jurisprudence and thus, any change in these elements may lead to changes in the foundation of Islamic social structures. The Saudi social novel usually describes rural communities as ultraconservative and religious. The previous quotation from *Ra'shat al-Zil* (al-Nassir, 1994,pp.19-20) shows the impact of religion on the villagers who start their daily lives with prayer; *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961,p.13) also shows how religious subjects were taught in *Katātīb* in rural education.

The tribe is highly revered by the villagers, with each Saudi tribe occupying its-own territory. The Saudi social novel shows the impact of villagers having to obey its authority and follow its rules. *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl*, (ibid.,pp.35-36) for example, shows the importance of the tribal leader since villagers must accept the decisions which he makes. The protagonist's father, who is responsible for the affairs of the tribe, asked a villager to solve a problem by eliciting help from the government, but the man refused to go, arguing that the tribal leader has responsibility for the people of his tribe. Most novels set in rural societies do not glorify the village,<sup>38</sup> and *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (ibid.,p.8) shows many negative aspect of village life, including the monotony of existence there:

الواقع أنه لا توجد هنا مفارقات ضخمة أو ملموسة في حياة الآخرين [...] الحياة هناك نسخة واحدة مكررة لا فرق بين أمسها وغدها. الناس هنا يعيشون يوما طويلا وكأنهم غرباء لا يعرفون لما الأقدار قذفت بهم إلى هذا المكان بالذات دون غيره لسبب يجهلونه أشد الجهل.

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<sup>38</sup> A number of Saudi novels set in different village attempt to criticise many rural customs and address important issues including *al-Ghiūm wa Manabit al-Shajar* by 'Abdu al-'Aziz al-Mshri and *Kanat Muṭma'ina* by Ḥusāin al-Qaḥṭāni. In addition, the works by 'Abdu Khal, *al-Mawt yamuru min Huna* and *al-Tīn*, provide a description of the primitive and undeveloped society in the homeland of legends and myths. See AL-NU'MI, Ḥ. 2009. *Al-Riwaya al-Su'ūdiyya Waqi'uha wa Tahūlatuha*, Riyadh, Wazarat al-Thaqāfa wa al-'I'lām, p. 69.

In fact, there are no huge or tangible differences in the lives of people [...] life here is the same all the time, people here live a long day as strangers, and they have no idea why their destinies led them to this particular place and not to another.

The preceding passage presents a miserable impression of rural life, in which the village is like an abandoned ghost town and this monotony affects the narrative structure of this part of the novel, as there is little development in its events. Moreover, even the protagonist does not play an active role there and is presented as being more active when he moves to the city. Thus, the unchanging nature of life in the village as opposed to the fast-paced life in the city is reflected in the narrative structure, the role of the protagonist, and the development of the plot. This difference is even reflected in the linguistic style, with the village scenes having extended passages of description, whilst in the second part, the emphasis shifts to a much greater use of verbs describing the protagonist's actions.

#### **6.4 Representations of City Life**

The image of the city in Saudi narrative discourse seems more complex than that of the village. The city is also more receptive to outsiders, and is the site of historical events. As Raghīb notes, “if the village symbolises the pure and simple relation between people and nature, the city symbolises the impure and complexity of life there” (Raghīb, 1988,p.77/2). A variety of studies from other fields have also commented on the complexity of the city. In his study on social justice and the city the anthropologist David Harvey (2009,p.22) states that “the city is manifestly a complicated thing. Part of the difficulty we experience in dealing with it can be attributed to this inherent complexity”.

A number of studies have explored the reasons for this complexity in the city. Al-Majid (2002,p.50) claims that the enormous social transformations in Saudi society have created this complexity, as a result of political ideologies, economics, industrialisation and the different cultural trends. This complexity may not be apparent to the characters in the narrative who are accustomed to city life, but it is apparent to outsiders. ‘Issā, the protagonist of *Thuqbun fi Rida’ al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961,p.17), senses this complexity when he dreams about living in the city:

على أن ما أصطدمت به أخيلتي هي الكيفية التي بها سوف أتبادل الحديث مع أناس تلك "الجنة". أهم بشر أسوياء؟ أم من طينة أخرى مختلفة تماما؟ على أن خيالي لم يلبث أن أسعفني برأي آخر أدخل الطمأنينة إلى نفسي، مؤداه أن أولئك الناس ليسوا في حاجة أبدا إلى الحديث إنما الإيماء برؤوسهم أو الإشارة الهينة تكفي لجعل الغلمان والغيد الحسان ينتفضون لتلبية ما يريدون على الفور ما دامو أنهم في خدمة أولئك الناس.

Still, though, the obstacle remained: how was I to converse with the people of this paradise? Were they human beings at all, or in a quite different mould?

But soon my fancy supplied a new, reassuring thought. These people didn't, perhaps, need to speak at all. Perhaps they just needed to nod their heads, or give some other simple signal, to summon the lads and pretty young girls who would instantly perform whatever task was required.

This passage shows the villager's dream about life in the city. He does not know how to adjust to it, as life there seems more complicated and fast; he assumes he does not need to talk, but will be understood through the use of gestures. This reflects the contrast between the rural and the urban communities. The protagonist turns to religion for a solution. His vision of communicating with people is reminiscent of descriptions in the Quran of life in Heaven, and how people communicate with the servants there. This seems to suggest that he has been influenced by the strong religious dimension in the culture of the village community.

The complexity in city life depicted in the Saudi social novel leads to fear and anxiety about an unknown fate. The opening lines of *Ra'shat al-Zil* (al-Nassir, 1994,p.5) embody these emotions describing how the protagonist, Faliḥ, "glanced around the market, then he retreated to a diagonal wall which was surrounded by many empty boxes, cartons, and some refuse. He wanted to shelter himself". The crowds of people in the city market, the multiplicity of nationalities and languages, and the new, busy life for the protagonist all generate fear and anxiety about the city. This same sense of fear and anxiety is present throughout the narrative, reappearing in the scene in which the protagonist searches for his brother in the crowd (ibid.,p.11).

إنه ليس خائفا تماما ولكنه يشعر بالتوتر والقلق نحو عالم يجهله. المدن الكبيرة فيها خطر عظيم على أمثاله من الذين لا يملكون أسلحة للمنافسة والمجابهة. إن للجديد سحره وبريقه الذي ينطوي على مجازفة لا شك فيها.

هكذا قيل له من رجال القرية ليس من أجل أن يعدل، ولكن حتى لا يستهون سبيل الغربية. والدته وشقيقتاه يغطون في نومهم العميق. لا يعكر صفوهم هذه الكوابيس التي جثمت على صدره مزعجة ثقته بنفسه. اذ مع اقتراب موعد المغامرة تبدت له أبعادها الغامضة. فالقلق والترقب الذي استشعره هذه الليلة لم يكن قد ألم به من قبل. فقد كانت القرية كل دنياه. بين أزقتها الضيقة الصغيرة يتسبح بالأمان والارتياح. دنيا صغيرة تشتم من حولها تلك البراءة المحتشدة والالتصاق الحميمي. كان التحذير الثاني قد سمعه من سائق الشاحنة الذي قال له مداعبا: انتبه لا تبتلعك العاصمة. رمقه بدهشة وقد تدفق إلى نفسه إحساس غامض. وأضاف الآخر: هي مثل البحر. يضيع فيها من لا يعرف العوم.

He was not very afraid but he felt tense and anxious about an unknown world. Big cities hold extreme danger for people like him, who do not have weapons with which to compete and challenge. The modern has elegance and charm, which definitely involves risk. This is what the men in the village said when they tried to change his mind about migrating to the city. His mother and two sisters fall into a deep sleep and are not disturbed by nightmares, which has an effect on his self-esteem. As the adventure becomes closer, he realises its ambiguous dimensions. He had never felt anxious and worried like he did tonight, as the village is everything in his life. He feels safe and comfortable with its small narrow alleyways. It is a small world where you can smell innocence and modesty. The second warning was from the truck driver who told him jokingly: “be careful, don’t get swallowed up by the capital city”. He glanced at him astonishingly with a vague feeling. The driver added: “It’s like a sea; people who can’t swim will drown (ibid.,p.17).

The passage highlights the villagers’ belief about the migration to the city. The protagonist realises how difficult it is to adjust to city life, especially for people who come from other villages; however, the desire for a new life and good well-paid job is what most people want, including the protagonist, so the city usually uses these things to entice people to move there. City life is very different from village life and requires different skills, and alertness is important. However, the narrator tries to suggest there are other reasons for being alert, such as the size: the tiny village makes him feel safe, whereas the large size of the city feels dangerous.



It is not just the size of the city; it is also the breadth of its intellectual, cultural, economic, expanding space. Likening the city to the sea makes it even more frightening, especially since this image evokes the qualities of the sea, such as its unpredictable nature. The protagonist's feelings are unsurprising given the intimacy of the village environment.

The text carries other less obvious messages about the city in comparison to the village; the latter is an innocent and modest world; the gap in the text concerning the city tacitly suggests it is the world of sin. This urban quality is made clear in *Ghuūm al-Kharīf*, which is set in a Western city. The novel describes social life in the city where you there are many homeless people, prostitutes, drug addicts and mafia-types. The novel also describes a scene featuring a poor man who wanted to have a meal inside a restaurant, and the aggressive response from the owner who thought he had come begging for a free meal; as soon as he saw his money, he immediately welcomed and served him (al-Nassir, 1988,p.109) implying that relationships in the city are usually based on money.

*Ra'shat al-Zil* also depicts some negative things in Saudi city life such as crime and cheating; there are also some hints of immorality in *'Adhra' al-Manfā* and *Dam al-Barā'a*, but they do not feature as obviously as in descriptions of foreign cities. In Saudi narrative writing the negative features of the city are usually presented in terms of injustice, inequality, persecution and racial discrimination, as well as immorality.

The Saudi novelist appears guarded in depicting the city. Other urban images are not shown, such as sexual desire and illicit relations, and the presence of prostitutes, with their nocturnal lives hidden from public view. However, this phenomenon does appear in other Arab novels, such as Algerian literature. An article about the city in Algerian narrative discourse argues that the conservative traditional culture prevents novelists from describing the seedy side of city life, with urban social problems remaining secret (Lhrash, 2010). The same reason would prevent the Saudi novelists from describing the seedy side of city life. Also, the limited freedom of speech is one important reason why this aspect of the city remains hidden whilst novelists face cultural taboos regarding revealing many negative aspects of city life.

Modernity is another recognisable urban feature with the modern lifestyle of the city imposing new practices, customs, habits, and cultures, which are also linked to the use of modern technology and devices. People follow the latest fashions in dressing and dining, they use modern designs in construction, education is freely available and there is a low rate of illiteracy. City dwellers are more open to the world and diverse cultures coexistent together; all these characteristics indicate the modernity of the Saudi city.

'*Adhra' al-Manfā* (al-Nassir, 1978,pp.35-36) depicts many different images of life in the Saudi city. When the protagonist Zāhir is invited to his manager's home for a work discussion and dinner, he stops his car next to a huge luxury villa, identical to the other houses on that street. Suddenly, a security guard emerges from the villa to open the door after verifying his identity and then takes him to a private section for guests. Another servant serves him Arab coffee, while Zāhir gazes at the Western design of the huge guest room with its luxurious green sofas with gold-plated edges and a massive expensive Turkish rug covering the floor. The ceiling is decorated with painted teak wood and crystal lamps. The room contains expensive occasional tables and landscape paintings; a vase of flowers, some small silver plates, gold-plated cups and a teapot are standing on the large central table. Next to the door there is a huge golden mirror and a glass bookshelf whilst the windows are draped with long curtains made of silk.

This scene describes the fashionable home of a wealthy Saudi at the beginning of the economic boom. Even though al-Mari (2006,p.150) claims that houses are regarded as closed places, this private space is wide open to different cultures, as seen in its decoration and furniture.

However, modernity is not limited to the lives of the upper class in Saudi society. *Safinat al-Dayā'* (al-Nassir, 1989,pp.116,117) also focuses on the lifestyle of the Saudi middle class in the city, and how it has been changed by the economic boom. This change is depicted in the description of the design of the house; the living room, the garden, curtains, paintings, dining table, and carpet, and the novel shows that the house has been decorated in the latest style.

Al-Nassir's novels do not focus on the working class who usually live in the inner city since their lifestyle has not been overly affected by social or economic changes:

houses resemble those in the village; the district has not laid out in the modern way. Inside the houses maintain the same features such as the guest room (al-Nassir, 1994,pp.12-30). The three social novels refer to some Saudi customs which have remained unchanged such as generosity, hospitality, and traditional entertainments such as Balūt<sup>39</sup> (al-Nassir, 1978,pp.12,29,37,99).

However, in general, change is one of the characteristic features of city life with Saudi society having experienced significant change following the discovery of oil. The Saudi social novel charts the beginnings of the extraction of crude oil and the huge impact which it has on the land and people. The protagonist of *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961,pp.240-241) explains to his friends about the black gold which had been found in the Saudi desert and how it will change the country. Specialised labour will be needed to develop the country and he longs to see the oilfields, refineries, and factories. He tells them that Saudi Arabia needs the efforts of its citizens, as the government will not be able to develop the country without active contributions from everyone. The discovery of oil is considered a major factor of change in Saudi life. The solitude of the desert disappears after many Saudi cities were established there, transforming the nature of the Saudi environment (al-Mahādīn, 2001,p.36).

Social relationships within the Saudi city setting appear to be weaker than those within the village. Thus, for example, the relationship between the protagonist of *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* and his father is changeable. In the village their relationship is strong relationship as the protagonist always obeys his father, whereas when he moves to the city this relationship becomes weaker as the protagonist starts to look for his complete independence, and consequently the relationship between them becomes more fraught. This weakening of personal links also occurs in novels such as *Ghuūm al-Kharīf*, specifically that of the husband-wife relationship, for example, as a result of certain social traditions; this example will be fully explored in Chapter Five.

In the Saudi social novel this change seems to be most pronounced in three key areas, challenging authority, religion, and tradition. With regards to authority,

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<sup>39</sup> It is a popular trick card game played in Saudi Arabia, which is similar to the French game Belote.

themes appear such as seeking personal freedom and human rights, increasing openness of the authorities to citizens and meeting their needs, and trying to get remove some of the social constraints that have limited development. Novels such as *'Adhra' al-Manfā* reflect the modern trends of the Saudi policy towards women being given more rights even though there is some opposition from parts of society towards this. In addition, freedom becomes a key theme in many social narrative works. Hiba, one of the major characters in *Dam al-Barā'a*, is a good example of this shift in power within society as she refuses to conform to social conventions, believing that everyone has the right to live as they wish to in keeping with their personal beliefs.

Urban life also has an impact on the protagonist of *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961,p.79), who loses his faith and becomes an unbeliever and rebel. Similarly, *Ghuūm al-Kharīf* describes the lives of two Saudi men abroad who are only interested in partying and chasing after girls, who forget their duties towards religion and have no time for prayer. Thus, city life radically changes the attitude of some characters towards their religion.

Other Saudi social customs and traditions are also seen to be challenged. In *Ghuūm al-Kharīf* the protagonist reflects on some negative social customs in Saudi society whilst living in Greece. One of these is the idea that walking next to one's sister or wife in an open place is viewed as a shameful act (al-Nassir, 1988,p.100).

### **6.5 The Relationship between City and Village**

Many novels depict the relationship between the city and the village as strained, complicated, and unstable. This is acknowledged in several studies about this topic; for example, Dīb (1989,p.126) noted this permanent village-city conflict in Saudi literature, especially in al-Nassir's novels. Al- Nu'mi (2009,p.62) claims that the urban-rural relationship represents the clash between modernity and tradition. Thus, the village is associated with the past and traditional values whilst the city represents the present and the future and modern values. According to al-Nassir (2009,p.87) this is only to be expected: "modernity has its own delicious taste and tradition has its strength, so the conflict between them is constant".

This relationship is seen clearly in Ibrahim al-Nassir's novels. The village embodies the past with its traditions, customs, habits, and architecture. In contrast, the city tries to get rid of some of these rural restrictions that limit the freedom of people due to the new lifestyle which accompanies rapid social development. However, the relationship between them appears to be a hostile one since villagers are perceived as being inferior to their urban counterparts as seen in *Ghuūm al-Kharīf* (al-Nassir, 1988,p.35) when Salmān jokingly tells the protagonist, "you're just a villager, you're worth nothing". His joke reveals the negative ideas in urban society about villagers who are considered to be uncivilised people.

As previously noted, some of the rural traditions, customs, and habits were imported to the city and adapted there, and vice versa. This mutual influence has been termed the *urbanisation of the rural* and the *ruralisation of the urban*.

### 6.5.1 Urbanisation of the Rural

The impact of urban lifestyles on the village way of life can be seen to affect many of its elements, including its appearance, social customs, and morals. The village in *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961,p.37) has some new services and facilities, such as paved roads and electricity, both of which are intended to end its isolation. There are some changes in lifestyle when some incomers arrive in the village, but many good moral values and customs persist in both societies, especially those which relate to religion and general human morality, including obedience to parents, visiting friends and the sick, helping others, and praying. Thus, the Saudi city does not obliterate the old traditions, customs, and habits, but appropriates the most useful ones.

The same novel (ibid.,p.30), shows the effects of the urbanization on the village. The villagers were accustomed to a simple lifestyle but when some urban citizens moved to this village electricity and roads were introduced:

على أن ماخسرته البلدة أشياء كثيرة لم ينظر إليها آنذاك بعين الجد والتعمق. ذلك أن تقاليدهم قد تراجعت خطوات كثيرة إلى الوراء. وحلت مكانها قيم ومثل جديدة أخذت في التقدم والزحف حتى أوشكت أن تكتسح الميدان وتبرز كواقع وحقيقة مسلم بها، فلم يعد مرأى فتاة حاسرة الوجه مثلًا طبعًا من عائلات الأقوام الوافدة-

ليثير في الأهلين التقزز الذي أعتادوه بل إن نساء تلك الأقوام قد دخلن ميدان العمل وأخذن يزاحمن الرجال في أرزاقهم ويمارسون عملهم تماما.

What the village lost at that time is great, and it was ignored by society. The old traditions receded, and they were replaced by new values and morals that have kept changing until it becomes a truly recognised fact. Seeing a woman in a foreign family without her veil repulses society. These foreign women enter the work field and they start to take men's jobs and do the same work as them.

The previous passage clarifies the main changes in rural society and the influence of the city on the village by the urban incomers. The traditional rural values are most affected and the narrative records the horrified feelings of the third-person narrator about the effects of this opening up to urban progress describes in terms of a 'loss'. Seeing a woman without her veil becomes as common in the village as in the city. In spite of this, these values and habits are not totally destroyed, but they went back according to this passage, and that demonstrates their strong resistance in rural society, so it becomes like a society inside another.

The Saudi social novel explores the difficulties of bringing change to such rural communities and the slow pace of process in areas which remain bastions of heritage. In spite of this, social transformation does affect rural society, as nothing is impossible. However, this new transformation has its price.

ولكن القاعدة تقول إن لكل شيء ثمنًا.. وثمان ذلك العصر الجديد أن يغير الأهلين الكثير من طبائع حياتهم التي ألفوها، فارتداء غالي الثياب وأثمنها وامتطاء أوفر العربات وأحدثها واقتناء أجمل الأثاث وأجوده جميعها مظاهر تتساق مع الوضع الجديد الذي وجدوا أنفسهم فجأة في أحضانه!!.

But as the saying goes everything has its price, and the price of this new era is that people change many of their lifestyle habits to which they were accustomed. Wearing the most expensive and valuable clothes, driving the most luxurious and modern vehicles, and acquiring the most beautiful and best furniture is all part of the new situation in which they suddenly find themselves.

The passage shows that the material changes in rural society are followed by changes in customs and habits. Villagers become materialistic, and are more

interested in consumerism to experience modern life. The passage also refers to an important element of the social transformation; its suddenness. Novelists usually focus on this aspect of change and exaggerate the pace of change in the social novel in comparison with reality.

### 6.5.2 Ruralisation of the City

The novel *Ra'shat al-Zil* (al-Nassir, 1994,p.13) shows how some areas in the capital city of Saudi Arabia inhabited by migrant workers and their families from the villages or beyond the border have become ruralised. Many of these are from the working class. The areas where they live have taken on some of the rural features even in the design of the place.

ومن ثم اتجها يسارا حيث أخبره أنهم يقطنون في هذه الحارة التي تسمى "معكال" وشدد عليه أن لاينسى هذا الاسم.. ومضيا يخوضان في أزقة ترايبية تناثرت فيها البرك الموحلة على جوانب المنازل الطينية التي تتشابه في تصميمها من طابق واحد من "اللين" عالية بعض الشيء.. قليلة النوافذ.. ذات أبواب خشبية أو معدنية مدهونة بألوان فاقعة بينما أكثر الجدران تركت بدون طلاء.

They [the protagonist and his brother] turned left, and then his brother told him that they live in this district, which is called 'al-Mi'kāz'. The brother stressed that he should not forget this name. They passed through dusty alleyways that had many puddles by the side of the adobe houses. These houses had almost the same design and they consisted of one floor, of above average height; few windows; and wooden or metal doors painted with bright colours, while most of the walls remain unpainted.

This short conversation exposes the characters' fear of the city which is known for being large and crowded. It is intimidating to first-time visitors, so he told his brother to memorise the name of the area. However, the scene gives an impression of *al-Mi'kāz* district as looking like a rural place and not part of the city. The dusty alleyways, adobe houses and the design of the district can be seen as a clear sign of a ruralised city as the description of this place evokes the village.

There are other signs indicating this ruralisation, such as the lifestyle of the characters in these areas, which is similar to that of the village. The novel,

*al-Ghajarā wa al-Thu'bān* (al-Nassir, 2008a,p.14), gives another example of the lifestyle in some areas of the city which makes it seem like a rural society:

ترجلا بالقرب من منزل عمه في المربع حيث يربض حي شعبي قديم أقيمت منازلها من الطين والقليل من الحجر.. كالحلة المنظر.. طليت بعض أعالي جدرانها بالجص الأبيض لتزيينها.. نوافذها عالية حتى لا يكتشف مداخلها ولتفادي دخول الغبار أثر الزوابع الفجائية التي تثار بدون مقدمات، فتشكل خيمة غبارية فوق سماء المدينة لعدة أيام فتجب الرؤية ثم تذر ذلك المسجوق الناعم الذي يعيش الأبرار ويحرق العيون التي يصاب أكثرها بالرمد قبل أنت تفرز الصديد فتخرج إلى حوانيت العطارين الذين يعرفون الأدوية، التي يمزجونها بأنواع من الأعشاب حيث أن العطارين بمثابة صيادلة الأحياء والمدن القديمة التي نساها التاريخ، وانسحبت عنها مكتشفات الحضارة ولم يعد بينهما أي اتصال فعلي.. ورغم وجود بعض القصور الخاصة في ذلك الحي فمازالت الحياة بسيطة فيه، فلم تستنكف أن تربط بعض الحيوانات قرب المنازل خاصة الحمير والبقر وبعض الماشية الأخرى و التي لا يستغنى عنها في حياتهم اليومية. ورغم أن الأطفال يجدون في هذا المشهد تسلية لهم عند ذهابهم إلى الدراسة أو العودة منها فانهم قلما يتعرضون لهذه الحيوانات بالأذى بل ربما يطعمونها مما معهم تقربا لها.

They walked near his uncle's house in the *al-Muraba'* district, which is in the inner city. Its houses are made of adobe and a few stones, and they are unsightly. Some of the upper parts of their walls are painted with white plaster for decoration. Their windows are set high to keep the household out of sight, and to prevent sudden dust storms from entering the house. These dust storms, which cover the city, last for days. They reduce visibility, harm the eyes, and cause conjunctivitis and discharge. People usually go to the herbalists, who prepare drugs by mixing different kinds of herbs. The herbalists are regarded like the pharmacists of the oldest inner city areas, which remain unconnected to modern culture. Although there are many private places, life is still simple, as livestock are kept near to the houses, especially donkeys, cows, and some other cattle, which are essential to their daily lives. Despite this, children find this sight entertaining on their way to school; they rarely harm them, and instead, offer them food to get closer.

The design of this place and the description of its lifestyle give the reader an impression of a rural society inside the city. The style of houses and roads, the use of traditional medicine which is popular there, the simplicity of life, and the



inhabitants' dependence on livestock for a living all help to create the stereotypical image of a village rather than a modern city. Even though this area is surrounded by many other modern districts it seems isolated from these and its habits resemble those of the village.

Ruralisation has a number of psychological, social, and economic components. It is a kind of compensation for missing village life, with the villagers who migrated to the cities attempting to recreate their own rural society inside the city, which, to a certain degree, resembles their former villages. These areas within the city help the rural migrants to cope with the culture shock of living in the city allowing them to maintain their rural lifestyle and privacy. According to some economic specialists, these parallel societies provide a solution for the villagers with very low incomes, who simply build their own low cost housing (al-Suhail, 2008).

However, there are tensions between the tradition of the village and the modernity of the city, with these opposing views locked in combat. Al-Majid (2002,pp.26-27) refers to the presence of modernity and tradition in many Saudi narrative works, including the works of al-Nassir and describes him as a pioneer in employing the theme of city vs. village in his short stories.

Al-Nassir also employs this theme in *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (1961) when describing the life of the protagonist as a kind of conflict with the monotony of the village, which prevents him from achieving his ambitions. The protagonist is torn between following tradition or espousing modernity. He criticises some issues in his rural society, such as the authority of the father which limits the freedom of the younger generation, the prevalence of superstition, the low level of education and the prevalence of illiteracy, but then his life in the city starts with a new conflict between new and old values, practices, habits, and customs, such as maintaining prayer times and the disrespect towards women's privacy in urban society.

The same conflict between modernity and tradition is also represented in *Dam al-Barā'a* (al-Nassir, 2001), which reveals the changes to long-held traditions in rural societies with regard to issues such as the oppression of women in marriage. Modernity vs. tradition as a theme is continued in *Ghuūm al-Kharīf* (al-Nassir, 1988), which describes the new urban lifestyle and the changes it brings to the lives of citizens such as reliance on servants who become a new part of the Saudi family

as parents become busier and economic prosperity distracts people from their families. This novel also shows the use of technology and the influence of Western culture on Saudi life. Additionally, learning foreign languages, especially English, has become a prerequisite for life in the city and his urban life forces the protagonist to be more open to other cultures. However, the narrator constantly contrasts between the modern and the traditional by evoking images of his former village existence in the mind of the protagonist who compares between them.

The conflict between the city and the village is chiefly related to a clash between modernity and tradition which is renewed with each new era: 'Abdullah ibn Qutiba (1958,p. 63/1) (an Arab critic of Classical Arabic literature) shows that what is modern today will become the tradition of tomorrow. Al-Majid (al-Majid, 2002,p. 29) points to a number of factors which have led to this violent conflict between village and city, such as the rapid transformations caused by the fast pace of industrial, and economic growth, but also globalisation, the development of the press, education, and other reasons which have contributed to this complex relationship.

## **6.6 Representing Space**

Two key issues are linked to the village vs. city theme in Saudi narrative discourse, namely, rural migration and urban alienation, and both feature prominently in al-Nassir's novels, even though some studies fail to acknowledge this, such as al-Jasim (1999).

### **6.6.1 Internal migration**

Saudi Arabia has witnessed a very high rate of migration from the village into cities over the last seven decades. An urbanisation rate of 74% has weakened the agricultural sector which rural exodus has affected the demographics of the population. Internal migration is a selective process, limited by the availability of employment and income, so most of those who leave rural areas are educated, meaning that rural society loses its most talented members. Another reason for migration is the improved provision of social services, such as education and health, in addition to modern lifestyle, entertainment and facilities (al-Sakrān and Munīr, 2006).

Thus, migration has changed the demographic structure of both rural and urban societies and in her study al-Majid (2002,p. 32) argues that it is one of the most important issues in Saudi narrative discourse reflecting what can be considered one of the most noticeable transformations in Saudi society.

In al-Nassir's novels the desire for a new life is the main motivation for migration. 'Issā, the protagonist of *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961,pp. 5, 8), dreams of migrating to what he thought of as a legendary city. Bored and frustrated in the village, he longs to move to the city, where life will be more exciting. The hope of a job forces the protagonist of *Ra'shat al-Zil* (al-Nassir, 1994,p.11) and his brother to migrate to the city. Education is another reason for migrating:

إن هذه المدينة يابني معروفة بفجور أهلها منذ قديم الزمن ولم يرغبني على الانتقال إليها إلا حرصي على أن تتألوا التعليم الذي يرفع رؤسنا جميعا.

The people in the city have no morals, and that has been known for a long time. The only thing that forces me to move to there is to provide you with a good education. I will be proud of you when you gain educational qualifications (al-Nassir, 1961,p.141).

Even though villagers know about the risks of the city, this father chooses to move there so that his children will receive a good education. During his time in the city, the protagonist of *Ra'shat al-Zil* (al-Nassir, 1994,p.147) also becomes more interested in gaining more knowledge. When his manager notices his strong desire for knowledge, he employs him as a librarian after he worked as a guard.

Like other writers of Saudi social novels al-Nassir shows reverse migration, from the city to the village. Economic recovery and the availability of electricity and other important facilities in the village can entice migrants to return after spending many years in the city. Usually these characters are older people who want to spend their remaining years in their birthplace, a social phenomenon represented in *Ra'shat al-Zil*.

Sālim, one of the main characters in this novel has lived in the city for a long time. After finding a job, he then resumed his education with the help of his employer. Eventually, he decided to go back to his village but after experiencing prosperity in the city, he finds his opinions about it have changed and it looks miserable. The

protagonist also explores the major changes in Salīm's life after his departure and what he will face when he returns to his village.

إنني أتخيله يمر عبر الأزقة المتربة والموحلة بتأفف وربما بتقزز. سوف يتضجر للبون الشاسع بين واقع المدينة والريف. بين الحياة المترفة والشقية. وأن كانت مابين معقدة وبسيطة. وحتى أرضهم الزراعية مهما كان اتساعها فسوف يراها حقلا صغيرا يحفل بالحشرات والجراثيم. بضعة صناديق من كل صنف في العام يستهلكها سكان القصر في أسابيع قليلة، تأتي في صناديق وأوعية معقمة من مختلف أنحاء العالم وعليها ملصقات ملونه تضاعف شهيتك لتناولها. أما في أراضيهم والغبار يشكل غيمة في الأفق تحجب الرؤيا فسوف ترى الديدان تحوم حول المحاصيل أوفي داخلها فتعافها النفس. ترى العمال بأسمالهم البالية وأقدامهم الغائصة بالأوحال تحمل تلك المنتجات وهم يحكون ظهورهم من الأوساخ وربما بسبب القمل الذي يعيش بين طيات ثيابهم القذرة بالإضافة إلى مرأى أظافرهم الطويلة وقد استقر ما بين الجلد والأظافر نوع أسود من الغناء يبعث على الغثيان. سوف يعود للنوم على حصيرة أو حشية ملبدة بالقنب والتبن فيحس بأضلاعه تتحشر أو تنبعج وتقلبه فوقها يجعله يستيقظ. وربما وجد حشرة أو أكثر تتسبق ثيابه أو تطن في أذنه إن لم تكن قد نجحت في قرصه فعلا وامتصت من دمه. هذا إذا لم تصبه بالعدوى فينتفخ وجهه أو أذنه بعد نذ. وأرجو أن لا يصاب بالهلع إذا ماتقيح الجرح أو تفسخ لأنه لا يوجد مستوصف إلا على مسافة عشرات الكيلو مترات كما أن المواصلات شاقة وواسطة النقل أكثر تعاسة.

I can imagine him walking wearily through the dusty and muddy alleyways. He will complain about the huge difference between the reality of city prosperity and village poverty, even though city life is complex and village life is simple. However big it is he will see his farm as small and full of insects and microbes. Here, inhabitants on a weekly basis consume many boxes of hygienic, delicious vegetables and fruit, which come from all over the world. In contrast, on his farm, where the dust obscures the vision, the crops are worm-ridden. He will see the farmers wearing dirty clothes with their feet caked in mud from carrying the crops. He will also see their long, filthy nails. He will sleep again on a wooden pallet or an old mattress stuffed with straw, and his ribs will ache. Turning over on this old mattress will wake him repeatedly. He might find an insect or more in his bed; he might be exposed to biting insects, and the problem becomes more serious if he develops an infection from this. If the infection is dangerous, he would need to travel a long way to get medication, due

to the long distance between the village and the hospital, and the poor transportation available (ibid.,pp.94-95).

This passage shows the mindset of the village returnee after he has lived in the city. His vision about the place is totally changed: before the village used to be his paradise, now it has become hell, as there are huge differences between both societies. There is no doubt that he will experience a clash between the values of the village and those of the city which he acquired during his life there. Thus, he will need to try to adjust again to his original life. Reverse migration will have an impact on rural society, as those villagers who left will not return with the same mindset but will bring back the habits, practices, and ideas they learned in the city. The villager who returns will not be the same as the villager who left which may lead to a rapprochement between the two societies.

### **6.6.2 Alienation**

In al-Nassir's novels, the rapid transformations of the city provoke a sense of alienation. The protagonist of *Ra'shat al-Zil* (ibid.,p.77) misses his life in the village with his family and always feels alone in the large, bustling city. He often stares at the tall walls which surrounded the villa where he used to work and thinks of it as a jail. However, this feeling of alienation exists in both urban and rural societies. Many events set in the village reflect this. For example, in the opening line of *Dam al-Barā'a* (al-Nassir, 2001,p.3) the protagonist regards his life there as being one of alienation, a feeling that is also reflected in the life of the protagonist of *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961,p.8) who constantly dreams about moving to the city. The novel describes the villagers and their daily life in the village thus: "People here live a long day as strangers and they have no ideas why their destinies led them to this particular place and not to another".

Life in the village follows long-established customs, practices, and traditions which do not fit the modern mindset and aspirations, especially those of the members of the young generation who, as *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (ibid.,p.9) shows, do not know which path to follow, the traditional or the modern, so they have an unclear vision that generates alienation. The city is associated with instability, with life there constantly changing until it generates a sense of alienation in citizens. Al-Nassir's protagonist experiences this sense of double alienation, reflecting the opinion of

Gaston Bachelard concerning our relationship with space: “when we live in a manor house we dream of a cottage, and when we live in a cottage we dream of a palace” (1994,p.63).

Al-Nassir’s personal feelings on this issue are made clear in the title of his autobiography *Ghurbat al-Makān* (Alienation of Place) and reflected in his writing, especially through his protagonists, who all experience this feeling. In his study about the protagonist in al-Nassir’s novels, al-Jasim (1999,p.63) refers to alienation as one of the distinguishing traits of al-Nassir’s protagonists. In fact, although alienation could be considered one of the hallmarks of this author’s works to date it has been largely neglected in most literary studies of al-Nassir, suggesting the need for further exploration of this theme in his works.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

In spite of the claim by some that, as a literary form, the novel is only linked to the city, the village appears as an important theme in Saudi narrative discourse. Al-Nassir is regarded as the first Saudi novelist to depict the village in his narrative works, bringing new life to a space which has generally been neglected in the novel. The village is presented as a force for maintaining the cultural heritage of Saudi society.

It is clear from the varying depictions of the village in Saudi narrative discourse that images of rural society are characterised by several features. The village is described as an isolated society, even though social relationships are tight-knit there and life retains its simplicity. The social novel represents the three key aspects of the village mindset: long-established traditions, religion, and the tribe. Saudi novelists do not usually glorify the village, instead leveling many criticisms at it for being bound by tradition.

Complexity, modernity, openness, and a lack of close social relationship characterize representations of the city in Saudi novels which highlight the negative aspects of urban life, even though Saudi cities are viewed as less sinful than their western counterparts. The different social classes in the Saudi city are represented, some embracing aspects of modern civilisation whilst others still live with the rural mindset. Social relationships in the city are less tightly knit than in rural

communities. Moreover, urban challenges to authority, religion, and tradition mean that the city is embodied in the Saudi novel as a revolutionary place: the Arab Spring was an urban phenomenon.

The relationship between city and village in the narrative text appears destabilised by rapid social transformations and al-Nassir employs this theme to represent the clash between tradition and modernity. His novels show that constant change brings rapid development to the city whilst the pace of change is much more gradual in rural society. The events in al-Nassir's novels are affected by these rapid and gradual changes so the development of the events is slower in the rural society than in the city.

The urbanisation of the village and the ruralisation of the city also make an appearance in Saudi narrative discourse and their mutual influence is explored, as too are the important phenomena of internal migration and alienation. The high levels of internal migration have played a major role in changing the demographics of Saudi social, with the majority of Saudis now leading an urban lifestyle, a transformation wrought by the project of King 'Abdu al-'Aziz to encourage the settlement of the previously nomadic desert Bedouin. Reverse migration also plays a role in this transformation, as the migrants return to the village carrying the knowledge they gained in the modern city, meaning they no longer return as the villagers they left, but as individuals who have accumulated a wealth of experience from their time in the city. Al-Nassir's work also shows that the feeling of alienation is not limited to those who live in the city but is also felt by village dwellers.

## **Chapter 7: Narrativising Family Relationships**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Social relationships in Saudi society are often regulated by customs and traditions, some of which are related to Islamic *Shari'a*, while others are linked to the dominant social norms that have become established in the mindset of the community, forming a culture that is passed from generation to generation. However, the form and composition of social relationships can also be affected by agents of change, including economic, historical, political, intellectual, and social factors.

Thus, this chapter examines the social transformations which have occurred within the Saudi family and their impact on close family relationships as depicted in al-Nassir's novels. As previously noted, social novels depict different types of family relationships, some of which are still controlled by long-established social customs, whilst others have been shaped by the conditions of the modern era and are more appropriate to contemporary lifestyles. This chapter will begin by discussing the representation of traditional and more modern-style marriage, identifying the most significant changes which have taken place in social customs as a result of social transformation, using this to understand the basis of relationships within the Saudi family, in particular those between husband and wife.

The second part of this chapter will shed light on the relationships between parents and children by comparing the representations of the traditional and the modern images of this relationship in the Saudi social novel. The generation gap will also be addressed in this chapter exploring those important factors that led to the widening of this rift. Finally, the chapter will show how status of children has faced some changes due to women's new role in Saudi society. This chapter will focus purely on al-Nassir's novels as a case study, use concepts from Social Studies to provide a greater understanding of the nature of family relationships in light of the rapid social transformations.

Saudi society, which has been transformed from a tribal system to a civil state, has witnessed many changes in social relations amongst its members. Whether husbands



and wives, or parents and children. This civil state is based on a number of fundamental elements, including the religious creed of Islam, the people's loyalty to their ruler, the land, and the language; however, tribal thought is still evident in Saudi society, and it continues to dominate some aspects of Saudi social relationships due to the fact that "the hereditary leaders of important Bedouin tribes and several merchant families have wielded political influence in the Kingdom since its establishment" (Metz and Library of Congress. Federal Research Division., 1993,p.11), which has affected the composition of Saudi society. Furthermore, Saudi tribes still represent the largest proportion of the community. This influence will be demonstrated by examining the stable and changing social relations in Saudi society.

## **7.2 Marriage**

Like any other social relationship, marriage has been transformed by development and cultural change. Concepts that have changed include the characteristics of the groom and bride and the nature of the husband-wife relationship. Some former social customs concerning this relationship have become unacceptable, while other are still fixed in the mindset of society and the Saudi social novels have been at the forefront of presenting some problematic social issues in the conservative society of Saudi Arabia. This section on marriage is divided into two sections. The first describes some modern and traditional social customs concerning engagement, while the second section sheds light on the relationships between husband and wife.

### **7.2.1 Engagement and Marriage Customs**

Customs regarding engagement and marriage in Saudi Arabia have undergone many transformations. There have always been slight regional variations depending on the traditions of particular Saudi tribes and clans.<sup>40</sup> Despite the many changes in aspects of life in Saudi Arabia, as the study by al-Khatīb (al-Khatīb, 2010,p.11) shows, the traditional arranged marriage is still the one most commonly adopted in the

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<sup>40</sup> In Saudi Arabia, a tribe consists of large numbers of relatives who are related to the same lineage, functioning as "a loose association of people who recognise that they are related to each other by kinship". JORDAN, A. T. 2011. *The Making of a Modern Kingdom: Globalization and Change in Saudi Arabia* USA, Waveland Press, Inc. p. 65.

Kingdom.<sup>41</sup> This type of marriage is often discussed in Saudi social novels to show how it can impact negatively on family relationships. The story of Shikh 'Uthmān's daughter (al-Nassir, 1961,pp,142-143), who escaped with her lover to an undisclosed location, depicts a protagonist who was originally critical of this girl's behaviour and then tried to understand the background of this situation to find the reason for this. He concludes that if the girl's family had showed some understanding of her feelings and tried to deal with them positively, she would not have fled. She believed she could not express her feelings of love in front of her family, as this is regarded as taboo and unacceptable, so the protagonist felt sympathy for her and blamed social attitudes which do not fit with "the new lifestyle", as he calls it. The novel supports the girl's behaviour when confronted by long-established social restrictions and her refusal to be at the mercy of these customs.

*Safinat al-Dayā'* (al-Nassir, 1989,pp.42-44) also provides a negative image of an arranged marriage, involving an older husband and a beautiful young wife. The young woman had no option of turning down this marriage, as her family forced her to obey their decision. The couple's relationship was based on social duty, with no sign of love between them. The husband admitted to himself that he had wronged the young woman, as he still grieved for his first wife. Nevertheless, al-Nassir's novels attempt to represent this type of arranged marriage as wrong, calling for society to be freed from these long-established social restrictions which contravene the nature of modern life and human rights.

Even though the majority of the Saudis still believe in arranged marriage, a large number of marriages are preceded by courtship (al-Khatīb, 2010,p.11) which represents a change in marriage customs after years of depending on traditional arranged marriage. The Saudi novel identifies the new type of marriage and indirectly refers to the elements which create this type of relationship. The rapid social transformation that is now being seen in Saudi society is regarded as being connected to the changing needs of the new generation, who refuse to be controlled by long-established social traditions.

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<sup>41</sup> The arranged marriage is the traditional style of marriage wherein the groom's family seeks a suitable bride for their son chosen from the same family or tribe.

The emergence of more openness within Saudi society and the adoption of new technology by the younger generation, such as mobile phones and other communication platforms, are considered to be some of the most important elements that have led to the creation of this new phenomenon in Arab society:

The changing needs of youth in MENA are affected by what happens inside and outside the region. The global economy—with its power to reach across national boundaries and into the smallest communities—has brought a new dimension that profoundly affects the life of young people in the region. Today, satellite dishes on rooftops bringing worldwide broadcasts into people's homes are a common feature of MENA's urban landscapes and are rapidly expanding to rural areas. Internet use is also growing fast and quickly changing the lives of youth—further widening the generation gap between young people and their parents and decision-makers (Assaad and Roudi-Fahimi, 2007).

In addition, the lack of gender segregation in some workplaces within sectors such as health and media provides a suitable environment for men and women to connect socially, as in the case of 'Issāand 'Abīr in *Safīnat al-Ḍayā*, working together in a hospital, or Zāhir and Buthaina in *'Adhra' al-Manfā*, who work together at a newspaper. Saudi social novels often depict the impact of such working environments and how they have led to the formation of a new understanding of husband-wife relations in Saudi Arabia.

*'Adhra' al-Manfā* illustrates in great detail how new technology and the working environment play a central role in creating the personal relationship between the characters Zāhir and Buthaina, working together in a newspaper office. After working together in the presence of Buthaina's father, the editor-in-chief, they begin to feel a sense of mutual admiration. The narrative depicts this affection when they meet by describing the language of their eyes, the secret feelings inside each character, and their way of talking and dressing as if they were attending a special occasion rather than working. The narrative context also succeeds in depicting the emotional feelings that begin to surface in every meeting. Originally Zāhir and Buthaina feel a little nervous at their first professional meeting in Buthaina's family home.

كانت الفتاة تسير إلى جانب أبيها رشيقة خفيفة الحركة. وأنصب زاهر و مد يده المرتعشة وابتسامة شاحبة تطل من وجهه المسحوق بالخجل ومع ذلك فقد ركز على وجه الفتاة.

- زاهر: فرصة سعيدة يا آنسة.

وصافح سمعه صوت ناعم ذا جرس موسيقي.

- بثينة: شكرا. (قالت ذلك وهي تسحب يدها بسرعة من يده).

وكانت الفتاة تضع على وجهها حجابا خفيفا يكشف عن تقاطيع وجه دقيقة وبشرة خميرية. بينما أرتدت فستانا بنفسجيا طويلا فوقه معطف زيتي فاخر، وصدرها الناهد يتقدمها بشموخ وثمرمة عقد ماسي ثمين يتدلى من جيدها العاجي وخاتم مرصع بالزمرد يلمع في بنصرها الأيمن. و فاح عبير ضواغ من بين أعطافها المشدودة، وكانت عينان جريئتان تبرق من وراء النقاب الشفاف، وجلست إلى جانب أبيها على أريكة محاذية لمقعده.

The girl walked by her father's side with a light dainty step. Zāhir stood up, stretching out his shaking hand, a pale smile flickering across his face, overwhelmed with shyness. Nevertheless, he focused his attention on the girl's face.

- Zāhir: A pleasure to meet you, miss.

He heard a melodious voice with a musical ring in response.

- Buthaina: Thank you. (She quickly withdrew her hand from his as she spoke).

The girl wore a transparent veil through which her delicate features and dark-coloured complexion could be discerned. She wore a long violet dress underneath an extravagant olive-coloured coat. Her full bosom protruded proudly, an expensive diamond necklace hung around her ivory neck, and an emerald ring shone on her right ring finger. A fragrant scent emanated from her firm body, and her confident eyes shone behind her transparent veil. She sat down on a couch beside her father's seat (al-Nassir, 1978,p.38).

Their first work meeting, which is slightly formal, reflects their initial emotional impression of each other surrounded by a slight nervousness. This is conveyed through several details, including Zāhir's face reflecting his shyness, and Buthaina's act of quickly pulling her hand away after the handshake and sitting next to her father. However, the passage also represents a new and unusual level of freedom

inside a conservative society, even though it involves work. The novel prepares for this relationship to be more understandable and acceptable to the reader by choosing suitable characters for this role. Thus, the father and his daughter are from a rich, very well-educated family, and both have studied abroad. Moreover, the protagonist is also a very well-educated individual who believes in the principle of women's rights. Al-Nassir was also careful to choose Hijāz as the setting for the novel as this region has a more open society than any other region in Saudi Arabia. The new reality of modern life has also forced the community to accept this kind of interaction between males and females.

The narrative clearly shows the characters' increasing affection towards each other in a subsequent meeting between Zāhir and Buthaina in the presence of her father:

ولم يحتاج اللقاء إلى رسميات كالتي سبقته [...] كان الأب قد سرح مع خواطره المنثالة، لعله يتخيل تحقق نهضة نسائية حقيقة كي يقرن اسمه فيما بعد بها باعتباره أول من أسهم في تحريك تلك الطاقات الجبارة. في حين طبق الشابان - زاهر وبثينة- يتحدثان عن الرسائل الاجتماعية عبر التاريخ الحضاري، وتأثيرها على المجتمعات البشرية ليصلا في نهاية مطافهما إلى الحديث عن الصحيفة.

وكان المساء قد حل، وحزم النور تتلمس طريقها هاربة عبر الكوى والزجاج. فتحرك زاهر مستأذنا يبغى الانصراف، بيد أن الأستاذ حمزة سعيد ألح بأن يشاركهم العشاء، إنها ليلة الاحتفال بنجاح صفحة المرأة بعد ميلادها. وكان بعضا من جهده [...] بل أنها تمت بصلة بينه وبين بثينة. ولم تكن هي مرتاحة لانصرافه، بل لزممت الصمت، ثم فجرت سكوتها حين أعلنت بأن لديها بعض المواد الخاصة بالصفحة. مما يقتضي مطالعتها من قبلهم جميعا. فكان ذلك تحريضا صارحا لأن ينكص زاهر ويجد من العذر ما يتيح بقائه. [...] ورننت ببصرها نحو زاهر. هذا الشاب الذي يبدو عليه السهوم والاستغراق. في التفكير. ترى بم يفكر؟ هل يتراءى له المستقبل من خلال حياتها معه.

The meeting required no formalities like the previous one [...]. Her father's attention had wandered off with his free-flowing thoughts. Perhaps he was imagining the achievement of a real feminine renaissance to which he could subsequently link his name on the grounds that he had been one of the first to mobilise its mighty forces. Meanwhile, the two young people – Zāhir and Buthaina – chatted about forms of social communication throughout human history and its effect on society, and their conversation finally led them to talk about the newspaper.

Evening had fallen, and lights could be seen in the small glass panes of the windows. Zāhir moved to take his leave, but Ḥamza Sa'īd insisted that he join them for supper, as that evening they were celebrating the success of the women's page following its launch, and he had contributed to this success [. . .] it had actually been accomplished by the relationship between him and Buthaina. She was upset at the prospect of his departure and remained silent, and then broke her silence by announcing that she had some articles for the page that they all needed to read. This encouraged Zāhir to change his mind and find an excuse to stay [....]. She turned her gaze towards Zāhir, who seemed to her like a worried young man, lost in thought. Of what was he thinking? Was he imagining a future in which she would share his life? (ibid.,pp.58-59).

This passage shows the mutual love between Zāhir and Buthaina, even though her father's presence gives Zāhir no chance to voice his feelings to her. Her father's dream, as the passage shows, is to raise the profile of women's role in society, and consequently, he takes a great step toward women's liberation by allowing his daughter to communicate with men and to choose her way in life.

Technology plays a role in consolidating this relationship through the regular phone conversations they begin to have. Even though the purpose of these calls is to discuss work matters, there are signs of romantic involvement in their conversation:

- صباح الخير يا أستاذ زاهر.
- صباح النور. من يزهم؟ (كان قد حدس ولكنه أراد التأكد).
- بثينة. بثينة حمزة سعيد. صوتي تغير عليك في التلفون وإلا.
- فقاطعها وقلبه يخفق بشدة حتى كاد أن يتلعثم: أنا آسف يا أنسة بثينة. وياكابنتتنا الكبيرة. بس المفاجأة جعلتني غيبا و إلا أنا غيب أصلا.
- وأنسابت إلى سماعه ضحكة مغردة.
- بالعكس يا أستاذ. أنت أذكى من عرفت. إنما يظهر أنك لم تعتد أن تتلقى مكالمات من الجنس الآخر.
- فقال في نفسه: ما هذا الإطراء. ثم أهي تمتحنه؟.
- فرد قائلا: فعلا هذا صحيح. كيف حالك؟.

- الحمد لله. وأنت؟

- كماتحيين. (بخير)

[...] ورق صوتها وهي تودعه قائلة: آسفة إن كنت أضعت بعض وقتك؟

- فرد بسرعة: بالعكس يا أنسة. فأنا سعيد هذا اليوم سعادة قد لاتتصورينها فشكرا على تفتك بي.

- طيب مع السلامة.

- فرد: في أمان الله.

وتصلبت يده على الهاتف وقد أكتسى وجهه بالاحمرار ونبض قلبه يتسارع.

- Good morning, who's calling? (He had guessed intuitively, but he wanted to be sure).

- Buthaina. Buthaina Ḥamza Sa'īd. Does my voice sound different to you on the phone, or...?

(He interrupted her, his heart pounding so hard it almost caused him to stammer.)

- I am sorry, Miss Buthaina, our team leader. The surprise has made me dumb, or maybe I was dumb to start with.

(A sing-song laugh floated to his ear).

- Not at all, sir. You are one of the smartest people I have met. But it seems you're not used to receiving calls from the opposite sex.

(He thought to himself, *what a compliment, or is she testing me?*)

- He responded: Actually, that's true. How are you?

- Well, thank God. And you?

- Fine.

[...] Her voice grew tender as she bade him farewell, saying: I'm sorry, have I wasted your time?

- He answered quickly: Not at all, miss. I am happier than you can imagine today, so thanks for your confidence in me.

- Alright, bye-bye.

- Goodbye, he responded. His hand froze on the receiver, his face flushed and his pulse raced (ibid.,pp.80-81).

Gender segregation leads to this kind of reaction, as the protagonist is unable to tell her how he feels but modern communications helps to narrow the gap between them. This love between Zāhir and Buthaina eventually leads them to marry, as they both refuse to follow the usual traditions regarding arranged marriage. Zāhir 's family are against his relationship with Buthaina, who is disliked by his mother (ibid.,pp.33-35, 93). The fact they are both well-educated helps them to overcome these problems and to break with tradition, as they believe that independence is necessary to make this decision.

The novel reveals the new generation's attempt to break with the tradition of arranged marriage by building a suitable path for independence in their crucial decisions, which represents a clear change to Saudi customs.

Many studies have analysed the attempts of Saudi youth to become more independent from their family in regard to making key decisions, especially in terms of marriage and education. A recent survey, conducted with 3,150 young men and women between the ages of fifteen and 29 from various areas of Saudi Arabia, examined the concerns, problems, and aspirations of young Saudis who are seeking to become more independent from the traditional social custom of family control. The study mentions changes in Saudi society that have led to this desire for independence, including viewing the traditional role of the family as a kind of obstacle in their efforts to achieve their personal ambitions (al-'Arābi, 2005).

The Saudi social novel and this study reflect this shift in marital relationships away from the traditional arranged marriage and the change in the mindset of Saudi youth, as evidenced by their attempts to be more independent in their decision-making and overcome the pressures traditionally imposed by their parents.

Family background, however, still plays an important role in marriage, as the Saudi novel suggests. Traditionally Saudi society confined social relationships to the members of the tribe, making it custom to marry a man or woman with a known ancestry although marriage sometimes extended to members of other well-known tribes or families. Despite the unification of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Bedouin settlement project in the urban, rural, and *Hijar* areas, which generally facilitated the transformation from a tribal society to one that is more open to other



cultures and civilisations, the involvement of parents is still required when contracting marriage in Saudi society.

*Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961,p.16) sheds light on this social necessity. It describes the hard life of al-Mawlā Maḥfūz, a secondary character, who was not allowed to marry:

تلك نقطة الضعف في منهاج المولى محفوظ اليومي. المنهاج الذي لا يستطيع تغييره أو تبديله، إذ كيف يستطيع الاستدلال على شجرته المقطوعة، فيكون أسرة تجعله يسكن بيتا خاصا ليس مكشوفاً وعماماً كالمسجد. ثم لا يضطر فيما بعد أن يتبول كالكلاب الضالة في مبنى مهجور.

That is the weak point in the daily routine of al-Mawlā Maḥfūz, the Sheikh's teaching assistant at the Quran memorisation school. It is a routine he can neither alter nor replace, for how can he locate his severed family tree, start his own family, and dwell in a home that is private and not open to everyone like a mosque, so that he would not have to urinate in a deserted building like a stray dog?

This quotation reveals the miserable existence of al-Mawla Maḥfūz, who is forced by social custom to remain single, has been robbed of his right to start a family, and cannot change his social status due to his unknown parentage. So, the only option is for him to marry a woman from a similar background.

Saudi society follows Islamic teachings, a religion which does not differentiate between Arab and non-Arab, or black and white, as many of the Quranic verses and Ḥadith explain. For example:

O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has *At-Taqwā* [i.e. he is one of the *Muttaqīn* (the pious, see V.2: 2)]. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware (Fakhry, 1997, Verse 49:13).

Comparing Islamic teaching, which stresses equality between all levels of society, with the reality of Saudi society in dealing with the issue of marriage, it becomes clear that Saudi Arabia is sometimes torn between two directions: one influenced by *Sharī'a* and the other by social customs. Although the Islamic view preaches against

discrimination, Saudi society follows social customs which are clearly at odds with this religious view. Many scholars and writers have observed the apparent contradiction in Saudi social behaviour in cases such as this one.

Al-Khshibān (2010) comments on the conflict that arises between social and religious customs in the Kingdom, arguing that society wrongly believes that many values, customs, and traditions form part of their religion, and that it is necessary to correct these misunderstandings and differentiate between social customs and religion. Another Arab researcher, Khalid al-Jabur (2007), stated:

We see in our society that there are some customs and traditions that are totally inconsistent with the provisions of religion, which means religious rule is easier and lighter than that of the customs and traditions. The religious rule is also more open, while customs and tradition are more closed.

Focusing on the subject of marriage and social customs, the Saudi novel reveals the disparities between the members of society, even though these groups may respectfully and peacefully coexist in many other ways, sharing each other's joys and sorrows and dealing commercially with each other; however, Saudis, especially those who come from the most well-known tribes and families, seldom neglect the requirement for knowing someone's ancestry. Highlighting these issues in Saudi narrative discourse not only reveals this social problem but also demonstrates that society is still pulled in two opposing directions.

'*Adhra*' *al-Manfā*, which was written after the novel quoted above, illustrates another shift from arranged marriages originally founded on family background which has occurred due to economic factors. The standard of living has recently become a criterion for the acceptance or rejection of a marriage proposal. In this novel, the protagonist Zāhir decides to marry Buthaina, whom he loves, but knows that she will find it difficult to accept his marriage proposal due to his standard of living.

لقد أحب بئينة مافي ذلك شك. فالزواج إذن غاية كل حب عفيف و منتهاه، فلماذا لا يختتم قصة حبه بالزواج قبل فوات الأوان؟ و فطن إلى ناحية شائكة، فكف تفاؤله. لقد نسي الفارق الاجتماعي. إنه شاب فقير معدم، رأسماله قلم هزيل وتشجيع مشكوك في اخلاصة. لقد ذاق حياة الكدح البائسة.

He was in love with Buthaina and there was no doubt about that.

Since marriage is the purpose and ultimate outcome of every pure

love, why should he not conclude his love story by getting married before it was too late? However, he recalled a thorny issue, and his optimism disappeared. He had forgotten about the social gap between them. He was a poor, penniless young man, whose only asset was his writing skills, for which he received encouragement that might not be sincere. He had experienced the misery of a life of drudgery (al-Nassir, 1978,p. 84).

The narrative context reflects the impact of economic factors on marriage decisions in Saudi society since they can form an obstacle to getting married. The protagonist realises that community traditions have changed; wealth has now become the new norm required for proposing marriage. The novel examines the protagonist's belief that the standard of living has become an important marriage concern in Saudi society. It also records the reaction of the girl's relatives who come to her father to dissuade him, as narrated by Buthaina:

فمنذ أسبوعين مضيا كانوا ثلة في غرفة الاستقبال يتكلمون بصوت مرتفع، إنهم أعمامي و أخوالي جاؤا إلى أبي ليزجون أنفسهم في مسألة لاتعني أحدا سواي. كان الاختطاف من دأبهم، فهرعوا لاختطاف مصيري. وأتفق أنني كنت أناول الخادم أدوات الشاي حين أرهنت السمع لأعلم مايدور في الحجرة المغلقة. فلم يكن من دأب أبي أن يخفي علينا شيئا بيد أن الفضول دفعني لإستبق الزمن. وبلغني صوته هادرا بلهجة غاضبة:

- هذا موضوع يخصني وحدي ولا أسمح لأي كان بالتدخل فيه. ثم أن الشاب لايعيبه شي. الرجال لايحط من قدرهم أو يرفعه مايملكونه من نقد و عقار.
  - وسمعت الرد المتوسل: ولكنك أصبحت من الأعيان يا أستاذ، عليك أن تصاهر من هو في مستواك وإلا فججا أولى بلحم ثوره.
  - رد الأستاذ عليهم: لا أملك أبقارا في هذا المنزل، وبثينة وحيدتي في الدنيا.
- وندت عني شهقة قوية وارتعش جسمي برمته وكدت أصرخ: أخرجوا أيها الوحوش الأدمية.

A couple of weeks ago, a group of people were in the living room talking loudly. It consisted of my paternal and maternal uncles, who had visited my father to get involved in an issue that was my concern and no one else's. They were used to seizing what didn't belong to them, and they had rushed to seize my fate. It so happened that I was handing the servant the teacups when I began eavesdropping to find out what was going on behind closed doors.

My father was not in the habit of keeping things from us, but I was prompted by my curiosity to find out right away.

- I heard him shouting angrily: “That is my business alone, and I will not allow anyone to interfere. Also, there is nothing wrong with the young man. A man’s worth is not enhanced or diminished by how much money and property he owns”.
- I heard the pleading response: “But sir, you have become a prominent individual, and you must choose a son-in-law whose social standing matches your own, besides, Juḥa is more deserving of his own bull’s flesh” (an Arabic idiom, meaning relatives have priority).
- He responded, “I own no cows in this house, and Buthaina is my only child”.
- I gasped loudly, and my whole body shook. I almost screamed, *Get out of here, you human monsters!* (ibid.,p.87).

This passage reveals a tense conflict between Buthaina’s relatives who emphasise social standing as the prerequisite for marriage, and the father who believes in the right of his daughter to choose her own husband. The dialogue also illustrates the impact of education, reflected in the father’s refusal to view his daughter as an asset comparable to livestock. He does not see a difference in social standing as a reason to prevent her marrying a young man who has impressed him with his educated and ambitious personality.

When he fails to be convinced about the issue of social difference, the relatives of Buthaina’s father also try to pressurize him by reminding him of the traditional marriage custom that give priority to blood relations, but their efforts do not succeed in persuading him as he staunchly defends the rights of his daughter. This argument between two different mindsets reveals the continuing conflict between ancestral customs and the newer ideas that seek to overcome such traditional concerns within society.

The Saudi social novel also refers to another social change which has led many young Saudis to delay marriage until a later age, due to the impact of factors such as education and economic factors. Before the economic boom, the age of marriage in Saudi society was linked to the age of puberty, being set at twelve to sixteen

years old for females, and sixteen to twenty for males. However, females now tend to marry between the ages of 19 and 25, and males between the ages of 23 and 28 (al-Gharīb, 2009):

Delaying the age of marriage is an Arab social phenomenon that is emerging as a result of various social, economic, cultural and psychological factors. These factors differ in their impacts on the family system as a whole, as well as its related systems, such as the system of marriage, the method of choosing a partner, and the age of marriage. In fact, delaying the age of marriage is considered to be a problematic phenomenon in Saudi society (al-Muṭiri, 2009,p.15).

Aware of these social changes, Zāhir (al-Nassir, 1978,p. 84) believes that gaining a higher level of education will ensure a better and more secure future for him; thus, he did not think about marriage until he had finished his studies:

لقد كانت أمنيته أن يحصل على شهادة عالية في الصحافة، ومثل هذا المؤهل سيمهد أمامه أفق المستقبل، انه الان في ربيع العمر، وبوسعه أن يحقق أحلامه قبل أن يرتبط بمسؤوليات تثقل كاهله. إنه بعد عام أو أكثر بقليل – فيما لوتزوج- سينجب، وهذا وحده يكفي لأن يزرع في طريقه عقبات لاحصر لها. وحين فكر بالأبناء أرتبك فتناقل في خطواته.

His cherished wish was to earn a university degree in journalism. Such a qualification would pave the way towards better future prospects. He was young and could achieve his dreams before becoming weighed down by responsibilities. However, in one year or perhaps a little longer – if he were to get married – he would become a father. That alone would be enough to plant innumerable obstacles in his path. Thoughts of having children overwhelmed him, and his footsteps grew heavy.

The novel refers to the awareness of Saudis about the importance of education, which becomes a social necessity to ensure a better future; thus, Zāhir sees marriage as a possible barrier between him and his dream of gaining a high level of education as it entails multiple responsibilities. The desire of many young Saudis to continue their education has played a role in raising the age of marriage. According to al-Gharīb's study (2009), 54.7% of Saudi university students prefer to continue their

education rather than get married, and 58.7% believe that the responsibilities of marriage are obstacle problem. Economic prosperity in Saudi Arabia has impacted on many aspects of life, including marriage, pushing up the cost of dowries and weddings, which have become a form of social prestige.

The Saudi social novel explores how the impact of economic factors has become an obstacle to marriage for members of the working class. *'Adhra' al-Manfā* (al-Nassir, 1978,p.50) describes the life of Jarrah, one of the main characters, who dreams of marriage, but the rising cost of living and his responsibilities towards his large family, which includes his disabled father, his father's three wives, and his brother and two sisters, make achieving his aim more difficult, as he has to save a large amount of money to hope to marry in the next fifty years.

Al-Muṭiri's study (2009,p.70) about the delayed age of marriage in Saudi society refers to economic factors as a major contributor to delaying marriage. These include the rise in dowry costs, the high cost of wedding parties, the rising cost of living, the complexity of life, and the inability to afford an independent house for the married couple. Al-Muṭiri views this delay in marrying as a social problem, whereas al-Gharīb considers it a normal trend (al-Gharīb, 2009).

### **7.2.2 The Relationship between Husband and Wife**

The relationship between husband and wife in contemporary Saudi society is in a state of turmoil, due in part to the rapid social transformations that have altered the traditional roles that Saudi women used to play before the economic boom, and also to the declining role of men within the family. The continuing increase in divorce rates in Saudi society is a clear indication of this instability. According to the annual statistics issued by the Saudi Ministry of Justice, in 2011 there were a total of 34,722 divorce cases, meaning one divorce case every 27 minutes, as opposed to only 145,079 marriages in the same year (Wzārat al-'Adil fi al-Mamlaka al-'Arabia al-Su'ūdiya, 2011).

Divorce cases have been given significant attention by Saudi novelists. Some of al-Nassir's novels focus on aspects of the nature of the relationship between husband and wife in the light of recent social changes. His novels examine different social changes and the changes in the status of women which are regarded as the main reason for increasing divorce rates in Saudi society.

The relationship between women and men in the Arab world forms the core of *'Adhra' al-Manfā*. The novel examines social attitude towards educated women and the extent to which the community has really changed; it also considers the extent to which society accepts these transformations ('Abu Niḍāl, 2006,p.109). The relationship between Zāhir and Buthaina gets off to a good start, as both are very well educated, and they understand each other perfectly, the narrative context emphasizing the harmonious way of their relationship. As the context shows, Zāhir is very keen on the idea of women's liberation and Buthaina is represented as a free woman inside a conservative society. However, the novel shows there are many differences between them, such as the level of education of their respective families. Buthaina and her family have all been educated abroad, whereas Zāhir is the only very well-educated person in his family. There is also a huge gap in terms of class between the two families as Zāhir comes from the working class, whereas Buthaina is from the upper class. These differences in background create a conflict between them which eventually ends in divorce. A recent study (ibid.,pp.109-110) shows that although Zāhir believes in women's freedom in theory, in practice he still clings on to old customs, so Buthaina comes up against the complex elements of long-established Saudi social traditions. According to the study, the novel represents an important period in the history of Saudi society during its transformation from tradition to modernity, when people felt caught between two sets of values. Thus, the cultural shift and economic growth of societies must be accompanied by a parallel change in the mindset of people who live there.

Different social backgrounds and social changes especially in the status of women also play an active role in breaking up the marriage in *Ḥitān al-Rīḥ*. The marriage between the protagonist and his young wife in this novel is based on "love and fear" (al-Nassir, 2008g,p.20), an older man's love for a young woman, and fear of people's negative opinion and stifling social restrictions. The protagonist (ibid.,p.22) believes that love transcends differences in social classes or age. The novel portrays a marriage affected by society's shift towards a capitalist lifestyle and the failure of the protagonist's opinions concerning the basis for a married relationship.

Al-Nassir's novels devote attention to the changing dynamics of the husband-wife relationship, with this relationship taking a different form in each of his novels. In his first novel, *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (1961,pp.11-14, 24, 61), al-Ḥāj 'Ammār and his wife have a normal, traditional relationship. Her role as wife is to look after her husband and children, feed them, and do the housework. Her husband, who is

usually busy with his job, tries to help his wife in raising their children by bringing home his salary.

The relationship between them revolves around their children, and there is no sign of anything romantic in the relationship; the novel shows how al-Hāj 'Ammār belittles his wife when their son is punished in school for not having done his homework:

ولما رأى زوجته أمامه خاطبها قائلاً: انظري إلى ابنك البليد الذي تطرين في توقد ذكائه. أتريدين شهادة أكبر على غبائه من رجليه المتورمتين من أثر الفلكة؟ اللعنة عليك من امرأة جاهلة. ولاذ عيسى بأمه يحتمي بها من شر يوشك أن ينزل به. إلا أن أباه لم يدعه في مأمنه فقد أمتدت إليه يده الغاضبة وانتزعتته وهو يهدر قائلاً: تعال يا ابن الكلبة. وشيعت الأم ابنها وقلبها يكاد ينخلع من الخوف ولم تكن تملك سوى أن تتم داعية بأن يبعد البلاء عن ابنها من شر هذه الغضبة المحمومة.

When he saw his wife before him, he said to her: Look at your dim-witted son, whose intelligence you keep praising. Look at how swollen his feet are from the beating. What more evidence of his stupidity do you need? God curse you, what an ignorant woman you are!

'Issā hid behind his mother to protect himself from the disaster that was about to befall him. But his father would not let him be. He grabbed him angrily from his refuge, shouting, *Come here, you son of a b...* His mother's heart pounded with fear as she let go of him. All she could do was mutter some prayers for the protection of her son against such fury (ibid.,p.12).

This episode illustrates the violence which Arab men meted out to their wives who are unable to defend themselves. As father, he denies any responsibility for educating his own children. In addition, it is clear from this novel that as husband, he is considered to be the authority in the house, whilst his wife has to follow his orders, for "The father is the one who holds the reins of absolute power, whether he is right or wrong" (al-'Inazi, 2010,p.70). Thus, the wife appears to play a marginal role in the family, living in the shadow of her husband. This novel, which is al-Nassir's longest work, reflects the social reality of the traditional status of woman in Arab society and their marginal role in the family, focusing only on the life of the male protagonist in his family and the role of his father. As wife and mother, the



female character plays no role in the decision-making, as the “women occupy an inferior status in this system” (ibid.,p.70).

The wife’s status in relation to her husband seems to be similar in other Arab countries. Su’ād al-‘Inazi (ibid.), in her study of depictions of violence in the contemporary novel, mentions two major reasons for this inferior status of Arab women. Firstly, they live under the control of traditional Arab culture, and they also live under the pressure of fundamentalist Islamic beliefs, which view women as slaves who must provide food and sex, completely neglecting their intellectual development.

Suhaila Zine al-‘Abidīn (2012), a human rights activist in Saudi Arabia, says that violence against women is a global phenomenon and is not confined to Saudi society. The phenomenon is a product of ancient social customs and the misinterpretation of religious teachings. However, this phenomenon also stems from women themselves accepting this kind of violence from men. Due to their status, women in the past were not as educated as men and used to be almost totally confined to the home, and the illiteracy of Arab women contributed greatly to the emergence of this phenomenon, as they were unable to learn about their rights. This phenomenon will gradually disappear in modern societies when women are given their full rights.

Another traditional husband and wife relationship is depicted in *Ghuūm al-Kharīf* which portrays how the wife feels unable to express her love for her husband due to her modesty and shyness as a result of social conditioning, which leads to a kind of emotional drought in their relationship. This in turn drives the protagonist to search for love by cheating on his wife with a prostitute while travelling outside the country on a business trip. The following dialogue (al-Nassir, 1988,p. 59) between the husband and wife reveals this relationship:

ورن الهاتف في منزله.

- البطل: كيف صحة نورة؟.
- الحمدلله تحسنت كثيرا. متى تعود؟.
- مازلت مشغولا.
- الجميع في شوق إليك. (الحياء منعها أن تقول أنا وبناتك في شوق إليك )
- سوف أعود إن شاء الله قريبا. أكل شيء على مايرام؟.

- نحمد الله. نحن في انتظارك.
- البطل: مع السلامة.

His home phone rang.

- Protagonist: How is Noura's condition?
- Thank God, she is a lot better. When will you be back?
- I'm still busy.
- Everyone misses you. (Her modesty prevented her from saying "my daughters and I miss you").
- I'll be back soon, God willing. Is everything okay?
- Yes, thank God. We're waiting for you.
- Protagonist: Bye-bye.

The novel shows the formality and lack of emotion expressed in this dialogue between the husband and the wife. The third-person narrator implies that the wife is hiding her true emotions from her husband due to her shyness, as social custom demands in Saudi culture; however, this complicates the relationship between them. Traveling from one country to another, the protagonist uses this opportunity to experience relationship with other women, unlike his reserved wife.

A poll by 'Okāz newspaper assessing the views of some sociologists on this issue suggests a number of reasons for the lack of emotion in relationships. Khalid al-Dūs (2013), a sociologist, refers to the rapid economic, social, and cultural transformations being witnessed in Saudi society, whereas another sociologist, Khalid 'Umar (2013), points to the different intellectual levels of partners. This appears to be the reason for the lack of feelings between the protagonist of *Ghuūm al-Kharīf* (al-Nassir, 1988,p.26) and his wife, since she is unable to understand the importance of his business projects or trips.

The protagonist has been influenced by his regular travels to developed countries and becomes more open to their culture and ideas. Therefore, it is not surprising that he criticises his conservative society. However, *Ghuūm al-Kharīf* attempts to give the reader insight into other reasons for this lack of closeness in their relationship as the context shows, since the protagonist blames the traditions and customs of his own society. He asked himself, "Who can walk next to his wife in a mall without feeling embarrassed?" (ibid.,p.55).

According to tradition, the woman's place is in the home and formerly in Saudi society women were not allowed to leave the domestic sphere. On the rare occasions that a wife did leave the home, traditionally her husband would not walk next to her, as a sign that she was subordinate to him. Shopping for pleasure was taken to indicate that she was neglecting her duties towards the family, and everybody would know who she was if her husband was walking next to her. In the public sphere, women might experience sexual harassment, which could have ended her married life, even if she was not guilty.

There is no doubt that the character of the desert environment is reflected in that of the Saudi man; the rugged wilderness of the desert has shaped the personality of the Saudi man who needed to develop toughness. Modern city life, however, has made him more responsive to social changes, as is the case with Faliḥ in *Ra'shat al-Zil*. Coming from a small desert community, he became more attracted to the urban lifestyle until he finally decided to settle there, not wishing to return to the desert. Although the Saudi male mindset is now changing, the traditional role enforced by social norms and customs created problems in husband-wife relationships.

The Saudi social novel reflects some of the positive transformations which have taken place in the nature of this relationship. *'Adhra' al-Manfā* (al-Nassir, 1978, pp.87, 95-102), which was written during the Saudi economic boom, as the actions of the characters indicate, shows a kind of intimacy between Zāhir as husband and the wife, Buthaina, both of whom are educated. Their relation is infused with love, understanding, and harmony. Images of this intimacy appear in many places throughout the novel. Although their marriage ends in divorce, the secret of this deep relationship between them lies in the fact that both are educated and able to share the decision-making and respectfully accept each other's views. Their level of education makes the couple better able to adapt to the modern life which requires active sharing between them.

Therefore, the more educated women are, the less they are willing to put up with violence; men and women understand their rights and roles in contemporary civilian life and are aware of the changing nature of their roles in society. This novel reveals a new awareness for the nature of the male-female relationship in modern society and shows the attempts to change conventional concepts concerning this relationship.

It may be noted that, over the course of time, the relationship between husband and wife becomes more open. A novel such as *Hijān al-Rīh* depicts a marriage based on openness, understanding, and happiness, even though this relationship ends in divorce. The husband is very open in expressing his feelings towards his wife (al-Nassir, 2008g, pp.20,62) as is she towards him (ibid., pp.102,144). This type of modern relationship is found in *al-Ghajarīa wa al-Thu'bān* (al-Nassir, 2008a, p.53) which depicts a Saudi wife who is not embarrassed about expressing her feelings towards her husband.

أنت لاتنام بسرعة فماالذي يشغل قلبك؟  
 أجب: متى جاءني النوم أستسلمت له. ولايشغلني سوى العمل.  
 تساءلت: عسى أن لا يكون عقلك يفكر بامرأة أخرى؟  
 أجب: أنا لأفكر بالنساء مطلقاً.  
 قالت: وهؤلاء اللاتي يتحدثن معك بالتلفون ألسن نساء؟  
 رد بسرعة: نامي ولا تتعيني بهذه الأحاديث المكررة.  
 قالت: أنت تعرف محبتي لك. واستعدادي لقتل من ينافسك علي.  
 ضحك فقال: أعرف أنك مجنونة. إنما نامي وتعوذي من الشيطان.

- You're taking a while to fall asleep. What's on your mind?
- He answered: When I get sleepy, I'll fall asleep. Nothing is worrying me except work.
- She asked: Perhaps you're thinking about another woman?  
He answered: I don't think about women at all.
- She said: What about all the ones who call you? Aren't they women?
- He answered quickly: Go to sleep and don't bother me with your usual chatter.
- She said: You know how much I love and how I would be ready to kill anyone competing with me for you.
- He laughed and said: I know that you're mad. Just go to sleep and put such devilish thoughts out of your mind.

It is clear from this dialogue that the relationship between husband and wife is more open. The wife feels free to express her feelings of love and jealousy to her husband, who answers her questions gently and diplomatically. As with the previous relationship, these transformations indicate that Saudis have begun to realise that

things have changed in the modern era and to accept this new way of life, letting go of those old customs that are out of touch with the Zeitgeist.

The Saudi social novel depicts some husband-wife relationships where there are differences in terms of age or mindset. Interestingly, all of these relationships ultimately fail because of the obvious differences between the couple such as in *Hitān al-Rīh*, which depicts a married relationship between Jabir, an elderly Saudi man from the middle class, and ʿItir, a young Egyptian girl from the lower class. Although they differ in terms of age and social background, their relationship is based on mutual love and loyalty but the inequalities between them ultimately bring the relationship to an end. The greed of his wife's family also plays a role in ending this honest relationship, as they frequently try to get money from Jabir. His wife is powerless to stop her family, because she cannot challenge their orders, which she considers binding by social tradition.

Traditionally the relationship between a husband and wife in Saudi society has ultimately been based on the need to produce offspring as a condition for the continuation of the relationship. According to al-Nassir, this “occurs in the most primitive societies” (al-Nassir, 1994,p.66), and a wife who cannot get pregnant becomes uncertain about her fate, as her husband is likely to marry someone else. However, the educated viewpoint on this issue is totally different. Zāhir in *ʿAdhraʿ al-Manfā* (al-Nassir, 1978,84), represents the attitude of Saudi intellectuals, by refusing this kind of relationship. As al-Nassir suggests in all of his novels, the relationship between husband and wife should be built on love above all else.

### **7.3 Parent-Child Relationships**

The Saudi social novel pays close attention to the changing nature of the relationship between parents and children in Saudi society. Generally speaking, children are born without any experience, knowledge, or idea about how to behave, so they receive their first lessons in social and interpersonal relations from their family in general, and their parents in particular, who contribute to the formation of their personality (Ḥalawa, 2011,p.73). In addition, the relationship between parents and children is affected by the environment in which the family lives.

This relationship has experienced many changes as a result of economic, political, intellectual, and social factors. The economic prosperity experienced by Saudi

society, the advancement of globalisation and technology, the education system, and the impact of the media have all impacted positively or negatively on the nature of this relationship. A number of studies have noted the rapid impact of some of these factors on parent-child relationships:

The exposure of Saudi youth to ever more diverse experiences, ranging from the Internet and satellite television to a more secular education system, leads to a perception, shared by their parents, that externally driven change is becoming faster and more uncontrolled (Yamani, 2000,p.56).

### **7.3.1 The Status of Children in Saudi society**

In traditional societies the son occupies an important position in the family as he considered as the second authority after his father. 'Issā in *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* is the eldest son in his family, which gives him a high position in his family meaning he has authority over his brothers and sisters who have to obey him (al-Nassir, 1961,p.10). The novel explains why the son is given this authority inside the traditional family, since he is regarded as the one who will take over the father's responsibilities towards the family as breadwinner (ibid.,p.43).

Even though the protagonist of *Ghuūm al-Kharīf* has three daughters, he dreams about having a son, as he himself is an only child, so the family line will stop if he does not have a boy; the protagonist is also concerned about who will inherit all his money when he dies (al-Nassir, 1988,p.81)? This traditional mindset indicates the high position of boys compared to girls within the Saudi family, with the son bearing the burden of providing income for the family and guaranteeing the continued existence of the family line.

The Saudi social novel does not show the traditional role of girls in the family except for her daily role in cleaning the home and preparing the food (al-Nassir, 1978,p.25). However, a novel such as *Dam al-Barā'a* shows the struggle faced by some female characters such as Mūḍī, who tries to be more powerful inside her society by playing a new more socially active role. Moreover, the Saudi social novel shows the status of the daughter in the modern Saudi family such as Buthaina, who has the same status as a son inside her family, as she is their only child. Buthaina's father is very proud of his daughter, and he believes in her choices, so she has the

freedom to do what she wants. Buthaina's status indicates a new social role for Saudi women, which is no longer confined to just house work and reproduction.

### **7.3.2 Traditional Relationships**

Traditional relationships between parents and children are based on the absolute dependency of children on their parents although "the family still provides the main reference point for the new generation's identity formation" (ibid.,p.57). The Saudi social novel shows how some families have maintained this traditional type of relationship. *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* depicts children who follow the orders of their family. Sa'īd, the protagonist's brother, (al-Nassir, 1961,p.54) follows in his father's steps, and tries to be like him even in his way of speaking or behaving, making him the favourite child. As previously noted, the name Sa'īd means *happy*, and choosing this name for this character suggests that the child who conforms the tradition usually receives special treatment and a position inside the family that ensures him happiness.

*'Adhra' al-Manfā* (al-Nassir, 1978,p.25) also depicts a traditional relationship. The protagonist's sister, Hudā, represents the traditional daughter, as she always follows her mother's advice and tries to be like her in taking on the traditional responsibility for the family, which is limited to housework. As a traditional daughter she is represented without great aspirations, as her social duty does not extend beyond the walls of the house.

As previously noted, the protagonists in al-Nassir's novels are not involved in this type of relationship, but seem to rebel against tradition, within the family in particular and in society in general. However, these images which reflect the traditional relationship between parents and children are based on total dependency, and can contribute to the creation of stereotyped characters in society, which could slow down the process of positive social transformation.

### **7.3.3 Modern Relationships**

The Saudi social novel presents some modern relationships between parents who deal with their children in keeping with the needs of the modern era, especially the needs of the younger generation. *'Adhra' al-Manfā* reflects a modern relationship between Buthaina and her father. Both are very well educated, which makes them more able to understand the complexities of modern life, so they get on well

together and they seem more harmonious. Buthaina's father gives his daughter the freedom to live as she wants, so she opts to attempt to break into the man's world by working in a community which was previously limited only to men. Working in the media field requires openness towards the other gender, which would have been impossible in a conservative society. In spite of that, her father supports her to work with men.

The novel shows a modern father who can understand and read the mind of the young generation. This understanding is presented, for example, through his dealing with the ideas of Zāhir and Buthaina, when he comments, "be sure that I support your generation's ideas, although I am older" (ibid.,p.42). This shows the modern attitude of Buthaina's father towards his child in not imposing his opinions on his daughter, which leads to building a good relationship between them both. Moreover, he did not force his daughter to marry someone like some more traditional fathers do, and he refused any intervention from his family in choosing her husband, believing it to be her personal choice(ibid.,pp.87-90).

Buthaina's mother (ibid.,p.68) has a similar approach to dealing with her daughter and as the novel shows, their relationship is solid as reflected in the following passage.

كانت بثينة تعلم بمدى محبة أمها و حرصها على إدخال السرور إلى قلبها العامر بالطموح. وقد جربت حين كانت ببيروت عدم مضايقتها اطلاقا فقد سمحت لها بأن تتجول بحرية مع صويحباتها، كما أنها لم تمنع في أن تتعلم قيادة العربات، وتقوم برحلات بحرية .. وبالإجمال فقد مارست بعض الأعمال بمفردها حتى اعتادت في الاعتماد على نفسها.

Buthaina knew the extent of the mother's love and care for her, and her mother was keen to bring happiness to her ambitious heart. She tried her mother, who had not bothered her at all when they were in Beirut; she allowed her to roam freely with her friends, and she had not prevented her from learning to drive a car and or going on a cruise. In general, she did many things alone until she became accustomed to relying on herself.

This passage shows a kind of intellectual compatibility between the daughter and her mother, who gives her total freedom as long she is doing the right things, meaning this relationship did not generate any conflict between them. Buthaina is in conflict



only with her community, which attempts to limit her social role and freedom by imposing its traditional customs which are no longer suited to modern life.

#### **7.3.4 The Generation Gap**

The generation gap is an issue which constantly reoccurs, as each generation has its own aspirations and ambitions, and each era has its own environment and conditions. The rapid pace of social change has served to widen this gap, so some changes are reflections of this relationship. However, with the multiple transformations being witnessed in Saudi society, there has been a kind of dilemma and complexity in the relationship between parents and children. A recent study concerning the transformation in Saudi society (Yamani, 2000,p.57) claims that “the generation gap is widening and in a more bewildering way than the change that took place between the grandparents’ and the parents’ generation”.

The Saudi social novel highlights some issues related to the generation gap, such as what parents and children need from each other, what is the most important factor in determining the parent-child relationship, given that the parents’ era was very different to that of their children. The answer to this important question can be found by re-reading some of al-Nassir’s novels in light of this generational split.

*Thuqbun fi Rida’ al-Layl* presents a traditional father who can be described as behaving in a dictatorial fashion with his children due to his deep-seated fear for his children and their futures. Times have changed as the protagonist’s grandfather said (al-Nassir, 1961,p.112), but the father still employs the same traditional method of dealing with his children. The novel presents many images that encapsulate the father’s style in dealing with his children as he believes that the new generation is full of idiots (ibid.,pp.21-13). In addition, he always uses beating and shouting as ways of forcing his children to behave (ibid.,pp.11,46).

The novel also shows a conflict between the authority of the parents and the children’s desire to be more independent in their decision-making. *Thuqbun fi Rida’ al-Layl* (ibid.,pp.59,66) describes an argument between a father and a son; he attempts to persuade his son to join him in business, whilst his son only wants to study literature. Although ‘Issā fears his father, his father always insists that his son has the right to make decisions to determine his own future. The novel (ibid.,p.56) also shows that ‘Issā does not want to rely on his father’s high social position,

suggesting that the younger generation wants to rely on itself to achieve self-realisation.

A recent study of the identity of Saudi society (Yamani, 2000,p.55) which focuses on the traditional social system showed that “many of the older interviewees obtained degrees similar to those of their fathers in the hope of joining the family business or taking up a similar career”. This option is rejected by the protagonist of *Thuqbun fi Rida’ al-Layl* who wants the freedom to make his own decisions. Thus, some traditional parents expect complete obedience from their children, deciding their future, like under the traditional family system. The father in this novel seems to be a guardian of the old traditions, ensuring these are maintained with respect to his children’s lives.

Conflict in the parent-children relationship is evident in *‘Adhra’ al-Manfā*. Zāhir’s family tries to fix traditional customs in his mind, but he refuses any intervention from his family in his personal or professional life. The long-established social habits and customs which are fixed in the mindset of his family do not allow him to work with females, as it is considered shameful. His mother says, “what will people say when they know about you working with a girl?” (al-Nassir, 1978,p.24). Zāhir tries to explain to his parents that working with a woman will not harm his reputation, and that women work with men, but they are not convinced by his answer.

The difference in educational level between the parents and their son also has an impact on the relationship between them. He tries to change their opinion about him working with a female, saying that it is not a problem as long as the relation is a strictly professional one. In contrast, the novel shows his sister’s sympathy with his situation, as she understands about social transformation and the subsequent conflict between new and old customs, even if she herself remains under the control of the old traditions (ibid.,p.33).

The Saudi social novel addresses some of the young generation’s problems in light of the rapid social transformations. *Thuqbun fi Rida’ al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961,p.9) focuses on the relationship between a father and his son ‘Issā, who experiences a major contrast between the old and modern social values. ‘Issā feels that what he learns from his parents is different from the reality which he experiences outside of the home:

أحس بنفسه ذات يوم يعيش في بحر متلاطم من المتناقضات. بحر يخوضه بكل وجدانه ومشاعره. ففي الخارج، خارج البيت حيث المجتمع الكبير. مجتمع المدرسة و الشارع والسوق تجد أن المرونة تبيح أموراً كثيرة رفضها هو وغيره في البداية ثم أستسلم لها مرغماً لأن الواقع يفرض عليه أموراً يرى فيها المجتمع الصغير (البيت) كبائر ومحرمات.

One day, he felt as if he was living in a sea of ranging contradictions, passing through all his affection and emotions. Outside of his home was the larger community that included the school, the street, and the market, where there was great flexibility that permitted many things that he and others have rejected, and then he gave up, unwillingly, because reality imposed many things that his own small community (his home) considered heinous sins and taboos.

This passage shows the huge differences between tradition and the contemporary reality. This clash between the customs and traditions which the son acquires from his parents at home and the world outside the home leads to problems for the new generation who find it difficult to reconcile what they are taught with what they see in reality. This conflict has a negative impact on the relationship between parents and children at the level of trust, and leads to the younger generation feeling that they are being pulled in two opposing directions.

The son explains that the incompatibility between the customs he has acquired from his parents at home and the social reality outside is a brand new problem for his generation:

وأطلق موكب شببية تلك الفئة المغتربة يشق طريقه على سفايد الحذر و الاحتراز. مبلبل الفكر مزعزع الثقة وكان موقفها جد دقيق إذ أنها لاتدري أنتجه إلى أهلها في محافظتهم و تزمتم المتشدد أم تنطلق مع تيار المجتمع الفسيح. وقد تحلل إلى درجة الارتباك من التقاليد. على أن جذور التشنة المحافظة التي تشربوها صغاراً قبل أن تتفتح مدارك الوعي فيهم مازالت تثقل الانطلاقة المتحررة من القيود المحافظة.

The procession of the youth of the expatriates took off, walking on ropes of caution and watchfulness with disturbed thoughts and uncertainty amidst a serious complex situation. Should they follow their conservative families with their extensive strictness, or should they run free in the open flow of the community? They have reached a point where they are falling into confusion with

regard to traditions. The roots of their own upbringing that nourished them as children before their conscience bloomed still bind them in heavy chains of traditionalism unable to seek liberty (ibid.,p.9).

This passage describes the unsteady progress of the younger generation towards modern life. It also highlights the desires of young people during this time of transition to leave behind the restrictive habits and customs once followed within society. The passage, tacitly, indicates that this generation are aware that due to transformations in society inherited customs are no longer valid for their era in which the world has become a small global village.

The Saudi social novel shows a father's attempt to understand the aspirations of his child in order to modify his conduct towards his children. 'Issā's father (ibid.,pp.12-13), who is illiterate, becomes very angry when he sees that his son was punished for carelessness by the teacher. He wants to hit his son, but after he calms down, he goes to the teacher to find out more about his son's problem and asks the teacher if there is another way to teach instead of beating. The father realises that his method of dealing with his son is wrong, and that he has to correct his method of parenting. 'Issā's grandfather (ibid.,p.112) clearly realises –better than his son – the huge gap between the generations. He tells his grandson, “But your life – the children of this era – is completely unlike ours. Moreover, the community where you live is different from that we lived in ourselves”.

The generation gap, as the Saudi social novel shows, is not only produced as a result of the conflict between old and modern traditions. The economic boom in Saudi Arabia has impacted on this relationship, so both Saudi parents find work to provide a higher standard of living for their children. Thus, parents play a less direct role due to their reliance on foreign labourers such as housekeepers, nannies, drivers, and chefs, relinquishing many responsibilities to these servants, especially those regarding the upbringing of their children.

Recent statistics from the Ministry of Labour in Saudi Arabia show that the number of servants who entered Saudi Arabia in 2011 was 647,796 people and the estimated total number of foreign workers of various kinds in Saudi Arabia is about 9.2 million, including irregular labourers who illegally stay in the country without permission. In other words, Saudi society consists of about 33% foreign labourers

(Wzārat al- 'Amal fi al-Mamlaka al- 'Arabia al-Su'ūdiya, 2011,p.52). These figures raise several important points.

Firstly, cultural conflict exists inside Saudi society between Saudi cultural values and beliefs of the Kingdom's citizens and the foreign cultures of its immigrant labourers. In addition, these figures show the ability of Saudi society to coexist with many other cultures; however, the existence of such a high proportion of servants could threaten Saudi family relationships. A recent study by Khalid al-Zakri (2003) shows the negative impact of servants on the parent-children relationship, with children becoming more attached to their nannies than to their parents, which affects children's mother tongue and their cultural identity, especially since the great majority of servants have a very low level of education.

In *Ghuūm al-Kharīf*, al-Nassir (1988,p.20-21) focuses on this issue. The protagonist, Muḥaisin, who is a businessman, used to travel a lot and does not care about his family, leaving his deputy look after his family during his long business trip. Over the course of the narrative it becomes clear that the protagonist relies entirely on his agent to take care of his family. The novel describes three phone calls on different days from his wife who is asking about him and when he will return; however, Muḥaisin does not even call to ask about his sick daughter, who misses him. His wife is also busy with her new life as a mother who cares mostly about travelling and following fashion:

ودخل عنصر جديد إلى المنزل. أخذ على عاتقه - بعد تدريبه- تنفيذ الرحلات اليومية المقررة ما بين المدارس إلى البيت ثم إلى السوق فزيارة الأقارب و الأصدقاء. ثم بالتدريج شراء لوازم البيت من خبز و لبن ثم الخضار و الفاكهة وحتى ابتياع الذبائح. وهذا مادفع محيسن إلى التساؤل: (من أصبح أكثر أهمية في المنزل. السائق أم أنا؟) [...] لقد ألقينا مسؤولية المنزل على السائقين كما أن الأمهات تخلين عن مسؤولياتهن للخدمات.

A new man entered the home. He takes upon himself – after he has been trained – the implementation of the daily scheduled duties, going from home to the school and then the market, and afterwards he takes the family to visit relatives and friends. Then gradually he starts to supply the home with bread, milk, vegetables, fruit, and meat. This status pushes Muḥaisin to wonder (who is becoming most important, the driver or me?) [...] We have placed all the responsibility of the house on our

drivers. Furthermore, mothers have handed their household responsibilities to maids. Thus, a fair equality has been achieved in the home environment. But we will see the consequences of this foreign condition that starts with gibberish (ibid.,p.74).

The third-person narrator depicts the parents' abandonment of their responsibilities towards their children. The servants gradually start to take over these responsibilities in the home so that the father sees his roles diminish whilst that of the servants grows ever more important. By ignoring their social duties towards their children and overly relying on the servants, as a result of economic prosperity, the parent-child relationship becomes less close. The text also reveals the father's fear of this transformation in their lives.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

Al-Nassir's novels present many changes in interpersonal and family relationships. The family, which is regarded as the principal institution in any society, has witnessed many transformations in the relationships amongst its members. These are a natural reaction to the multiple changes experienced in the wider community. As shown, the narrative characters are not isolated from the impact of these social transformations. Some traditional values have been replaced by more modern ones. In the case of marriage, family lineage is no longer a guarantee for getting married, as some families now require a groom with a prestigious social standing and a strong financial status. The social novel shows how some characters rebel against this idea, believing that love and intellectual compatibility between a husband and wife is more important than anything else. Moreover, the younger generation has rejected some of the old marriage customs, such as arranged or forced marriage, and they also refuse any family intervention in determining their future partners.

Saudi narrative discourse illustrates two types of husband-wife relationships. The first is the traditional image of the relationship which lacks any emotional basis, in which there is no active cooperation between the two parties. The other one, the modern image of the relationship, seems more harmonious and understanding. The relationships between parents and their children seem complicated due to the huge generation gap. There has always been tension between the generations but the

recent rapid transformations have made this issue more noticeable until it has become one of the most important elements of parent-child relationship. Al-Nassir's protagonists struggle in particular against some of the long-established social customs which limit their freedoms and aspirations, so they try to break free of their reliance on their family in order to gain their independence. Moreover, the novels suggest a slight shift in the mindset of society, as al-Nassir provides an image of the modern family which does not distinguish between the two genders, whereas traditionally, sons would have been more highly prized than daughters.

## **Chapter 8: Narrativising Gender: Representation of Women**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The Saudi social novel pays close attention to women as a theme, reviewing and discussing many issues that relate to them. This chapter aims to demonstrate the status and role of Saudi women in light of the social changes represented in al-Nassir's fiction. The chapter will examine the representation of women in al-Nassir's novels and the reason for this interest in women's issues. Two important topics are discussed in this chapter through al-Nassir's novels. The first is the Women's Liberation Movement, which has an impact on some of the characters in al-Nassir's fiction; the second is the Islamic view of women and how this has been misinterpreted. Al-Nassir's novels provide three different images of women which reflect the changing status of Saudi women.

### **8.2 The Literary Representation of Women's Changing Role**

Since the unification of the Saudi state, the status of Saudi women has represented a major challenge within the Kingdom since it has long been underdeveloped due to their relatively lack entry into education. There has been much opposition to women's education from certain parts of society, mostly based on a form of strict religious doctrine, which led to the spread of ignorance and illiteracy. In addition, women were constrained by numerous social restrictions that contributed to the decline of their social role; however, these obstacles did not stop women from performing various roles in society, as this chapter shows.

Much debate still exists about the factors that led to the marked decline in the social role of women, which was reflected in narrative text. BuShusha bin Jum'a (1999,p.643) refers to adherence to traditional customs as the main factor leading to the prevalence of the traditional behaviour of Arab women:

This type of woman is connected to the traditional mindset in terms of its mythical and metaphysical bias. It is also connected to the inherited habits and customs which they imitate. This model is the



product of a strict conservative society which restricts women through prohibitions that deny her knowledge. [...] The model is related to the older generation who had no chance to obtain education due to colonialism. The female who used to be illiterate shows unlimited obedience towards man. This female role model is confined to taking care of her husband and children and doing housework.

While many factors led to the decline of women's role in Arab society, bin Jum'a blames traditional habits and customs that still exist, and refers to the negative roles of both Arab men and colonialism. All together, these produced a woman who cannot interact with modern life, because even though colonial repression has ended, this has been followed by repression by men, which delayed women's progress for many years. As times change, social roles also need to change, and society must recognise this fact.

Many researchers might claim that the Saudi region has not been colonised throughout history. However, many Arab countries especially around this region were colonised such as Jordan, Yemen, Sudan, Iraq and Egypt. Thus, Arab peninsula was not isolated from the negative impacts of colonialism at that time. Furthermore, al-Nassir's novels such as *Dam al-Barā'a* consider the Ottoman Empire as a coloniser due to the clear similarity between this Empire and other colonisers in focusing on their advantages. The coloniser usually does not care about the colonists and there is an unequal relationship between the colonial power and the colony. Also, the colonised regions are usually the least developed regions also the Arab peninsula at the time of Ottoman Empire was one of the least developed regions.

Michael L. Ross has another theory to describe the slow progress toward gender equality, especially in the Middle East. Many observers claim that the region's Islamic traditions are the cause, but he suggests that oil, not Islam, has reduced the number of working females in the labour force, which, in turn, has also reduced their political influence. This placed men in strong positions and gave them more authority in society whilst women's role diminished, leading to gender inequality (Ross, 2008 ). However, oil is only one of many factors that have combined to mean slower progress for women. Extremism in religious teachings is not related to the

production of oil, and oil production has helped those countries to develop their social services, including education and health. Additionally, work opportunities are not confined to oil production.

The Saudi social novel identifies some of the factors that led to the decline in the role of women. The novel *'Adhra' al-Manfā* (al-Nassir, 1978,pp.14-17) mentions strict religious teachings which were opposed to the education of women, as this author sees more advantages than disadvantages in educating women. In addition, the novel (ibid.,p.25) suggest that some Saudi mothers prepare their daughters for a traditional social role, limited to the marital home.

On the other hand, the culture of repression that is practiced by men has contributed to the decline in the woman's social role. *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* portrays an autocratic father who attempts to mould his family's lives as he wishes. He affords no freedom to the family members, including his wife, and everyone has to obey his orders. Although the novel is rich with dialogue between the characters, there is not a single line of positive dialogue between the father and any family member, especially his wife who does not even express an opinion; her character is portrayed as totally passive and plays no role in shaping events.

A culture of repression is practiced not only by fathers, but also sons (al-Nassir, 1961,p.12) who play the same authoritarian role:

أما صاحبنا عيسى فلقد كان كبير ستة أخوة مما أعطاه ميزة لاتداني بين أفراد أسرته وعلى الأخص بالنسبة لأمه. فلقد كان في البيت نافذ الكلمة مهاب الجانب تكفي إشارة منه للحصول على مايريد.

Our friend 'Issā was the eldest of six brothers, a seniority that gave him distinction within the family, especially in his mother's eyes. He was listened to by everybody, and the smallest sign from him was enough to make him obeyed.

Arabs are very fond of children, especially sons, who represent the source of pride and power. Moreover, the relationship between father and son in a traditional family is strong and coherent and “the son usually works in the same profession as the father” (‘Abdu al-Ḥakim, 2012,p.75). In traditional families, the son usually lives in almost the same conditions as his father and experiences the same problems, so his intellectual level is similar to that of his father.

Mūḍi in *Dam al-Barā'a* (al-Nassir, 2001, pp.32-33) suffers from repression because even though her father has died, her brother still plays the same traditional role of man in Saudi society. She feels under his control and he makes her life a living hell, making her wonder about a way to change her life: "Do I have to be a man to gain my right and to have an authority in this house?" The novel places Mūḍi in a struggle with this traditional authority, which makes this character very active in the plot in contrast to the mother in *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl*.

### **8.3 Representing Woman's Issues in the Social Novel**

Women's issues constitute the theme of many Arab novels and their representation is widely considered to be one of the most important issues in Arabic narrative discourse. Discussing the image of women in the realist novel, the critic Mohammed al-Shintī (2004, p.425) observes: "With regards to the female character in the realist novel in this stage, she is mostly characterised positively. Novelists give her a great deal of attention, and track her progress".

The reason for the presence of this theme in Arabic narrative discourse is the rapid changes –economic, political and social– that have occurred in the status of women and changed their roles. Thus, they are no longer confined to childbearing but can play multiple roles within the community (al-Ghaṭa, 2006).

Saudi social narrative discourse pays close attention to women and presents many images of them as wives, daughters, mothers and friends. In addition, it introduces a broad range of female types, including traditional, educated, modern, radical, and oppressed women. Moreover, the novels discuss women's issues, such as their right to education and work. The social transformations being witnessed in many aspects of Saudi society have had an impact on the social role of both genders, and have changed many concepts and ideas related to masculinity and femininity.

Women's issues will continue to dominate novels as long as women continue to be marginalized in Saudi society. Noting the attention given to women's issues as a theme in Saudi narrative discourse, Khalida Sa'īd (1991, p.69) attributes this attention to the large number of problems that beset women:

Until there is full equality in legislation and in reality, as long as people have preconceived ideas about women that have been formed over the ages, from myths and illogical perceptions, as long as society is unwilling to accept women's freedom with respect for her humanity, free from discrimination on the grounds of gender or race, according to the Convention of Human Rights, as long as these issues remain unresolved, this case stays open.

Al-Nassir found that Saudi women's issues constitute a rich field for writing, and thus he dedicated two of his novels specifically to this theme, namely, '*Adhra' al-Manfā*' and *Dam al-Barā'a*. According to Ḥāmid al-Rubai'i (2013), '*Adhra' al-Manfā*' "narrates some important events in the life of Saudi women [representing] the story of women's struggle until they gained some of their legitimate rights". In her study of al-Nassir's novels, al-Mari (2006,pp.220-231) focused solely on '*Adhra' al-Manfā*' to discuss the author's portrayal of images of Saudi women.

Al-Nassir (1989,p.112) depicts the social injustice of how some customs and traditions in the region affect women who still suffer from some of these restrictions and he believes that these restrictions are not of a religious nature. It could be said that al-Nassir, who wrote '*Adhra' al-Manfā*' in 1978, had a clear vision of how these social transformations would impact on women's lives. As proof of that, Buthaina is skillfully portrayed as a radical woman, despite the fact that there were few female role models with this level of modernity in Saudi society at that time.

### **8.3.1 The Arab Women's Liberation Movement**

The modern era has witnessed many calls for Women's Liberation accompanied by social movements. The Arab Women's Liberation Movement (1899) as it was named by Qasim 'Amin, the first feminist in Arab society, played a major role in advancing the status of Arab women. Mohammad Ḥusaīn (1993,p.20) claimed that the roots of this movement extended to the era of Mohammad Ali Basha, the Governor of Egypt (1805-1848) who sent many Egyptians on scholarships to France, and they returned with different mindsets having been affected by Western culture. However, Ḥusaīn saw these scholars as attempting to reform Egyptian culture by employing Western ideas that conflicted with Islam. Thus, the roots of

women's liberation lie in an earlier era but 'Amīn is generally recognised as the founder of this movement in the Arab world.

'Amīn wrote a book entitled *Tahrīr al-Mar'a (The Liberation of Women)* to show the importance of the need to raise the level of social awareness about women's rights, in which he outlined the need for action:

I call on every lover of truth to examine with me the status of women in Egyptian society. I am confident that such individuals will arrive independently at the same conclusion I have – namely, the necessity of improving the status of Egyptian women. The truth I am presenting today has preoccupied me for a long time; I have considered it, examined it, and analysed it. [...] I have finally reached the point where it has become my dominant thought, alerting me to its advantages and reminding me of its necessity (ibid,p.3).

'Amin's study (ibid.,pp.10-25) showed the impact of education on Western women who feel free and able to claim their rights, which in turn brings them to prominence. After the era of colonialism, Arab men started to colonise their own women, although Islam technically gives women full freedom and rights. Therefore, 'Amīn claims, Arab men are dictators, using a style of authority borrowed from dictatorial regimes. His study also commented on different trends in society's views towards female education, with some believing that women's education is not obligatory, whereas others were unclear whether it is forbidden in Islam.

'Amin's ideas, which had many supporters and opponents, had an impact not only on Egyptian society, but also on many other Arab countries. Some scholars believe that they represent a kind of Westernisation that will destroy Arab Islamic identity (Ḥusaīn, 1993,p.8-14). One hundred years after the publication of 'Amin's call for women's liberation, the University of Cairo held its first conference on women's liberation on 23-28 October 1999. The conference discussed 'Amin's opinions and the harsh criticism which it had evoked. Discussing 'Amin's ideas a century after they were first introduced suggests that little progress has been achieved in the liberation of Arab women, and of course the demands of this generation differ greatly from those of 'Amin's generation.

However, 'Amin's call for the liberation of women has had a clear impact on Saudi society and the formation of the modern Saudi woman. Saudi narrative has also been influenced by these ideas and 'Athra' *al-Manfā* suggests that Saudis are split between supporters and opponents of 'Amin's work. Zāhir (al-Nassir, 1978,p.20), who is responsible for editing a page on women's issues, is known amongst his friends as Qasim 'Amin's successor in the Arabian Peninsula, and 'Amin's ideas are seen to have the support of some educated Saudi women. Buthaina (ibid.,p.78), for example, is pro-'Amīn even though her father does not totally agree with him, as the following dialogue shows.

إيه رأيك بابابا في كتابات قاسم أمين؟

- فأجاب وهو يحرك يديه: متطرف شويه.
- وفغرت فاهها دهشة، فلم تكن تعتقد بأن أباهها يحمل مثل هذه الفكرة. هذا بالرغم من أنها فكرت أن تنقل بعض المقالات من مؤلفاته لصفحة المرأة ولكن هاهي الآن تصطدم بمايقضي على ما أعتزمته فأبي خيبة أمل هذه؟ [...] فأجابت بفتور: كنت أحسبك من أنصاره؟
- فقاطعها بسرعة: هذا صحيح. أنا فاهم قصدك. ولكني لا أدين بكل ما ينادي به قاسم أمين. (ثم أضاف)
- يعني أختلف معه في بعض النواحي وليس جميع أفكاره أرفضها.
- فلانت ملامحها و علفت بسرور: لقد أعدت لي الثقة بنفسي.

What do you think, Dad, about Qasim 'Amin's writings?

- He answered while his hands continued moving: He is an extremist.
  - She opened her mouth in shock; she was not happy that her father had expressed such an opinion. She was planning to use some of his articles on the women's page, but now the shock made her forget what she had intended to do. [...]
  - She answered lukewarmly: I thought you were one of his supporters.
  - He interrupted her quickly: That's right. I understand what you mean. But I don't accept everything he calls for. (Then he added)
  - I disagree with him in some respects, but I don't reject all of his ideas.
- She looked relieved and she said happily: You have just restored my self-confidence.

'Amin's call to change the status of women, who at that time still suffered under the burden of illiteracy and social tradition, impacted on Saudi society, especially upon educated women. Buthaina, who supports his ideas, appears surprised by her father's

reaction when she raises this topic, as he is a very educated, liberal individual and a supporter of women's issues. However he does not agree with all of the aims of the women's liberation movement, possibly due to his belief that all societies are different and their approach to new ideologies will vary. In addition, the use of the word 'extremist' by Buthaina's father suggests he might believe that some of 'Amin's ideas are confrontational, and adopting them could cause social conflict.

'Amin's ideas produce a new type of female character in the narrative text. Buthaina, for example, plays an active role in the novel's plotline. In other words, Buthaina in this novel can be considered as the embodiment of 'Amin's ideas.

In his novels, al-Nassir depicts images of many traditional women who are still controlled by long-established customs, which limit their involvement in society. One example is the character of the mother in *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* whose role in the village is limited to housework. On the other hand, women play a more active role in the city since they are more educated and liberated. A novel such as *'Adhra' al-Manfā* suggests that Saudi women need to work effectively to gain their freedom, and that it is time for women's liberation. Al-Nassir's novels also provide evidence of many attitudes which are critical of women's traditionally restricted role, especially in *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl*, which refers to old customs as the main obstacle to women achieving progress.

### 8.3.2 Religion and Sexism

Islam differentiates between male and female but views them as equal in Islamic law. Gender inequality does not come from Islamic scriptures, but from different understandings and interpretations of some religious teachings, which fail to take into account the transformation of society over time. This sometimes leads to diverse opinions; for example, music is forbidden in Saudi society because some Saudi '*Ulamā*' (religious scholars) proclaimed it as such, on the basis of evidence from the Quran;<sup>42</sup> however, others refute this opinion, looking instead to its positive

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<sup>42</sup> Follow the link to see the fatwa:

<http://www.alifta.net/Search/ResultDetails.aspx?language=en&lang=en&view=result&fatwaNum=&FatwaNumID=&ID=231&searchScope=14&SearchScopeLevels1=&SearchScopeLevels2=&highlight=1&SearchType=exact&SearchMoesar=false&bookID=&LeftVal=0&RightVal=0&simple=&SearchCriteria=allwords&PagePath=&siteSection=1&searchkeyword=109117115105099032097098117032116117114097098#firstKeyWordFound>

impact on educating people. The existence of these differences in interpreting religious teachings affects Saudi society.

All social, religious or political discourse can be divided into three types – conservative, moderate and radical. New ideas usually create social conflict between conservatives and radicals, which are usually settled in society when the stage of moderation based on consensus as a way to alleviate the conflict. Thus, differences of opinion on certain social issues usually start with a clash of ideologies and then are shaped by society, as was the case with the dilemma concerning the introduction of satellite dishes referred to in Chapter One. Some believed this new technology would lead to a fall in moral standards, whereas others looked to its educational and entertainment value. However, now it has become rare to see a roof without a satellite dish.

Upright living in any society is founded on justice, equality and freedom for all members of that society, including males and females, but societies like bodies are sometimes exposed to diseases, and then recover if treated appropriately. Arab women were suffered a miserable life before Islam. The widespread phenomenon of female infanticide due to the preference for boys, who represent the power of the father, is a clear example of the diminished status of women at that time. With the advent of Islam, women regained their rights and dignity, allowing them to contribute to the development of Islamic civilisation.

This was reflected in the emergence of remarkable women: Zaynab bint Khuzaīma, who used to feed the poor; Hind bint 'Abi 'Ummayya, a wise woman to whom the Prophet Mohammad turned to for advice; Şafiya bint 'Abdu al-Muṭalib, who participated in the Islamic wars; Tamāḍur bint 'Amru ibn al-Ḥārth, a poet; and al-Shifa' ibnat 'Abdullah, who used to cure illnesses and controlled the movement of part of the market at that time (al-Shaḥut, 2007). It is clear from these examples that women were heavily involved in building Islamic culture in many fields, and played key roles in the social, political and economic sphere. "According to *Sharī'a*, there is no distinction between men and women from the legal age of sixteen in terms of ownership, control and use of money" (Yamani, 2000,p.11). Thus, the distinctions that exist between the genders have been created by society.

The Saudi social novel in general refers to the utilisation of religion to rob women of their rights and to limit their social roles. The protagonist of *Thuqbun fi Rida'*



*al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961,p.81) wonders about women's status in his town, comparing it to that of women in an open society:

وفي بلدته .. هذه البلدة التي لا تبعد سوى فراسخ معدودة لا يسمح للبننت بأن ترفع صوتها حتى لا يسمعه الرجال الغرباء لأن من يفعل ذلك لابد أن يكون مجوسيا .. ومع ذلك فهو واثق أن هؤلاء الفتيات لسن مجوسيات إنما هم مسلمات أو على الأقل أغلبهن كذلك .. فلم يبح الدين منح هذه الحرية لنساء مدينة بعينها في حين يمنعها عن نساء بلدة أخرى كبلدته .. بل إن الرجال في بلدته يتمسكون بأشياء كثيرة لا يتزحزون عنها حتى لو أقتضى الأمر أن يسيل الدم ..؟!..

His hometown, which is only few leagues away, does not allow a girl to raise her voice so that strangers should not hear this, lest she is a Magian; however he is confident that these girls are not Magians but Muslims, or at least most of them are. Islam did not grant freedom to women in one specific city and not another, like his hometown, but the men in his town cling strongly to many things even if blood must be spilled over them!

This passage raises an important issue about religious rulings that differ from one place to another and the impact of these rules on believers. The passage shows the extent of oppression against women in a village that is considered a closed society for them. The word 'voice' does not only refer to the sound we make when we speak, (2004) it also means the right to express an opinion; so in this closed society women have no voice in both senses and are closely restricted, and anyone who tries to cross these limitations is beyond the pale of society. The protagonist wonders why there is a difference in the status of women in his own community and in more open places elsewhere, where Muslim women have more freedom. The passage suggests that religious teachings are subject to interpretation by society, which can choose to read these in different ways. As the passage shows, the villagers still cling strongly to their old social customs and beliefs and will not only abandon them, but are willing to die to defend them.

The third-person narrator in *Dam al-Barā'a* (al-Nassir, 2001,p30) refers to the status of women and religion in the context of women in his village: "It is a humanitarian inherent humanitarian tendency to reject restrictions imposed without conviction; but a woman accepted being a prisoner on the basis of the requirements of Islamic law". The narrator suggests that no one can impose unconvincing restrictions on

human beings and that women's problem comes from their willingness to be imprisoned; thus, the narrator sees that change must start by them rejecting incorrect religious teachings.

'Itir in *Ḥiṭān al-Rīh* (al-Nassir, 2008g,p.142) recognises the relationship between freedom and religion, as she said, "(Freedom), the concept that I never give it up despite its narrow confines, but it [is] surprising how religious interpretation and marginalization [is] can simply be accepted". This character acknowledges that seeking freedom is the centre of her life and she cannot abandon it. The real problem, as she says, comes from intentional misinterpretations which adjust the meaning of freedom. Thus, the main problem lies in how religious teachings are interpreted and not in religion itself.

#### **8.4 Images of Women**

The female characters in al-Nassir's novels provide various images of Saudi women as wives, daughters, sisters, friends or lovers. These characters are portrayed as having different personalities, such as being peaceable or intrusive of representing different types such as the struggler, the leader, etc. However, there are three clear divisions amongst the female characters in al-Nassir's novels which represent three types of attitudes towards social transformation in Saudi women's status: the traditional, the modern, and the radical. Traditionalists are most frequently seen in Saudi narrative discourse, but characters are also portrayed who adopt more radical attitudes toward their role in society.

##### **8.4.1 Traditional Woman**

In this context, the term 'traditional woman' refers to those characters who appear to espouse a set of long-established ideas derived from previous generations that have shaped the role and status of women in society and are still present in contemporary society. Despite the fact that all countries have experienced a degree of social change due to the impact of development, globalisation, the industrial boom, and the technological revolution—although these effects differ quantitatively and qualitatively from one country to another—some women have maintained their traditional role even in societies impacted by these changes. According to Bin Jum'a (1999,p.643) this traditional female type is bound by social customs and traditions

and is considered to be a product of a strict, conservative society that restricts women by means of taboos that prohibit women from enjoying their rights. Instead, they are subjected to male authority and dominance.

To adapt the allegory of the cave set forth by Plato, traditional women can be seen as living in the shadows while men live in reality. Plato (2007,p.193) uses the allegory of the cave to “make an image of our nature in its education and want of education”. However, ‘shadows’ and ‘reality’ here refer to the position of women under the control of men. Traditional woman has not gained her full rights and freedom, largely as a result of the weakness of the Islamic empire, the collapse of the religious values in Arab society, and the return of some Arab tribal traditions and customs that abrogate the rights of women. This traditional woman loses her volition and freedom of expression under the control of man; thus, the shadow woman (i.e. traditional woman) is a product of the authority, volition and willingness of the man who embodies reality. Accordingly, fathers, brothers, husbands and even sons are seen as the reality, while women are seen as their shadows. This reality-shadow relation could be transformed into a relation between two realities if women were to claim their natural status.

As noted, the Saudi social novel provides many traditional female characters that seem to function as mere shadows; therefore, they do not have any substance in the narrative text, lacking worth or importance in driving the plotline. However, the traditional woman is totally controlled by male authority, so she does not have any freedom to share ideas with males. *Thuqbun fi Rida’ al-Layl* depicts male control over females in Saudi society. The episode relating the reaction of ‘Issā’ father to his son’s punishment at school shows that women have no authority in the presence of male authority. The mother could not protect her son when he was being punished by his father. ‘Issā threw himself on his mother, seeking refuge, but she was so terrified of her husband so she could not protect ‘Issā. Her only response was murmur some prayers to protect her son from his angry father.

This situation illustrates the weak position of women under the control of an authoritarian male. Fear of the husband as the principal authority in the home and social customs that have shaped women’s role have rendered the mother passive in such an instance. The fact that she feels she has no right to interfere when her

husband is present, clearly demonstrates male domination and suppression of women. The social customs that give men absolute freedom and authority prevent women from active participation, so if women had their rights, the mother would be able to react more in this scene and we would see an interaction between two realities, male and female, but the woman is still a shadow of the authoritarian man.

The social Saudi novel pays close attention to the cultural dimensions of traditional women. *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961,p.8) explores the mindset of the mothers and grandmothers in the village:

لقد كن – رحمهن الله – لا يعرفن الأعوام إطلاقاً. إنما يحددن الأعمار و يحسبن المراحل و الوفيات بهجوم العثمانيين على البلدة مثلاً أو ذبحهم أحد أعيانها وكبارها في رابعة النهار أمام جميع الناس. ثم هناك بناء مدرسة أو إضاءة بيت أحد المسؤولين بالكهرباء...إلخ.

They – May God have mercy on them – did not know how to use and count years. They used to calculate age, year of death, and the timing of other events by linking them to the events such as the Ottoman attack on the village, the killing of important individuals in the village by Ottomans in front of all the citizens, the building of a new school, or installing electricity in a governor's home.

The narrative explains how the villagers used different methods to ascertain people's age. Linking this to major events in their community is a frequent practice in oral cultures, and women represented the largest illiterate segment of the population at that time. This associative method is used to link personal and collective events that cannot be forgotten because they form part of a communal history. The novel represents a particular type of illiterate traditional women, who illustrate the lack of educational opportunities at the time.

Myths, superstitions and folk tales comprise traditional women's popular culture due to their lack of formal education, whereas men are less affected by these factors due to their greater contact with the realities of life.

الحكايات الشعبية كانت تنتقل من منزل إلى آخر. تسمعها الجدات على الأحفاد في ليالي الشتاء الطويلة. يلتفون حولها في منازلهم الباردة وقد أشعلوا موقداً في زاوية من الغرفة. يصغون إلى الشفاة التي لاتكف عن الحركة بكل جوارحهم. حتى يهاجمهم الوسن.

The folk tales moved from home to home. They are told to the grandchildren by the grandmothers on long winter nights. The grandmother is surrounded by the grandchildren in the cold house. They light a fire in a fireplace in the corner of the room, and the children listen attentively to her lips, which do not stop moving, using all their senses until they fall sleep (al-Nassir, 1994,p.21).

Folk tales are a kind of knowledge circulated by traditional women to teach children, but also a type of entertainment. Indeed, “the family used to be the main environment that forms a child’s culture and personal character, so cultural heritage is a source of family education” (al-Yamia, 2013). Although these stories have a role in the upbringing of children, considering them to be an essential source of education and knowledge keeps children away from reality and makes them more attached to imaginary ideas.

‘Imād al-Dīn Khidīr (2012), consultant and researcher in the field of parenting, refers to the importance of this culture on a child’s mindset; however, he also refers to its negative impacts, especially imaginative folk tales that draw on magic and the worlds of the jinn and devils. These distract children from reality and affect their self-knowledge. Moreover, modern social life, with its rapid changes and challenges, requires more scientific knowledge.

The spreading of myths and legends and the domination of folk culture affect the response of traditional women to modern technology and life, making it hard for them to adapt easily to the modern lifestyle. *Dam al-Barā’a* (al-Nassir, 2001,pp.10-11) shows the reactions of traditional women when told about the new lifestyle. ‘Umm Sāmīr, a minor character who had lived abroad in a Western country, is a striking presence among the women in the village, and the other women like to listen to stories about her life abroad.

وهناك في تلك المحافل تجد أن الحلقة تتسع حولها حين تتحدث لهن عما رأته في تلك البلاد البعيدة التي عاشت فيها زمنا طويلا فتعلمت الكثير من الفنون التي تجهلها وتشربت بالثقافات التي تضطرب في الأوطان البعيدة والقريبة من بلاد الغرب أو بلاد الكفر كما يدعونها في ذلك الحين. فهي تحدثهن عن مخترعات لم يسمعن بها إلا قليلا مثل ذلك الجهاز الذي يسمونه(بالراديو) يخشخش طوال النهار بالأحاديث و الأغاني أو الجهاز الذي ينقل المكالمات من مدينة إلى أخرى و الملابس التي يرتديها الناس في تلك الديار و نوع الطعام و الشراب

وغير ذلك من الأمور التي ليست مألوفة لديهن فيصغين غير مصدقات أو يتعودون من الشيطان لأن تلك المخترعات لا بد وبسيرها الجن الذين يختفون في تلك الأجهزة المريبة.

In their meetings, she was surrounded by many other women who listened to what she had seen in that distant country, where she had lived for a long time. She had learned many skills and absorbed many cultures in the Western country, or the 'land of non-believers', as they called it in those times. She talked about inventions which had not known previously, such as a device called 'a radio' which broadcasts conversations and music, or another device used to make calls from one city to another. She also talked about the clothes they wore in that country, and their types of food and drink, and other matters that were unfamiliar to them. They listened carefully and could not believe, and sought refuge from Satan because these inventions surely were controlled by jinn who were hiding in those suspicious devices.

This episode makes three points about traditional women. Firstly, that cultural knowledge, which to some extent is founded on myths and superstitions, is used to explain and understand new facts, which then affects the women's reaction towards new technology; thus, their lack of education means they are not prepared for new ideas. Secondly, news about the arrival of modernity in Saudi society, with its new technology and inventions, was spread by word of mouth which helped to lessen the impact of culture shock; however, the traditional women are, to some extent, "isolated from the wider world outside, which could give women the appropriate amount of knowledge to bypass the oral culture" (al-Dab' 2007,p13). Finally, religion conditioned perceptions about the other (Western culture) at that time placing a barrier between Saudi society and the other, meaning there was no acceptance of other lifestyles.

The traditional role of women as described in the social novel does not extend beyond doing housework and raising children, as shown in *Ra'shat al-Zil* (al-Nassir, 1994,pp.19-20):

من بعيد سمع ثغاء أغنام و هي تتعارك فتذكر أمه تبسمل في البواكير ماضية إلى عنزتها حتى تحلبها وتحضر له تلك الرغوة المرتعشة. [...] عقب الإفطار الخفيف الذي تشيعه بركة الدعاء ما بين الرغيف الحار الذي

تحرص أمه أن تقدمه لهم من التتور الذي أوقدته بالجلة و الحطب مباشرة مع الحليب الفائر ينطلق إلى المطوع للدراسة مع رفاقه أبناء الحي.

From afar, he heard sheep bleating, fighting with each other. He remembered his mother starting her day in the early morning with the name of God and heading towards her goats to milk them. After a light breakfast, with a blessing of supplication, hot homemade bread, served directly from the wood-fired clay oven, and hot milk, he rushed to school with his friends from the same district.

There is not much difference between the role of traditional women in the village and in the city, as shown in *'Adhra' al-Manfā*. However, the traditional woman in the urban setting seems to have more power. This empowerment (al-Nassir, 1978,pp.22-24) is shown in the mother's attitude towards her husband interrupting her when she is discussing a matter with her son, Zāhir , who also fails to convince his mother about the suitability of his new job which involves working with the daughter of the newspaper owner. Zāhir's mother dismisses his female colleague as an individual lacking manners and morals.

Some of the traditional women were opposed to the new role outside the home of modern Saudi women. Women like Zāhir's mother are portrayed as providing the role model for the next generation, a contribution which is described throughout the novels. *'Adhra' al-Manfā* provides a model of the traditional mother's role towards her daughters. The role of Zāhir's mother is to teach her daughter the tasks involved in housework, such as cooking and cleaning, in order to prepare her for the traditional social role as an obedient wife who fulfils all male needs and desires. So, her obedient daughter works in the kitchen and at the same time tries to meet all of the family's needs, even if she is busy. When there is a fierce debate between the Zāhir and his mother, she angrily tells him (al-Nassir, 1978,p.25): "Shut up, or I'll break your sister's head". This episode shows how women shaped their daughters into adopting the traditional mode of femininity. Moreover, it is important to notice that those characters who are oppressed try to oppress those who are weaker and less powerful than themselves as a compensatory measure, in order to restore their own confidence. Mufīd Najim (2012) claimed that this explains why the mother characters in many novels practise cruelty and oppression on their own daughters.

Social novels provide many images of traditional women unable to play active social roles outside the home environment who consequently become submissive to the social reality imposed on them by strict religious ideas, harsh traditions and customs, and absolute male authority. This type of female character is a mere shadow of masculine authority and desire in a society where male dominance prevails. Thus, “the novelists represent women as unable to act, and bound to carry out the desires of males who created the culture and introduced the legislation” (al-Ghaṭa, 2006). The traditional woman is represented in these novels as marginalized; even though she is ever-present in the narrative backdrop, she is never the protagonist of the action. The traditional role of women in Saudi society is reflected by her role in the Saudi novel, always a minor character even in those events which directly regard her, such as the choice of a husband-to-be or being given the right to education and work.

In Saudi narrative discourse the traditional woman is a weak creature who can only express her feelings and defend her-self by crying. The protagonist of *Thuqbun fi Rida' al-Layl* (al-Nassir, 1961, pp.21-22) criticises the lack of masculinity in his own attitude towards his mother, thinking there is something abnormal about the way he responds to her emotional outbursts:

عندما تنخرط أمه في البكاء فهو حينئذ لا يتمالك نفسه وإنما يشاركها على الفور في بكائها. وبدأ يتسائل هل هو إنسان شاذ؟ من ذا يستطيع إجابته؟ لا أحد لأنه هو نفسه يشعر بالتعقيد و الغرابة من شخصيته.

Whenever his mother began weeping, he would immediately find himself sharing her sobs and tears. Was there, he wondered, a possibility that he was gay? Who could provide an answer to this question? No-one. He himself thought he felt the complexity, the strangeness, in his personality.

One of the traditional Arab social norms is that crying is appropriate for women but not for men, who have to be strong in facing the problems of life. This event reveals to some extent the troubled relationship between males and females caused as a result of traditional social customs which enforce rigid notions of masculinity and femininity.

Ibrahim Naṣīb (2011) criticises the public Arab insistence that men do not cry, and sees this behavior as appropriate for both genders and not restricted to women. Such



habits are related to the nature of the Arabs, who have been shaped by the harsh life in the desert; and a tough personality is derived from the hard life in those early times. Back then, life was dependent on the strength of the body more than on the power of the mind to secure a living, which helps to explain the widespread preference for sons rather than daughters.

The traditional woman is portrayed in the Saudi social novel as being without any will of her own or decision-making ability, even in life-changing events such as her own marriage. *Safinat al-Dayā'* (al-Nassir, 2004c,p.74), for example, depicts a traditional arranged marriage in which the wife is much younger than her husband and does not feel happy in her marriage as her husband has noted. This marriage is not based on love, the wife merely playing her traditional social role as she cannot refuse her family's decision. Highly critical representation of this type of marriage is found in many of al-Nassir's novels.

#### **8.4.2 Modern Woman**

The modern Saudi woman is an educated woman, sometimes to a very high level and this education gives women the opportunity to expand their social horizons outside the home to take up employment opportunities. Saudi social narratives show that the modern woman's education covers much more than just writing and reading, explaining the crucial role played by education in transforming women's status.

After the unification of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Saudi Government faced many obstacles and problems in developing the new state. At that time, the government was looking for ways to compel Saudi citizens to move from tribal culture to a more modern understanding of civil society. The Arab countries in general have long remained an underdeveloped region due to colonisation and its aftermath and government corruption. In the Saudi case, illiteracy, lack of human rights and security, and low health status were the most significant problems at that time, as discussed in Chapter One. Therefore, the Saudi Government attempted to develop governmental services such as the health, military and economic sectors, and also placed major emphasis on education, leading to the establishment of the Directorate of Education in 1924 (al-Salum, 1991,p.12), some eight years before the Declaration of Unification. This helped to create a long-term understanding of the

role played by education in building the modern state and in promoting the social cohesion needed within society to introduce social change (ibid.,p.13).

Women's education was one of the biggest challenges faced by the Saudi Government due to prevailing attitudes towards women's status in conservative Saudi society. In 1960, the Saudi Government took the first bold step in improving Saudi women's rights by establishing the first Government department for girls' education, known as the General Presidency for Girls' Education. This was to usher in great future changes in women's role in society. In 2002, following a long debate within society concerning women's education, the General Presidency was incorporated into the administration of the Ministry of Education. The debate was ultimately ended by issuing this governmental decision, which also started a new era in women's education in Saudi Arabia set to produce the modern Saudi woman.

The Saudi social novel believes that education is a legitimate right for both males and females and an important factor in developing the nation. *'Adhra' al-Manfā* pays close attention to the issue of women's education, which functions as a pivotal theme in the novel and shows the importance of education in changing the social role and status of women in Saudi society. The novel also shows the role played by the media in spreading awareness about the importance of women's education among citizens.

As many studies show, al-Nassir carefully chose the setting for this novel, selecting the western region of Saudi Arabia known as Ḥijāz, as is clear from the dialogue between some characters who speak the local dialect. At the time the novel is set, this was the most developed region of Saudi Arabia. In addition, it has links with the beginning of the education and development of the modern Saudi female. Many educated women were known to have lived there, including 'Iffat al-Thunayyān, who, in 1955, established Dār al-Ḥanān, the first private school for girls, intended especially for those who were poor and orphaned (Slamah, 2008,p.47). Besides that, the two holy cities of Makkah and Madina are in Ḥijāz, and their two famous mosques also host many Islamic scholars who deliver lectures and classes. Moreover, in comparison to Saudi society in general, the presence of pilgrims contributes to making the region a place where civilizations meet meaning it is more open to other societies such as Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon due to their

geographical proximity and religious value. Thus, society in this region was more receptive to the idea of women's education than other parts of Saudi Arabia, and this location also lent the issue itself some religious value.

In her study, al-Mari (2006,p.221) shows the importance of the Ḥijāz setting given that the region is considered the most open, culturally and intellectually; in addition, the first newspaper was established there. She also notes that in 1930 Ḥijāz used to be governed by Egypt, so this direct link between the region and Egypt created a new educational environment. Her study focuses on the impact of Egyptian culture on modern Saudi women, especially in Ḥijāz, and neglects the role of private schools in the region.<sup>43</sup> The region had been under Egyptian rule since 1812, when Mohammed Ali succeeded in recapturing Ḥijāz (Dodwell, 1977,pp.43-44), and not in the 1930s as the study suggests.

The narrative events highlight several factors –both external and internal– that led to the formation of the image of the modern Saudi woman. Firstly, scholarships to study abroad played a major role. These scholarships encouraged connections between Saudi women and their counterparts in more developed countries and meant these female Saudi students were influenced by other cultures. Like many Saudi girls from rich families, Buthaina (al-Nassir, 1978,p.15) studied in Lebanon as there was no chance for women to continue their education in Saudi Arabia. Since her father believed that she should play a responsible role in society, her new role after finishing her studies was to raise Saudi women's level of awareness about education.

Al-Mari (2006,p.221) mentions Lebanon's role in helping to create the modern Saudi woman, since it is the most open Arab nation in both intellectual and cultural terms due to it being more liberal. She links this directly to the fact that al-Nassir mentions this as the place where Buthaina had finished her studies. Another study (al-Qaḥṭani, 2009,p.18-19) examines the direct contact between Egyptian and Saudi culture, and the impact of the former on the latter as many Saudi women, especially those from Ḥijāz, used to travel there to study. Therefore, both Lebanon and Egypt played influential roles in the intellectual and cultural development of modern Saudi women.

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<sup>43</sup> See Chapter One for a discussion of the many private schools which existed at that time.

The novel also highlights other internal factors which contributed to the emergence of this new feminist image, such as the role of the media in educating citizens about the importance of women's education. The media play a major role in helping to form public opinion, especially concerning important social issues; by focusing on these issues, the media (al-Ramli, 2011) can help citizens to understand possible options and make informed decisions, by raising social awareness. *'Adhra' al-Manfā* (al-Nassir, 1978,pp.14-17) depicts the media's contribution to the formation of the modern Saudi woman by increasing social awareness of women's education. The novel reflects the trends in Saudi society concerning the issue of women's education, and in the narrative, two opposing views emerge about the importance of this subject. The first is presented by those who are educated and support this idea. Buthaina's father, who is editor-in-chief of a Saudi newspaper, strongly supports the need for women's education, and plans to establish a page in his newspaper which will educate society on the importance of women's education; he assigns the task of supervising this to Zāhir and Buthaina. Her father states(ibid.,p.15):

خدمة المجتمع من الجنسين واجب وطني وعلى الفتاة المثقفة خاصة دور كبير في توعية بنات جنسها [...] . إن حضارة أية أمة أو شعب – في يقيني – لن تبرز أو تثبت وجودها مالم تتضافر جهود الجنسين في كافة الميادين.

Serving society is a social duty for both genders. Educated women especially have to play a major role in raising the level of Saudi women's awareness [...] the civilisation of any nation or public – in my opinion – will not excel or will not prove its existence unless both men and women work together toward this goal in all fields.

Zāhir agrees to what the editor-in-chief says and accepts the responsibility to supervise the page; however, he realises that this task will not be easy because society is resistant to this idea. Educated Saudis could be expected to contribute actively to spreading awareness about this issue among their fellow citizens. However, the novel depicts some of the social opposition to the issue which comes from two groups – the religious conservatives and the traditionalists who believe that women's education leads to moral decay.

The launch of the women's page creates a strong impression on society, as the novel (ibid.,p.79) relates:

وظهرت صفحة المرأة [...] كانت مقالاتها في غاية التركيز والموضوعية، وتوجهت بصورة مباشرة إلى الشباب محملة إياه مسؤولية المبادرة لمحو الأمية مشيرة إلى ارهاصات النهضة التي تبنت في الأفق الفكري لشباب الجزيرة [...] ثم تدرجت إلى أن تعليم الفتاة أصبح يشكل المنطلق الأول للتحرر من عبودية الجهل و الظلام التي رسفت المرأة في أغلالها طوال قرون. وتساءلت هل من المعقول أن تستطيع أمة مواكبة التقدم الانساني في حين أن أكثر من نصف المجتمع يعيش في عتمة الخرافة و متاهات الخواء الفكري؟! وفندت في الوقت ذاته مزاعم الفئات التي تتوجس خيفة من أن يمتد الانحلال إلى أغوار سحيقة فيما لونات المرأة قسطا من التعليم.

The woman's page was published. [...] Its articles were very focused and objective. It directly addressed young people to take responsibility for putting an end to illiteracy. The page refers to the harbingers of the Renaissance, which had begun to be seen in the intellectual horizons of Saudi youth. [...] Then gradually, the page began to discuss the issue of women's education, which is the first step of liberation from the bondage of ignorance and darkness that had restricted them for centuries. The page asked: Is it possible for a nation to keep up with human progress while more than half of its population lives in the darkness of superstition and in the maze of an intellectual vacuum? At the same time, the page refuted the allegations of those groups who were wary about the possibility of moral decline if women got involved in education.

It is clear from the above quotation that the editor-in-chief of the newspaper hopes to create social mobility in the Saudi public by leading the discussion on the issue of women's education. Since the media is run by educated people such as Zāhir, Buthaina and her father, they support this idea as the means of combating ignorance and oppression. It is also important to mention here that al-Nassir shows how the media use the views of the moderate religious groups to encourage women's education. The language of the media also influences discussion of this issue, by providing support from scriptures and factual information to encourage both men and women to obtain an education. The newspaper proves to be successful in presenting the issue and in influencing Saudi public opinion, and receives a broad welcome from the Saudi public and, as the novel mentions, especially from girls who strongly support the issue.

The novel depicts an important social transformation in Saudi Arabia as the status of women shifts from the traditional stereotype to a more modern educated woman who is no longer confined to the home. The majority of women used to suffer from illiteracy and ignorance due to the lack of schools for girls' education and their lack of equality with men, as well as the lack of social awareness about the importance of women's education. Thus, for a long time Saudi women played a limited role in society until the Government acted boldly on the issue and established the General Presidency for Girls' Education in 1960. Before that, Saudi society used to live with only half of its true culture and identity due to the repressive social traditions and the attitude of hardline clerics which contributed to the absence of women at that time.

Al-Nassir carefully chose the characters of the novel to embody various aspects of this issue. Zāhir's family represents traditional thinking, whilst Buthaina's family embodies the image of a modern educated family. Thus, it is not surprising that a conflict arises between these two different ways of thinking. In addition, al-Nassir forms a link between the two different families in terms of living and intellectual standards, represented by the relationship between Zāhir and Buthaina, who are both well-educated and share the same ambitions. Buthaina represents the modern Saudi female due to "her ability as a symbol to express the author's vision and ideas about the world" (al-Mari, 2006,p.228).

Some of the characters of traditional women reject this new role and status for woman. Zāhir 's mother is shocked when she learns that some girls are educated, and exclaims (al-Nassir, 1978,p.24) in surprise when she learns about Buthaina: "Could the girl read?! Oh my God, what is worse than that?". Thus, al-Nassir shows that it was not only Saudi men who opposed educating women, but some traditional women also rejected this idea. Zāhir 's mother as a traditional woman represents female oppression, restricted in her social role to the home; in addition, illiteracy contributes to the ease with which this status is maintained. Thus, education plays a major role in changing the status of women. The primary aim in introduction education for women in 1960 was to reform and modernise this model of womanhood and to demonstrate women's ability to face up to the challenges of our time, to adjust to new lifestyles, and become more aware of social developments.

There is a strong relationship between education and work since educational outcomes constitute the main engine of the labour market. Thus, education set women on the path for women to prepare them for their real social roles. The social novel revealed the desire of many educated Saudi women to engage in work outside the home. *Dam al-Barā'a* (al-Nassir, 2001,p.89) highlights the attitude of Hiba, who plans to look for a job:

ترغب أن تكون حرة في تفكيرها وفي تصرفاتها دون خضوع أو مذلة. وماذا يحول دون تحقيق هذه الأمنية طالما تعلمت وسوف تجد وظيفة جيدة تتناسب مع مؤهلها وبكفي مرتبها لتحقيق حياة ميسورة دون الحاجة لأي كان.

She would like to be free in her thoughts and attitude without facing any humiliation or submission. What prevents her from achieving this wish, as long she studies and finds a good job that suits her qualifications? Her salary will be enough to secure an affordable life without any need for anyone.

Education has contributed toward building the character of Saudi women as willing to struggle in order to gain their full rights and freedom in a patriarchal society; it provides security to women who used to have no option other than complete dependence upon men. This passage highlights the absence in Hiba's community of freedom that serves as the basis of modern women's thought. Hiba, like any other modern woman, is continually searching for this missing value.

Buthaina (al-Nassir, 1978,p.17) refuses to stay at home after gaining her degree as she feels she has a social responsibility toward her generation, especially other women. She therefore decides to work as a journalist, as she believes that media is a very important tool for achieving her aim of raising social awareness about women's rights, especially in education and work. The Saudi work environment differs from that in other countries since males and females are generally segregated in education and work, except in some places such as hospitals. However, Buthaina does not like this separation at work and does not mind working with other men in the same field as long as it is in a professional context.

### 8.4.3 Radical Woman: The Representation of Saudi Feminists

The radical woman represents the third noticeable transformation in the status of the Saudi woman, as a consequence of modern women's education. It is important to define the concept of radical women before discussing their depictions in the Saudi social novel. Nancy Whittier (1995,p.1), in her study on the radical women's movement in the United States, especially in Ohio, proposes a descriptive framework for women from the perspective of the radical feminist movement. The meaning of feminist in this case is "to be independent and strong, to take oneself and other women seriously, and to challenge the restrictions placed on women in a male-dominated society". Thus, the foundation of the movement is to maintain woman's identity and strongly assert the presence of women in society.

There has been no special movement representing the issues of radical women in Saudi society as in Western countries; however, the lack of such an institution does not necessarily indicate a lack of radical Saudi women. Individual efforts have been made by some feminists to discuss many women-related issues, including Saudi women driving and the creation of gender equality in terms of work opportunities, administrative positions, and freedom to choose a spouse. In addition, some Saudi women's rights campaigns<sup>44</sup> have emerged alongside other rights campaigns that use Twitter, Facebook and other social networking sites to disseminate their ideas and garner support.

Radical women in Saudi Arabia contribute to media discourse as employees or freelance journalists who write about issues of general interest and initiate dialogue on cultural and social issues, including women's issues. They communicate directly with the people, rather than relying on men to help them communicate with others. The women also participate in Saudi cultural creativity by writing stories, novels, poems and plays, and conducting scientific and theoretical research. There are many well-known Saudi females with a strong presence in the Saudi cultural landscape, including the poet Thuria Qabil, the novelist Rajā' 'Alim, the playwright Milḥa 'Abdullah, and the scientist Ḥayāt bint Sulaimān Sindi.

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<sup>44</sup> To read more about the Saudi women's rights campaign, visit the campaign website through the link: [http://saudiwomen22.blogspot.co.uk/p/blog-page\\_22.html](http://saudiwomen22.blogspot.co.uk/p/blog-page_22.html)



The Saudi authorities also take a keen interest in women's issues. Women's education was one of the benefits that resulted from the Government's efforts to provide women with fuller rights. The Government now also provides job opportunities in many sectors of work, and has empowered women to vote and make nominations in municipal elections. Additionally, women are now appointed in leadership positions, and hold 30 seats in the Shura Council, one of the most important decision-making authorities in Saudi Arabia (al-Jazira, 2013).

Saudi narrative discourse features many female characters with radical attitudes who oppose the customs and traditions which limit and narrow their roles and rights within society. The character of Buthaina in '*Adhra*' *al-Manfā* can be considered as representing the radical Saudi woman. Buthaina is a modern educated woman with clear opinions about her social role and rights. She dazzles men with her intellect: "Zāhir was amazed by her accurate observations which reflect a deep awareness" (al-Nassir, 1978,p.39).

Buthaina is a pragmatic character and does not like to live outside the boundaries of her social reality; she also likes adventure, especially in regard to those things she strongly yearns to achieve because, as she (ibid.,p.112) states, "experience has broken all of the intellectual and human energies that I have". Moreover, she is strong-minded, a characteristic implanted in her personality by her father who also allows her freedom, as he trusts her and is very confident about her decisions.

Although Buthaina believes in freedom, she also knows that there are many social restrictions that limit women's role in society, so she is in constant conflict with these customs and traditions, refusing to pay heed to them (ibid,pp.67-69). She believes that there is nothing wrong with playing the piano and that any girl should have the right to play. Furthermore, she does not allow her relatives to interfere in her private life, as she believes that women have the right to marry whomever they want. She criticises the traditional attitude of her friend Hudā, who feels unable to marry anyone other than the man whom her family wants her to marry. Freedom gives her the ability to voice a dissenting opinion in a society that provides no space for bold women, as shown through the abovementioned attitudes of Buthaina towards her society.

The narration depicts opposition from radical Saudi women towards some ideas and attitudes that are firmly established in the mindset of the community. Buthaina does not like to play the conventional role of the traditional woman in dealing with a husband. Her opposition to this (ibid.,p.109) is seen in a dialogue between Buthaina and her mother, who suggests that her daughter should ask her husband if he needs something:

– أسرع. روعي له يمكن مستنيك.

إن احتاج لي حينادي من نفسه يا أمي.

المرأة يابنتي لازم تشعر زوجها أنه محتاجها.

و طفقت أمضغ طعامي على مهل و كأنني لم أسمع ملاحظتها. بل أنني لم أكن بحاجة إلى تلك الملاحظة لأنها تمثل طريقة الجيل الذي تنتمي إليه أمي في محاولة إلى كسب الرجل في كل مناسبة.

Hurry up, go to your husband, he might be waiting for you.

- He will call me if he needs me, mom.
- A woman should show her husband that he always needs her help and he should feel he needs you.

I continued chewing my food slowly, pretending that I did not hear her comment, I didn't need it because it represents the way my mom's generation try to win over a man at every opportunity.

The dialogue between the mother and daughter is an intergenerational dialogue between two different ways of thinking – traditional and modern. As can be seen, the radical woman knows that her husband is angry with her, but she has her own way of dealing with the matter. The traditional mother has a weak and obedient personality in the presence of men, and has a traditional way of dealing with them. In contrast, Buthaina as a radical woman does not like to show weakness or submission as she no longer accepts the arrogance of man.

She (ibid.,pp.79-108) is fully aware that although the era of the oppression of women is over, women like her mother still allow their freedoms to be controlled by men by using these traditional methods. Like any radical woman, she recognises the importance of work for women, so she has no great need to found her life on a man as she is able to take care of her own responsibilities herself. She does not mind working as a journalist in a male environment, as long as the relationship between

them is limited to work. Her reason for choosing work in the field of media is to spread awareness of the issue of women's education. Finally, she achieves her aim and convinces many social groups about this idea. However, Buthaina faces some harsh criticism from some traditional women who disagree with the new role and status of women. Zāhir's mother likens her to a man as she mixes with them at work and she is also afraid of what people will say about her son when they find out that he is working with a woman, as that is considered to be socially unacceptable. She blames the education of women as the reason for them working with men. However, Buthaina does not care about what people say because she knows that she is not doing something illegal.

Radical women realise that their social role is not restricted to the home, a belief reflected in Buthaina's thoughts when she (ibid.,p.121) says: "I won't accept this costume. Life is full of many things to do. I will fight for what I believe in". It seems that the radical woman is not easy to persuade, and is ready to make sacrifices in order to achieve her objectives; however, the relationship between Buthaina and her father, which is founded on respect, contributes to creating this new type of woman as he clearly understands the nature of life and how social changes will impact on the role and status of Saudi women. Moreover, characters like Zāhir show that some men also supported the aims of radical women to improve the social role and status of women.

The novel depicts Buthaina as a feisty fighter who disseminates many ideas of radical Saudi women and helps to drive the narrative forward. Buthaina in particular is considered to be one of the most effective characters in al-Nassir's novels, as al-Mari (2006,p.219) claimed. Buthaina plays an active role in the narrative demonstrating that radical women reject the long-established social conventions that no longer suit the modern era and the aspirations of modern women.

Al-Mari (ibid.,p.219) claims that with the exception of Buthaina in '*Adhra*' *al-Manfā*, all the traditional female Saudi characters in al-Nassir's novels lack depth and that those who are represented as being educated and active are very much in the minority. However, *Dam al-Barā'a* (al-Nassir, 2001,p.125) provides another representation of a radical Saudi woman who is just as active as Buthaina. Hibā falls in love with the protagonist, acting on her beliefs about women's freedom. Although

she knows that it is socially unacceptable and taboo for a woman to visit a man who is not a relative, she disregards these traditions and visits him in his home when he is injured (ibid.,p.90). She also does not wear a veil, traditionally worn by Saudi women (ibid.). Moreover, she (ibid.,p.125) knows that by social tradition she will be forced to marry a relative, but she totally rejects this idea, and prefers instead to remain single rather than being forced into an arranged marriage. As previously noted, the narrator usually draws the readers' attention to facts about the status of women in Saudi society by choosing to highlight instances which show unfair treatment of women, such as the case of marriage in which the girl may not choose her own husband:

إن مجتمعهم المحافظ لا يقبل بمثل ذلك الاختيار [...] إن من فساد هذا النظام التعيس الذي تحرم فيه الفتاة من اختيار عريسها الذي قد تظهر مساوئه بالعشرات ولكن لا فائدة من معرفتها بعد أن يكون قد اقتحم خندق الفتاة.

The conservative society does not accept such a choice. In this corrupt system, the girl cannot choose her husband who could have many negative traits, and there is no way to know about these traits until after the marriage (ibid.).

The author directs his criticism at this closed society, in which long-established social customs and traditions disregard the rights of women even in the crucial issues pertaining to them most. Regular meetings between Hiba and the protagonist (ibid.,p.90) shows her opposition to social customs and traditions. Moreover, she (ibid.,pp.64,90) she goes wherever she wishes, even to the shops, whereas this is prohibited for the other girls in her village. Hiba lives her life as she wishes, completely ignoring the social customs in her village. Both, Hiba and Buthaina clearly present the ideas of radical women. There are other radical female characters in al-Nassir's novels such as 'Itir in *Ḥitān al-Rīh*, proving that Buthaina is not the only active character in al-Nassir's novel, as al-Mari claims.

## 8.5 Conclusion

This discussion of the representation of Saudi women in al-Nassir's work has shown that the status of females in the Saudi novel has been affected by social change. These transformations in the role of Saudi women faced a number of obstacles that slowed down the progress for the Saudi women's movement, in comparison to the

rapid development of infrastructure and the economy. However, it is noted that the power of male authority tends to restrict the freedom and rights of female characters especially in closed places such as villages. Differential treatment among family members highlights the absolute authority of the male characters. Some commonly held beliefs, such as males are the source of power, the provider of the best opinions, and the breadwinner, also contribute the idea of dictatorial patriarchy in this society.

The novels explore the links between women's role and Islamic belief, which is a complex one due to misinterpretations of religious teachings and texts. Moreover, the influence of ideas about the women's liberation movement is seen in al-Nassir's female characters with the appearance of new types such as the modern woman and the radical woman. Female characters are seen to succeed in overcoming some of their social problems in the fields of education and work.

Saudi women are looking to achieve more and participate more fully in society. To date, they have succeeded in gaining just some of their rights and continue their struggle against other unresolved issues including the right to drive and to gain more job opportunities. Conservative religious opinions and long-established social customs are reasons for the slowness of the pace of change with regards to women's issues. In his novels, al-Nassir attempts to reflect the different roles that women play within Saudi society. Those characters who represent traditional women play no active role in the progress of the narrative, a reflection of women's inactivity in real life. In contrast, the radical female characters play a major role in moving the plot forward and are represented as being freed from restrictions.

In spite of the fact that the Saudi government has made concerted attempts to improve women participation in the political, economic, and educational fields of the state, the transformation in Saudi women's status seems to be slow compared to pace of other transformations. In general, male characters play a greater role in the Saudi social novel compared to their female counterparts. However male characters are also seen to demand freedom for Saudi women on the grounds they believe that females have the right to be involved in all aspects of society. In his time, al-Nassir, was considered to be the first great defender of women's rights in his novels, as is clear from his works, which play a great deal of attention to women's issues.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

The main objective of this chapter is to revisit the research questions raised in Chapter One, as a means of reviewing the major results of this study, and to discuss ideas for future research on the Saudi social novel. As shown in Chapter One, this thesis attempted to address an initial question:

**How are social transformations in modern Saudi society represented in the fiction of Saudi novelist Ibrahim al-Nassir?**

This initial research question comprises seven interrelated questions. The following discussion addresses each of these questions in turn.

### **Research Question 1: What is a social novel?**

This research question formed the main focus of the second chapter, which was intended to provide deeper understanding about the social novel, which is used as literary material in this thesis to demonstrate how social transformations in modern Saudi society are represented in al-Nassir's novels. Many Western and Arab studies concerning the social novel were reviewed to benefit from them in drawing up the framework of the social novel. However, these studies have used the term "social novel" in different ways for their own purposes. Some studies focus on the term in relation to historical issues; other are more interested in analysing how this genre represents the impact of economics and politics on society, and some even focus on the aesthetics of this subgenre. Arab literary studies have paid little attention to this subgenre and have failed to produce a clear definition of this genre, as can be seen in al-Shanṭi's study, which relates the social novel to the term "romantic."

This chapter also addressed methodological considerations in order to show how the chosen texts were to be studied in this thesis. This included the need to contextualise al-Nassir's social texts in order to analyse his texts and understand how he chooses to represent social transformations in his novels.

This thesis reveals that there is an overlap between the social novel and several other subgenres, such as the political novel, the economic novel, the industrial novel, the

historical novel, and the autobiographical novel. Thus, this thesis attempts to conceptualise the term according to its literary structure. It was concluded that the social novel is a realist literary subgenre, which has a social thesis and deals with human relationships, customs, and morals. It presents a prevailing social problem that is usually generated by conflict between traditional and modern social values and also depicts social aspirations.

It was necessary to trace the origin and development of the social novel in order to clearly understand the circumstances and factors that contributed to its emergence. This subgenre was seen as a response to the rapid social transformation in many aspects of life, as literature is considered to be representations of reality. Comparing the emergence of this subgenre in both Western and Arab literature revealed that the circumstances and the factors of its emergence and development were largely the same. These included economic and political conditions, globalisation, the complex relationship between human and machine, and technology's powerful grip on our lives.

Some Arab studies have highlighted particular factors such as education, the press, printing and publishing, and the presence of intellectual elite that contributed to spreading the popularity of the social novel. It was suggested that other contributory factors included foreign educational scholarships, which have had an impact on some Saudi novelists such as Ghazi al-Qusaibi and Turki al-Hamad. In addition, certain intellectual movements have contributed to spreading the social novel in Arab literature such as the realist movement in art (1850) and Pan-Arab nationalism. The translation of foreign novels into Arabic also played an important role in introducing this subgenre to Arab readers. Great social narrative works by authors such as Charles Dickens, Maxim Gorky, Victor Hugo, and Honoré de Balzac have all been translated into the Arabic language. The final factor that contributed to the emergence and the development of the social novel is the novelist's belief in social responsibility and his efforts to perform a function for society by writing about social issues.

Discussing the development of the Saudi social novel and the resulting literary accomplishments demonstrates the great importance of this subgenre in Saudi literature. This subgenre initially developed slowly, but as increasing numbers of social novels were published, this subgenre has enticed many young Saudi writers into expressing their views on social issues in this literary form. To date, there have been few critical studies, as the literature review illustrates, but now literary scholars are beginning to engage with the social novel, especially after the increase in publishing of Saudi novels.

This thesis noted that the relationship between the social novel and society is obvious: the social novel is a representation of reality rather than a reflection and the role of the novelist in structuring the novel is not simply to represent reality and to convey it into the social novel. Studying this relation makes it clear that the social novel as a literary genre can be regarded as the clearest confluence point of literature and society due to its combination of the many different forms of society and literary aesthetics.

As the study of a selection of al-Nassir's social texts makes clear, the aesthetic features of the social novel are varied. However, this study highlights some of these such as dealing with human customs and relations, changing current social thought, and participating in social discussion. In addition, there are two other important elements—namely, realism and freedom of speech—that enable this subgenre to depict a society from many aspects. The thesis reveals that some Saudi studies continue to deal with the social novel as a romantic text, whereas it is a realistic text.

This chapter sheds light on key themes addressed by the social novel, such as gender, race, class, identity, and freedom, the majority of social novels, including those of al-Nassir, focus on one or more of these themes. Some studies have attempted to deny the idea of social class and its existence in the Saudi novel since this is against the values of Islamic society; thus, these studies attempt to coin a new term, “social contrast.” Surprisingly, these studies have to admit the appearance of social classes in the Saudi narrative texts. This chapter attempts to answer the



research question about the social novel by developing a deeper understanding of many methodological and theoretical aspects of this subgenre.

## **Research Question 2: What major social transformations have taken place in Saudi Arabia?**

This research question is answered in the third chapter, which considers the unification of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as the first important social transformation in the Arabian Peninsula, since it transformed Saudi society from a scattered tribal society into a modern civil society. This chapter provided basic information about the *Sharī'a*-based Saudi regime, in order to contextualise the progress of these transformations within this conservative society. The reform of Ibn 'Abdu al-Wahāb, founded on Ḥanbali jurisprudence, has become a key source of government rule. Some scholars have harshly criticised the reform; however, by overlapping with other three Islamic approaches, the reform has been able to obtain a more holistic view.

This chapter focused on the two main factors that have contributed to the social transformation of many aspects of Saudi life. The discovery of oil changed the status of the modern kingdom. Many new hospitals, factories, buildings, schools, ports, universities, and government institutions were built as a result, and modern cities were established. This rapid development changed the nature of the Saudi desert from a quiet wilderness into a busy industrialised zone.

Globalisation also played a major role in changing Saudi society, especially after the revolution of modern technology, which has made the entire world into a small village. Globalisation helps in forming shared human demands such as human rights, and, with the rise of globalisation, Saudi society has become more open to the world.

This chapter also noted the negative impact of these transformations on Saudis including feelings of alienation and divided loyalties inside society. These impacts are represented in some of al-Nassir's characters.

### **Research Question 3: What role does Al-Nassir occupy in Saudi literature?**

Chapter Four shed light on an important literary figure in the history of Saudi literature: Ibrahim al-Nassir. It provided key information about his education and cultural background, his career, personal life, and literary works. It was revealed that al-Nassir was affected by reading many translated Western social novels, which helped from his ideas about structuring this subgenre. In addition, his work as a journalist helped him to understand social themes in Saudi society, as can be seen clearly through his novels. He also benefitted from writing short stories, since he borrowed some of the social issues and ideas in his short stories and employed these in his novels.

Saudi novelists share some common characteristics in how they interpret society, such as focusing on freedom as a social demand, In addition, they focus on individuals as the basis for development and they pay close attention to social transformation and document the various social problems generated as a result of these transformations. The Saudi social novel is regarded as a literary reformist discourse that attempts to raise social awareness about the importance of the reform. However, every Saudi novelist has his own method for representing society; some of them have relied on economic and political aspects to show social transformation, whilst other have relied on the discourse of myths and legends to interpret society. As is clear from his social works, al-Nassir attempts to read Saudi society from a social perspective to represent its problems and issues.

Many critical studies refer to characterisation and dialogue as key stylistic features of al-Nassir's style. Regarding characterisation, it has been argued that al-Nassir pays scant attention to the external appearance of his protagonists since they form alter egos of the author himself. This thesis argued against this opinion. Al-Nassir's dialogues contain three levels of Arabic: standard, dialect, and in between these two levels. Many critics claim that using dialect reduces the value of the novel, whereas this thesis has argued that this is an important means of reflecting the reality of the characters and contemporary culture.

#### **Research Question 4: How is identity narrativised in al-Nassir's fiction?**

This chapter addresses this topic through the key terms of self and the other. Although a number of studies have claimed that there was a gap in the history of Saudi novels between 1960 and 1980 when the themes of self and the other disappeared, this thesis reveals that the theme did exist in this period, especially in al-Nassir's novels from those decades.

As is also noted in al-Nassir's novels, the relationship between the self and the other takes three forms, each being linked to a type of identity: Islamic, Arab, and Saudi nationality. The relationship between self and the other in the context of Islamic and Arab identity is a complex one due to historical and political issues such as colonialism, the issue of Palestine, and the Suez Crisis. This chapter notes that with the development of Saudi identity, the relationship with the other becomes more conciliatory, in keeping with the aims of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and reflects the orientations of the Saudi government.

#### **Research Question 5: How are social spaces narrativised in al-Nassir's fiction?**

This research question is the focus of Chapter Six, which analyses the narration of urban and rural space in al-Nassir's novels where the rapid social transformation of the city is used to represent complexity, modernity, openness, and weak social relationships whilst the village, which still resists these transformations, represents tradition, religion, and the tribe. This chapter also explored the conflict and interaction between these two spaces, in terms of the urbanisation of the village, and the ruralisation of the city.

Other key themes related to narrating space in al-Nassir's novels include migration from villages to cities and the author's work highlights the many reasons that entice villagers to move into the large cities such as looking for a job, education, and a better environment in which to live. Reverse migration from cities to the villages means that migrants return to the village carrying knowledge and experiences gained from the modern city, which changes both them and the village to which they return. The other theme is alienation, and al-Nassir makes it clear that this phenomenon is

not limited solely to city life in Saudi narrative discourse; it is also experienced by the villagers.

**Research Question 6: How are Saudi family's relationships narrativised in al-Nassir's fiction?**

Chapter Seven addresses the representation of social relationships within Saudi society in al-Nassir's novels and how these have responded to social transformation. This chapter illustrates the nature of the two types of husband-wife relationships. The first is the traditional relationship, founded on the subordination of women to men. The other type is the modern relationship, founded on equality, love, and understanding between husband and wife. This relationship is reflected in the social narrative text, as the female character in this relationship plays a more active role in the narrative as in the case of 'Itir in *Ghuūm al-Kharīf*. Al-Nassir's protagonists always criticise the role of the traditional wife, as they seek a modern wife who is able to understand the needs of men in today's society.

The relationships between children and parents have become more complex due to the aspirations of a younger generation who desire independence and freedom. They reject long-established conventions, such as arranged or forced marriage and refuse to allow their family to determine their marriage partners or even their social roles. The social novel usually represents this relationship in terms of a conflict between parents and their children to show the generation gap between them. As is made clear, al-Nassir's protagonists particularly struggle against traditional social customs, which limit their freedom and aspirations, and they try to gain their independence from their family. These novels also reveal a slight change in the mind-set of society with regards to offspring since whereas previously, sons would have been more highly prized than daughters, there is now evidence of a new image of a modern family, which does not distinguish on the basis of gender.

### **Research Question 7: How are Saudi women's issues narrativised in al-Nassir's fiction?**

This research question is the focus of Chapter 8, which investigates the issues of Saudi women in al-Nassir's social novels. This chapter begins by examining the reasons why the importance of women's role diminished in Saudi society and exploring how this change is reflected in the narrative text. Some studies blame the persistence of traditional habits and customs and refer to the negative influence of patriarchy and colonialism. Others suggest that oil, not Islam, has reduced the numbers of females in the labour force. The Saudi social novel also shows how conservative religious opinion voiced its opposition to the education of women. In addition to this, the social novel illustrates the role which some Saudi mothers play in preparing their daughters for traditional social roles which are limited to the marital home.

Like other Saudi novelists, al-Nassir found that women's issues provide rich literary material so he dedicated two of his novels specifically to this subject: *'Adhra' al-Manfā* and *Dam al-Barā'a*. This chapter addresses two important issues related to Saudi women: the women's liberation movement, and Islam and sexism. In his social novels, al-Nassir features female characters who represent the liberation of women in society. Buthaina, for example, tries to change traditional ideas about the role of women in a developing society by raising the level of social awareness about this topic. The social novel also investigated the relationship between Islam and women and revealed that society is trying to resist changes to the role of women by placing old customs as obstacles in front of them.

Three types of female characters appear in al-Nassir novels: traditional women, modern women, and radical women. With regards to first of these types, this thesis reveals that they do not play an active role in the progress of the fictional events, reflecting the passivity of the role they role in real life. In contrast, their modern and radical counterparts play a central role in the narrative, as exemplified in the character of Buthaina, who does not give up even after the failure of her marriage.

Generally speaking, the social novels of al-Nassir pay significant attention to the various types of transformations which have taken place in Saudi society; thus, it is true to say that social transformation is a major theme of the social novel. Studying al-Nassir's work provides some ideas for future research on the Saudi novel. Firstly,

the themes of feminism and the image of the “other” in the Saudi novel considered from the perspective of social transformation would benefit from further examination. It would also be interesting to explore the intertextual links between al-Nassir’s short stories and his novels. In addition, a study of the representation of Pan-Arab nationalism in al-Nassir’s fiction would make a useful addition to the field of Arabic literary studies as would a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of alienation in al-Nassir’s literary works.

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