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Home is Exile: Identity Quest in Saud Al-Sanousi's Saq Al-Bamboo:

A Post-modern Study

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Abstract:

This paper discusses identity quest in Saud Al-Sanousi's novel, *Saq Al-Bamboo* (2012), from a postmodern perspective. Al-Sanousi becomes one of the prominent Gulf modern novelists whose works widely discuss topics related to the unfair social, cultural, humanitarian and racist practices of the postmodern era such as identity fragmentation, hybridity, culture hegemony, citizenship rights, and oppression of minorities and foreign workers. Therefore, this paper sheds light on the topic of identity loss in Saud Al-Sanousi's novel *Saq Al-Bamboo*. The novel has been analysed by using the Post-modern theory. The findings of the study proved that the main characters in the novel severely suffered of their social and cultural alienation. In spite of their serious attempts to prove their identity, all these efforts went in vain due to the intransigence of strict laws and unfair traditions of the Gulf society. The study will significantly contribute to the critical studies of postmodern literature and open new horizons for further studies.

Key words:, identity quest, Arabian Gulf novel, postmodernism, Saq Al-Bamboo

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الوطن هو المنفى: البحث عن الهوية في رواية "ساق البامبو" لسعود السنعوسي:

دراسة ما بعد الحداثة

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الملخص:

تسعى هذه الدراسة موضوع البحث عن الهوية في رواية سعود السنعوسي "ساق البامبو" (2012) من منظور ما بعد الحداثة. يعد سعود السنعوسي من كتاب الرواية الخليجية الحديثة البارزين الذين انتقدوا في أعمالهم على نطاق واسع الموضوعات التي تتعلق بالممارسات الاجتماعية والثقافية والإنسانية والعنصرية غير العادلة لعصر ما بعد الحداثة مثل تشظي الهوية، التهجين أو تداخل الأجناس، والهيمنة الثقافية، وحقوق المواطنة، واضطهاد الأقليات والعمالة الأجنبية. لذلك تلقي هذه الدراسة الضوء على موضوع ضياع الانتماء في الرواية. ففي تحليل الرواية، تم استخدام نظرية ما بعد الحداثة. وقد أثبتت نتائج الدراسة أن الشخصيات الرئيسية في الرواية عانت بشدة من اغترابها الاجتماعي والثقافي وقد حاولت جاهدة لإثبات هويتها ولكن بات كل محاولاتها بالفشل، بسبب صرامة القوانين والتقاليد غير العادلة للبلد. كما أنها ستسهم هذه الدراسة بشكل كبير في إثراء الدراسات النقدية لأدب ما بعد الحداثة وفتح آفاق جديدة لمزيد من الدراسات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ساق البامبو، البحث عن الهوية، الرواية الخليجية، مصطلح ما بعد الحداثة

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Introduction:

The twentieth century writers have expressed their voices loudly through their writings, speeches, and seminars. They have used many themes and various techniques to convey their message around the world. The changes in social, political, historical, economic and geographical aspects of life have greatly affected their writings. Therefore, they have raised the questions of race, hybridity, ethnicity, identity, oppression, culture, and globalization. In addition, some diasporic writers who have lived outside their homeland shared them these common themes such as migration, displacement, identity crisis, mixed culture and hybridity.

It is worth mentioning to say that the Arabic novel has been influenced by the main trends of postmodernism and post-colonialism as well. In this context, one might be confused between the two terms. Firstly, postmodernism began in the mid-20th century as a reaction against modernism. It focuses on the idea that art is a reflection of culture and concepts of irony, parody, and

self-reflection. In other word, postmodern literature describes the works of literature that were produced after World War II (1945). The main objective of postmodern literature is to break away from conventional traditions through experimentation with new literary devices, forms, genres, and styles. In addition, it is a cultural, philosophical and artistic movement which,

... can be traced through the history of modern thought but takes present shape after the Second World War, postmodernity now loosely encompasses or relates to a series of movements, sometimes incompatible, that emerged in affluent countries in Europe and of European descent in art, architecture, music, the social sciences and the humanities (Taylor & Winquist, 2001, p. 304)

On the other hand, modernism began in the late 19th century and sought to break away from the traditions of the past and create something new and different. This movement was characterized by experimentation, individualism, and a rejection of the past. Thus, modernism developed itself to be an ideology of a unified world and a unified humanity with a shared vision and shared goals.

On the contrary, postcolonial "designates the state of peoples and regions formally colonized principally by western imperial nations, and the study of the material and cultural implications of that history and its aftermath" (Taylor & Winquist, 2001, p. 299). This kind of literature clearly refers to the literary works that have been produced by people from former colonial nations and works written to record the postcolonial experience of colonialism and its past and present effects. Post-colonialism is also the critical academic study of the cultural, political and economic legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the impact of human control and exploitation of colonized people and their lands.

From the above definitions, there is a strong intersection between the two concepts. In this regard, Berger mentions that postmodernism and post-colonialism converge in some respective purposes. First, both are a textual practice. Second, the two movements examine an emergent or dominant global culture. In addition, both explore the idea of authority or as Berger

asserts that a dominant global culture, and perhaps this is why there is yet no definite boundary drawn between the two movements yet. So it seems that both movements investigate the ideas of control in different settings. (Berger, 1992.)

Moreover, Tiffin makes an excellent distinction again between the theories of post-colonialism and postmodernism. She says that they are energized by different theoretical assumptions (post-modernism) and by vastly different political (post-colonialism) motivations. A postmodernist focuses on aesthetics, and perhaps authority in general, but a postcolonial writer explores the implications of European authority. If so, then this might explain why post-colonialism is more of a political movement in contrast to a cultural movement, i.e. postmodernism. (Tiffin, 1993).

Therefore, the basic features of what is now called postmodernism can be found as early as the 1940s, most notably in the work of artists such as Jorge Luis Borges. However, most scholars today agree that postmodernism began to compete with modernism

in the late 1950s and gained ascendancy over it in the 1960s. Historically, the emergence of postmodernism began after World War II, that is, after 1945, as a project to overcome the modernist project through a radical renovation of the forms of art that had been established. It has appeared as reaction against modernism, a reaction against a totally new world after WWII, a reaction to significant post-war events: [cold war](#), the [civil rights movement in the United States](#), [post-colonialism](#), and globalization.

In essence, postmodernism is an extension of the modernist movement which discusses many issues such as self-conscious parody, irony, fragmentation, generic mixing, ambiguity, simultaneity and the breakdown between high and low forms of expression. However, in the literary field, it constitutes both a negation and an affirmation of the modernist panorama. Hence, postmodernism has begun as a radical fringe movement in the 1970s and has become the dominant movement of the 1980s. The notable literary devices of postmodern literature are paradox,

unreliable narrators, unrealistic narratives, parody and dark humor. Most postmodern literature also rejects the idea of a single theme or meaning, choosing instead to have many meanings or forgo theme entirely. Thus, postmodern literature is noticeably characterized by the use of metafiction, irony, pastiche, hyperreality, self-reflexivity, magical realism, intertextuality, unpredictability, identity fragmentation, individual alienation, parody, complexity, paranoia, culture change, identity, absurdism, abstraction, power construct, social construct, materialism, nihilism, idealism, ...etc.

Indeed, there is resemblance between the postmodern and postcolonial literature. Despite the Gulf countries have never been colonized, such themes have been reflected by Gulf writers. It seems that they share their peers of Arab writers their worries and aspirations. Some Arabian countries in Asia and Africa were once occupied, therefore, those Gulf writers have been affected by other Arabian writers. This mutual literary and cultural contact have caused positive interaction among

all writers of the arena. In addition, some diasporic writers who have lived outside their homeland shared common themes related to their resident countries such as migration, refugees problems, displacement, identity crisis and hybridity.

The Rise of Arabian Gulf Novel

The second half of the 20th century has witnessed a flourishing of Arab literature, fiction genre, in particular. The development of the Gulf prose has noticeably drawn the attention of critics and translators all around the world. It is known that the Kuwaiti novel was initiated in 1940s following the oil boom. For example, Farhan al-Farhan, Abdulla Khalaf, Ismael Fahd Ismael, ...etc., but also there are other female writers who established the novel such as Fatima al-Ali, Sabeeha al-Mahari, Laila al-Othman and others.

Indeed, different writings from the Arabian Gulf countries without exception have significantly contributed to the long and glorious history of Arab fiction. The most important novels that written in Arabic have been translated into many languages,

English comes foremost. Despite their contribution to the development of contemporary Arab fiction, these authors remain largely unknown to non-Arab readers.

The Arabian Gulf novelists have successfully shown themselves on the literary scene and competed great writers of the narrative. Hence, the Gulf novel has become a prominent element in the Arabian novels and has imposed itself in publishing houses. In this regard, many Gulf novel writers have won prestigious prizes in the Arabian peninsula. In addition, publishing houses have turned to Gulf writers because of the revival of novel writing in this Arabian region and its growing social and cultural role. There is no doubt that the Gulf novel has reached the stage of literary maturity. Therefore, it is important to mention some of the Gulf novels that have achieved unparalleled popularity to a large extent.

To begin with, Fatmia Yousef al-Ali, is a Kuwaiti author, short story writer and journalist. She was the first Kuwaiti woman to write a novel (published 1971), and has published four collections of short stories and in 1996 won

the Kuwait short story prize. However, some of her works have been adapted for Kuwaiti radio and television. She has published in Arabic, a novel, *Wujuh fi-l-Ziham* (Faces in the Crowd) and several collections of short stories, including *Wajhuha Watan* (Her Face is a Nation), *Ta' Marbuta* (A Feminine Ending), and *Dima' Ala-l-Qamar* (Blood on the Moon), the last of which is devoted to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. An English translation of her story "To Sleep" has been appeared in *Shahrazad's Sisters; Shahrayar's Brothers: An Anthology of Arabic Literature Since 1953* (Paintbrush, 2002). Laila al-Othman is another [Kuwaiti](#) writer, novelist, and short story writer. She has published fourteen collections of short stories, nine novels, and many news articles. Her last novel is *Al-Mohakama...Maqta' Min Sirat al-Waqi'* (The Trial... A Glimpse of Reality, 2000).

Recently, among the young Kuwaiti writers who have already proved themselves on the world of competition is the promising and prominent Kuwaiti novelist Saud Alsanousi whose famous novel *Saq Al-Bamboo* (The Bamboo

Stalk, 2012) has been translated by Jonathan Wright (2015) and *Mama Hissa's Mice* (2015), translated by Sawad Hussain (2020), Saudi [Laila al-Johani's](#) *Days of Ignorance*, translated by Nancy Robert in 2015, and Omani Jokha Al-harhi's *Sayyidat Al-Gamar* (Celestial Bodies, (2018), translated by Marilyn Booth, the novel was nominated for The Sheik Zayed Book Award in 2011 and also won the Man Booker International Prize 2019. Similarly, Omani author Zahran Al Qasimi has been awarded the 16th edition of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) 2023 for his novel "The Water Diviner". Thus, Al Qasimi has become the first Omani to emerge the winner of such great prizes. Indeed, he has made a remarkable contribution to contemporary Arabic literature with his fourth novel. His previous works include "Mountain of the Horseradish Tree" (2013), "The Sniper" (2014), and "Hunger for Honey" (2017), alongside published collections of poetry, short stories, and nonfiction.

In 2011, Saudi novelist Raja Alem has become the first woman to win the International Prize for

Arabic Fiction for her novel *The Dove's Necklace* (2010). She has won many prizes. Recently, she has won the Arabic Women's Creative Writing Prize in 2005 on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the founding of UNESCO; and the Lebanese Literary Club Prize, in Paris, 2008. Some of her works have been translated into English and Spanish.

In addition, Emirati novelist Naseeba alozaibi whose novel *Al Ghool wa Nabtat Al Olayq* (The Beast and the Blackberry, 2019) was nominated for The Sheikh Zayed Book Award. Her story Takshira (Frown) was shortlisted in the 2013 Etisalat Award's Book of the Year category, and her story *Ommy Ghorilla and Aby Feel* (My Mother is a Gorilla, and My Father is an Elephant) won the same award in the Best Text for 2017. Kuwaiti novelist Bothayna al-Essa's *All That I Want to Forget* (2019), Kuwaiti novelist Layla al-Ammar whose debut novel, *The Pact We Made* (2019) and *Silence*

is a Sense (2021) gained a critical appraisal. Saudi novelist Badriya al-Bishr whose novel *Hind and the Soldiers*, translated by Sanna Dhahir and published in 2017, Saudi Abdurrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* (1984), Kuwaiti Ismail Fahd Ismail's short novel *The Old Woman and the River* (2019) translated by Sophia Vasalou, Kuwaiti Taleb Alrefai's *The Shadow of the Sun* (1988) and *The Mariner*, the latter translated by Russell Harris (2020) , Kuwaiti Shahd Alshammari's *Head Above Water* (2022), Kuwaiti Mai al-Nakib's debut novel, *An Unlasting Home* (2022), However, these are some of the great novels written by the Gulf writers whose works have been awarded for their criticism for the mainstream issues and have brought them into the global spotlight. No doubt that their works reflect the diversity and richness of Arabic literature.

Saud Al-Sanousi (1981)

Saud Al-sanousi is regarded as one of the prominent Kuwaiti novelists and journalists in the history of Kuwaiti narrative. Based on critics' appraisal, he is one of the most important literary voices in the Arab world. He has also been described as a voice of conscience. He really represents the postmodern novel among the new generation of Arabian Gulf writers. Al-Sanousi was born in the capital city of Kuwait in 1981. His works have won a host of great awards. His first novel *The Prisoner of Mirrors* was published in 2010 and won the fourth Leila Othman Prize, a prestigious prize which is given for writing short stories and novels by young writers. In 2011, his short story *The Bonsai and the Old Man* also won a competition organized by *al-Arabi* magazine and BBC Arabic. His second novel *Saq Al-Bamboo* (The Bamboo Stalk, 2012) has won the International Prize for Arabic

Fiction (2013), (colloquially known as the "Arab Booker"). In this regard, Al-Sanousi becomes the first Kuwaiti writer who wins win the international prize for the Arab novel. This novel also won The State Of Kuwait Prize.

Due to the unexpected success of his novel *Saq Al-Bamboo*, which has widely been received a literary and critical appraisal, he has been encouraged to pursue his artistic skill of writing and has written his third novel *Firan Ammi Hessa* (Grandma Hessa's Mice, 2015). In addition, he has written his fourth novel *Hamam Al Dar* (Pigeons of the House, 2017). His last novel is *Naqa't Saleha* (Saleha's Camel, 2019). He is recently a writer in residence at The Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Cultural Centre. Significantly, his works have been appeared in a number of Kuwaiti publications, including *al-Watan* newspaper and *al-Arabi*, *al-Kuwait* and *al-Abwab* magazines.

He currently writes for *al-Qabas* newspaper and works on a new novel.

***Saq Al-Bamboo* (2012)**

This novel becomes one of the great literary masterpieces of the Kuwaiti writer Saud Al-Sanousi. By winning the Man 'Booker Prize' for the Arabic novel, *Saq Al-Bamboo* has gained worldly fame. In addition, it is one of the best Gulf novels which opens debates, discussions and raises some questions about the immigration severe consequences to the region and investigates the image of the Gulf not only on the eyes of locals, but also the expats. Hence, it has been translated into many languages. English comes foremost and has been published by Bloomsbury in February 2015.

Accordingly, this paper aims to investigate the identity quest in Saud Al-Sanousi's novel *Saq Al-Bamboo* (2012). This study is quite different from other previous

studies that have focused only on the themes of hybridity and its impact on identity. This research paper, however, tackles the gap related to the identity quest by the three characters in the novel.

. It is worldly known that each country throughout the world has its own identity, language and culture that distinguish its people from others. Nevertheless, some people in many countries have combined two different identities, languages and cultures in their practical life. These varieties of people represent the term 'hybridity' which means a mixture between two cultures, such as Eastern and Western cultures or cultures of two different languages, countries or even ethnicities. These complicated issues are widely reflected by Saud Al-Sanousi whose work sheds much light on the themes of hybridity, ethnicity, identity loss,

mixed culture and oppression of minority group and expats.

Saq Al-Bamboo is a postmodern Arabic novel and probably the most celebrated one in the Arabic-speaking world. The novel has been translated into English by the English writer and translator Jonathan Wright. The novel has also been translated into many European languages because of its boldness, freshness, seriousness and universality. Therefore, *Saq Al-Bamboo* has been considered as a revolutionary work which challenges the Gulf society and its traditions. In fact, it addresses universal issues of identity, ethnicity and religion.

The novel largely examines the contradictions and immigrant suffering in the Gulf Arabian societies. It explores the long journey of three characters who are in constant search to find their own identity, the green card which grants them permanent residence

in racial and multicultural society. The narrator and main character in the story is Jose or Issa; a hybrid who is a bitter fruit of a Filipino mother and a Kuwaiti father. His mother comes to Kuwait to work as a domestic maid for a rich family called al-Tarroof. Shortly after his birth, his mother is forcibly returned to the Philippines by his paternal family who refused to accept him as a family grandson. He grows up in the Philippines surrounded by his mother, grandfather, Mendoza who considers him an illegitimate child, uncle, aunt, Aida and the closest person to him, his cousin, Merla. In the Philippines, he grows up dreaming of the day his father returns him back to Kuwait and embraces him to live with his family where he can find the welfare and comfortable life.

The narrator's suffering begins when he is torn between two cultures, two languages, and three

religions. Al-Sanousi evokes different places and atmospheres as he creates a host of well-delineated characters. Jose has transcendent spiritual experiences and moves between Christian, Buddhist and Muslim places of worship. Given his attraction to meditation, "might I be a Buddhist without knowing it?" he asks himself (Al-Sanousi, 2013).

Indeed, it is a long deep and risky journey full of constant search for official papers to prove their identity and grant them passport to travel and identification card to study or work formally in a racial and harsh society. Three characters hardly strive to find a safe place as a shelter which insures their life. Jose and Ghassan urgently need such citizenship to have the green light moving freely and attaining their aspirations. Merla is the third character in the novel who seeks her identity so as to get a better

life and esteemed job in a desperate and poor society. Hence, the purpose of the present paper is to reveal the identity loss and identify the reasons behind its failure to achieve it in the novel.

Discussions and Analysis

The issue of identity is one of the most crucial topics that has aroused debate and interest in post-colonial societies. Identity as a concept is an essential and controversial in the post-colonial era. In general, identity is people's understanding of themselves, what sort of people they are, and how they treat others (Hogg, 2006). In addition, identity describes how individuals and groups define themselves and how others could define them based on race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture (Deng, 1995). Therefore, identity refers to the way individuals and groups realize themselves and think about how different they are from others in

racial, ethnic, religious, language, and cultural aspects. Moreover, before colonialism, Eastern societies had no issue with identity realization. In fact, original cultures and traditions are transmitted smoothly and naturally from one generation to another. During colonialism, the western invaders disturbed the stability to force their own cultures and affect the homogeneity of these societies. Thus, they aimed to separate the people from their original identity to weaken their sense of belonging to easily control them and exploit their wealth.

On the other hand, identity can be a set of meaningful ascriptions attached to the self, such as social roles, interests, a structure of values and norms, a web of acquaintances, and social attachments that make up a unique conception of one's personality. The definition of someone's

identity is the distinct personality of an individual. In this context, there are a lot of factors that determine someone's identity such as race, ethnicity, culture, hybridity, ideology, and original country. Therefore, the issue of identity is not a precise and framed concept as it can be an imagined and converted phenomenon. Identity simply converts to an issue when it is in crisis and when events that are supposed to be fixed, consistent, and firm, relocated by the experience of ambiguity and uncertainty (Shore, 1996).

Indeed, one of the most important characteristics of postcolonial literature is the way it is connected to identity and hybridity. Accordingly, the necessity of hybridity, inner conflict, and imitation of the western development, one can find that a lot of postcolonial scholars have given considerable

care to this point as well as interpreted its image in the colonial and postcolonial periods.

It is known that the themes of ethnicity, identity, culture assimilation, dominance and oppression (despising others) are crude materials for the Gulf writers. By the discovery of oil in the 1950s, migrants have come from different countries to Gulf states in search of a good job to improve their income and the style of living despite of their different cultures, languages, and religions. However, these foreign workers have faced many problems in their host societies, such as ill treatment and social discrimination. Definitely, there is something wrong with the host families by treating these foreign workers arrogantly and harshly. This inhumanity is tackled clearly and openly by Saud Al-Sanousi in his novel *Saq Al-Bamboo*. Such behavior is reflected by the

domineering characters of Ghanima, Norieh, and Mendoza who used to treat the minority group harshly for social and economic considerations.

In the essence, the oil boom and the arrival of the migrants to the Gulf States have changed the political, cultural, social and economic structure of the Gulf region. The fast transformations in all aspects of life pushed the gulf people further and created a big gap between the high class families and the lower classes. In addition, the rapid changes of the Gulf States raised conflicting ideas such as domination of royal families, women rights, classism, feminism, racism, and searching for identity.

Saq Al- Bamboo traces the repatriation of a Filipino-Kuwaiti who comes back to Kuwait in search for identity and a better life. Like her son, Josephine started her journey to the Gulf

region as a result of the global economic condition which forces thousands of people leave their homelands to the region following the discovery of oil. In the novel, she represents many immigrated Asians to the Gulf region who look for good jobs. In fact, Al-Sanousi's novel, further, investigates the relationship between the expats and the Gulf society.

The current study traces the long journey of three characters (Jose, Merla, and Ghassan) who are in constant search for their own identity. It is interesting to note that *Saq Al- Bamboo* has been written from the perspective of a hybrid boy of Kuwaiti-Filipino parentage about his struggle to find a place in his father's country and live peacefully. Al-Sanousi here reflects the dramatic identity and the bitter internal and external conflict by aggravating the obsession of belonging to one

name, family, culture, religion, society and country.

Saq Al-Bamboo invites the reader into Jose's story with an opening line that immediately alludes to his identity struggle:

My name is Jose. In the Philippines, it's pronounced in the English way, with an *h* sound at the start. In Arabic, rather like in Spanish, it begins with a *kh* sound, *xoseh*. In Portuguese, though it's written the same way, it opens with a *j*, as in Joseph. All these versions are completely different from my name here in Kuwait, where I'm known as Issa. (Al-Sanousi, 2013, p. 17)

Jose or Issa al-Tarroof, his father's family, is the main character in the novel. As the narrator of the story, he narrates the life of alienation he has experienced in both countries; Kuwait and Philippines. Jose is just one example of hybrid identity crisis in the Gulf states where Gulf citizens often marry

from Asian ethnicity such as Filipino, Indonesian, or Thai maids secretly. They are certainly afraid of social and moral scandal. Al-Sanousi has sharply criticized this kind of marriage because of its negative consequences. When some women come to the Gulf in search of a good job and better life at the houses of rich families, they are often forced to have a secret marriage or illegal relationship with the house owner. If they refuse, they will be expelled. In case of having a baby, this child will not be identified or granted a citizenship of his father's nationality. When the child grows up and needs to go to school, he/she cannot go because he does not have official documents that prove his identity.

Rashid, Jose's father, falls in love with Jose's mother, Josephine Mendoza who works at al-Tarouf family. Josephine's contract work in Kuwait is to work as a domestic

maid. Her fate is that she comes to Kuwait from the Philippines to meet Rashid, a spoiled and pampered son. Rashid loves her as a kind of compensation of his first love. Once, Rashid loves his colleague but his family refused her because she was from the lower class. Filled with emotional shock, he finds Josephine the right person, even temporarily to nurse and heal his deep wounds. So they married in secret by *Urfi* (unofficial) marriage and it was bear witnessed by two of his friends.

Josephine, with all the wide-eyed naivety of youth, believes she has found true love. But when she becomes pregnant, and with the rumble of war growing ever louder, Rashid abandons her and sends her back home with her baby son, Jose. Brought up struggling with his dual identity, Jose clings to the hope of returning to his father's country

when he is eighteen. The question which arises here is "Is Kuwait going to welcome him?" Daring and bold, *The Bamboo Stalk* takes an unflinching look at the phenomenon of foreign workers in the Arab countries and confronts the universal problems of identity loss, race, social injustice and religion.

In the novel, Jose represents many children who become fatherless or stateless. They become victims of unfair and strict rules as well as awkward traditions of the host country. It is fair to say that Josephine, as a Filipino maid who works at al-Tarroof rich family, must have all the privileges and rights to raise her baby, sending him to school and carries his father's nationality. However Rashid's mother, Ghanima, refuses this kind of marriage because she sees it as incompatible match and for other

social, moral and lawful considerations.

This unofficial marriage, in fact, has resulted the hybrid child, Jose or Issa. His dilemma here is being unwanted by his father's family, especially from his grandmother, Ghanima, whom she neither affords nor accepts, especially, when he was a newborn baby. Issa is regarded as " *...a curse for the family*" (Al-Sanousi, 2013, p. 51). Indeed, his grandmother, Ghanima, has the upper hand in the house and acts as the male figure of the family. Therefore, she sees him as "*the bomb which will explode any moment*" (Al-Sanousi, 2013, p. 74).

In Kuwait, the most Kuwaiti females are not really housewives, but house keepers who are responsible for taking care of their families while their spouses travel either for business or tourism (Tetreault, 2001). In the last century, and particularly in the

last two decades, Kuwaiti females have improved their skills and increased their status by entering for the most important fields that were not open for them previously. They hold higher positions at the state such as ambassadors, ministers, educators, doctors, engineers, judges, journalists, and in the fields of politics, economics, and business (Tetreault, 2001). In these positions, they have participated beside men and demonstrated the accomplishment of Kuwaiti females in organizations (Al-Mughni, 1993). Although the opportunity for women to participate in leadership positions has increased, the attitudes toward females in those leadership positions vary among the Kuwaiti people, depending on the cultural backgrounds of male leaders.

The reader is encountered by Mama Ghanima who behaves arrogantly and cruelly. Her

character is described as a neurotic old woman who is doting to her only granddaughter, Khawla. She is the girl who carries (full-Kuwaiti name) of her deceased father, Rashid. Indeed, the relationship between Essa and his grandmother, Ganimai is not very good because she treats him indecently. Her family and society norms force her to react harshly.

In his long search for his own name where he biologically and socially belongs, Jose longs for freedom. In the researcher's view, he is prisoned between two dark cells and shattered between two harsh worlds. In the Philippines, when he was seen by his grandfather, Mendoza, he called him "*illegitimate boy*" (Al-Sanousi, 2013, p. 59). In Philippines, people call him "Arabo" because he carries some Arabic features, whereas he is called in Kuwait "The Filipino" as he carries some Filipino features

of his mother (Al-Sanousi, 2013, p. 159). On the other hand, his aunts, Noriah and Awatef call him "*Issa Josephine*" (Al-Sanousi, 2013, p. 372), because he is regarded as an illegitimate boy and therefore, must be attributed to his mother. Only his half-sister, Khawla loves, supports and treats him as a real brother. Al-Sanousi here uses an irony to bring the conflict Jose experiences and deepens his struggle and alienation.

Rashid is forced to divorce Josephine and to send her back to the Philippines with her son. He assures her that she will come back when her son reaches the age of maturity to grant him his official name. Before going to Iraq, he asked his friend Ghassan to keep his promise and give his son his official documents that prove his nationality. In the Philippines, Jose suffers hardships, longing for his

homeland, the land of paradise as his mother calls it. Therefore, Jose decides to return back to Kuwait in search for his identity.

By the course of the events, Rashid was arrested by the Iraqi forces and then dies in a mass genocide in Karbala, Iraq. As a patriot, Rashid defends his country against Iraqi invasion in the second Gulf war. Therefore, the death of Jose's father symbolically represents the loss of his identity, because his father is the only person who can defend his right and proves his fatherhood (identity).

Another contradiction Jose encounters is that he is born Muslim, the religion of his father, but he is raised Christian, the religion of his mother. This contradiction which al-Sanousi brings has its indications later. As the name suggests, Issa carries the Islamic name, but Jose holds the Christian name. This dilemma, in

fact, deepens his inner struggle and confusion. He is torn between two cultures, two languages, and three religions. Adrift and yearning for a sense of belonging, Jose flirts with Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. But it seems that none satisfy him completely. He explained that if his parents only could give him a single, clear identity, instead of making him grope his way alone through life in search of one. He complains:

Then I would have just one name that would make me turn when someone called me. I would have just one native country. I would learn its national anthem. Its trees and streets would shape my memories and in the end I could lie at rest in its soil. I would have one religion I could believe in instead of having to set myself up as the prophet of a religion that was mine alone. (Al-Sanousi, 2013)

Certainly, this duality which Jose experiences is remaining him in constant self-struggle. He does not merge with al-Tarouf family or gain their recognition. Therefore, he decides to return to the Philippines after he loses his work and discovers that he cannot find his real family roots, like the bamboo tree which cannot be planted in the Kuwaiti land. In this regard, Jose says: "*If I were a bamboo tree that has no roots, we can cut a piece of its stalk and plant it with no roots in any land. It will grow so fast until it has new roots. It will grow again in a new land with no past or memory, with no importance of the different names*" (Al-Sanousi, 2013, p. 94).

The second character in the novel who is in quest for her identity is Merla. She is the illegitimate daughter of Aida and an unknown father. Aida, Jose's aunt, has been forced to practice prostitution to support her retired

father. He is financially suffers and needs money to satisfy his drinking and gambling habits. Therefore, his harshness forces his daughters look for work whatever the results are. Josephine has got a work contract in Kuwait and Aida meets foreigners every day. At the end of the day, she gives him the money he needs. Merla lives in an internal struggle and suffers from conscience torture. She has European features, a matter which makes her live in constant psychological struggle to seek her identity. She has been described by her cousin, Jose who loves her very much. He gazes at her and gives some details of her physical appearance by saying "*she has Filipino features, but her skin is reddish fair, her eyes are blue, her nose prominent, and her hair is brown*" (Al-Sanousi, 2013, p. 22). It is clear that these special features that Merla carries prove her father's identity. He must be European for some reasons. First,

these features can only be found in the European people. Second, Europeans are rich and go to spend their summer vacation to visit different countries. Third, only Europeans who pay much for those whores to enjoy themselves. The economic situation in the Philippines is very hard and most young Filipinos suffer from unemployment. Fourth, a Filipino cannot pay much money for practicing adultery.

Like Jose, Merla suffers socially and psychologically because she needs to prove her identity. She lives as a stranger and alienated person in her mother's homeland. Though she has the European physical appearance, no one can propose her one day. She sends her cousin, Jose an email to describe her beauty which is the only precious thing that she owns. She proudly says: "*My beauty, the only thing people consider, attracts their attention away from*

anything else. I consider this beauty as a distinguishing mark from my surroundings and stigma of my mother's memory, past and the circumstances of my birth., the baby of an European cock" (al-Sanousi, 2013, p. 281).

Merla is clearly painful and disgusted of the way that she was born to live the life of suffering and torture. That is why she despises her mother and treats her cruelly. She neither calls her "Mama" nor respects her orders. For example, when she tries to smoke marijuana, she never stops in spite of Aida's objection. She acts as a boy who never fears and does whatever he wants. This rebellion, however, is a kind of reaction against her mother's profession as a prostitution and her identity loss. She never stops thinking of her physical existence to this terrible and detested life. She is annoyed by her mother's wish to have a stable marital life

and future. She loudly screams: "[That's enough]... *after all I have heard from you about the cocks, you wish me a husband and children, too!??... look at me! ... Who am I? Where's my father?! ...Look at yourself... at your drunk father in his damned house. Where is he? Where are you?"* (Al-Sanousi, 2013, p. 128).

Merla's dilemma, in fact, of being nothing or nonbeing, leads her to search another alternative to find herself. She becomes lesbian and tattoos herself. She tattoos the two letters 'MM' on her arm. This match significantly has different interpretations: the first one, it probably indicates her strong relationship with her lesbian friend, Maria, the second one, her name is matched with her capital city of her country, Manila (the place where she really belongs or the place which destroyed her), and the third one indicates the first names of her grandfather,

Mendoza, in an attempt to connect herself with her mother's family, Merla Mendoza though he strongly hates her. In her search for identity, this familial attachment is the last destination by which she confesses her origin. She also resorts to practice her mother's profession as a kind of revenge for those who hurt her mother and the main cause of her long suffering. She states: *"I sense an unprecedented joy when they [bastards] lower down their heads to kiss my feet. I don't consider this, but a desperate search for weak chickens that look for worms between my toes. I [sharply] humiliate them. Then, I'm enough filled with satisfaction ... "* (Al-Sanousi, 2013, p. 282). In this regard, Belkhasher states:

Merla, Jose's cousin, suffers because she is a mestiza. Her beautiful European features always remind her of her hateful unknown father. Merla's attitude

towards herself makes her first revolt against her mother, Aida, and second leads her to addiction, to be lesbian, and finally to attempt to commit suicide. (Belkhasher & Badurais, 2016).

In her lost life, Merla is haunted by two things: thinking of her lost identity and death (committing suicide) as a way to forget her own family and put an end for her everlasting torture. This suffering and torture is a desperate attempt to search her lost identity or to put an end for her tragedy. However, the first one seems impossible as she hates Filipino's history because it records the tragic events of European colonizers and tourists who had been to the country. In a touristic tour with Jose around the city, she tells him that she strongly detests Europeans. She painfully expresses:

Detestation of Europeans grew inside me, those who occupied our

country for long years. Although they left, their traces remained witnessing their footsteps here. The name of our country remained as they called it after the name of their king, Philip II. And before many years, Aida's body was destroyed by an European. Then he departed, leaving what witnessed his passing steps here ...me. (Al-Sanousi, 2013, pp. 281-2)

At last, when she has realized the inevitability of her lost identity, she resorts to suicide so as to end her life. The idea of suicide occasionally flashes in her mind. Therefore, she repeats the Filipino fighter Jose Rizal's saying: *"for the sake of sacrifice, the victim must be pure to be accepted"* (Al-Sanousi, 2013, p. 282). As Erikson (1950) once put it, "Deprivation of identity can lead to murder" (p. 216). On the other hand, the presence of a sense of identity is important because it

serves as a prime motivator and a call for action and behavior. Daphna Oyserman (2015) states "once an identity (and its implications for behavior) comes to mind, people prefer to act in ways that are consonant with it" (p. 9). The desire to end her suffering, Merla thinks rashly although it is an illegal action. When she has realized the danger of death, she thinks wisely and says: *"no one commits suicide, but a coward who fails to face life, ... and a brave who dares to face death"* (Al-Sanousi, 2013, p. 321).

At the age of twenty-one, Merla seems to reach her maturity and starts thinking mentally. that It is Jose who hardly tries to save her from death by sending her frequent emails to stop thinking of killing herself. Towards the end of the novel, Merla appears in a dramatic scene as Jose's wife carrying his son, Rashid.

Ghassan is the third character in the novel who is in constant quest for his identity and the last character to be analysed in this study. In *The Bamboo Stalk*, Al-Sanousi does not give much details of his life. He probably wants to draw the readers and critics' attention to the size or space he occupies in Kuwaiti society. In Kuwait, these minority groups are marginalized and alienated deliberately by the society's norms and traditions.

There are five levels of social stratification in Kuwaiti society, and these divisions are based on social status which is determined by wealth. At the apex of the social hierarchy is the ruling family. Below that are old Kuwaiti merchant families. In the middle of the strata are former *Bedouin*, Arabian Desert nomads, who settled in Kuwait with the advent of the oil industry. Next come Arabs from neighboring

countries, and at the bottom of this hierarchy are foreigners.

Within classes, there are strong kinship bonds, which help maintain the social structure. Social stratification is extremely perpetuated by the state, as in the legal ability to own property by cultural factors, such as marriage patterns, and by social rights, such as the provision or lack of state funded education, healthcare, and housing. Within this hierarchy, there are enormous gaps between the vastly rich, the middle class, and the extraordinarily poor migrants. Al-Sanousi is clever enough to depict this social racism in his novel as he dreams of social equality among classes in the society. His aim is clear enough that he wants to draw the Statesmen to this critical issue and achieve such social justice.

He is a close friend of Rashid al-Tarouf whom he loves very much and spends most of his time with

him. Jose meets Ghassan in Kuwait face to face. They meet not by chance, but fate brings them together as they both in search for one's identity. Their first meeting was at the airport where Ghassan welcomed Issa. He is described by the narrator, Jose as "*his eyes are so sad that I've never seen. If I'm asked once 'how does sadness look like?', my answer is 'Ghassan's face'*" (Al-Sanousi, 2013, p. 187). Jose's accurate description clearly reflects Ghassan's grieve and suffering. Like Jose, he suffers of his social and cultural alienation in the society he has grown up and lived his entire life. He is classified as one of those people who are known as *Bedouin* (without nationality) or stateless. In spite of their love for their host Kuwait, they are alienated by the strict regulations of the State. This alienation which he lives in his society, deepens his suffering and torture. This condition of hopeless

has been carefully depicted by Jose who know much about Ghassan as a narrator. He states: "*Ghassan's tearful laugh that clearly resembles a cry is an enough answer!*" (Al-Sanousi, 2013, pp. 191-2).

In Kuwait, Ghassan is an example of the marginalized minority because of their social and cultural status in the society. This issue of stateless or *Bedouin* has widely discussed in the novel and shocked the readers whom they hear of these unfair laws of the rich and liberal country, Kuwait. Jose is shocked when Ghassan tells him his status in the society and cannot travel because he has no official documents that prove his identity. This kind of deprivation is problematic, because he deserves such citizenship as a native person lives in Kuwait his entire life. In the conversation with Jose, Ghassan confesses: "*I can't travel; I'm not*

Kuwaiti...from where you are, then? He answered instantly bedoun ... I've heard about this country before, Jose replied. Ghassan keeps silent and I asked stupidly as usual, does Bedouin one of the GCC?" (Al-Sanousi, 2013, p 191).

It is known in Kuwait that a person who does not have a citizenship, people call him/her *Bedouin*, even if he/she is born in Kuwait. The society looks at him/her contemptuously. Though they represent more than one generation and serve their country as others, they do not have any privileges of the citizenship in the country. Accordingly, he is one of those *Bedouin* who will not grant his full rights as other Kuwaiti natives. Ghassan cannot marry from al -Tarooif family because of this lower status. They probably think about the future of their daughters who will suffer with their husbands and even their

children would not be granted the citizenship. Thus, Al-Sanousi stresses on this old issue of *bedoun* who work with other Kuwaiti in serving, developing and defending the country, but they treat with ethnic prejudice and discrimination.

This suffering, however, cannot be seen by those who live in higher tower and usually despise those outcasts in the society. Only Jose who can sense and experience such alienation, deprivation and torture. Jose cannot realize the literary meaning of this word: "He is *Bedouin*, I hate this name which I don't understand despite Ghassan's translation of it, but his parents were born in Kuwait, and he was born where his parents were born. He does not recognize another home, only this home, working in its military area and defending of it during occupation, he is *Bedouin*" (al-Sanousi, 2013, p.

192). Here Jose's ironic tone is clear how such a man who serves his country in the peace or war and he does not deserve to be given the citizenship which presents his identity.

The loss of identity is an endless problem. This minority group of stateless or *Bedouin* has to suffer the rest of their lives. The author wants to draw the reader's attention and the society to such identity loss. This novel raises a big question mark on the hybrid as Jose, Merla and Ghassan as *Bedouin*, who are stateless and have no citizenship. They are lost and unwelcomed in their society. In all cases, Jose represents identity loss, Merla represents identity fragmentation, and Ghassan represents identity crisis. Thus, they have to spend the rest of their life in an endless quest for their own identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, postmodern Arabic novel reflects the social, economic and the political changes in this region. It undergoes a long process before it becomes a recognizable genre of modern Arabic literature. It also adopts a satirical tone to disclose important negative aspects of the Gulf society, Kuwaiti, in particular. Prominent writers such Al-Sanousi and others have played an important role in the emergence and the development of this new modern genre and sent a clear message to the statesmen to reform their society laws.

The theme of identity quest has been widely reflected in the novel. Al-Sanousi stresses on the reason of identity loss which is hybridity, mixed race or ethnicity, cultural and social discrimination, high class hegemony and the countries' unfair laws. In an attempt to search their identity, all the three main characters in the novel faced

many obstacles: Jose has faced the cruel refusal of his al-Tarooof family because of his hybridity and his father's sudden death before revealing his truth and granting him his name. The title significantly symbolizes the bamboo tree cannot be planted in Kuwaiti soil because it is barren and dry, which symbolically means the country's strict laws. Merla does not find her own father and is left to face her inevitable fate. Finally, Ghassan who suffers of being stateless or *Bedouin* is left to struggle till the end of his life. All these characters are victims of the hybrid, ethnic and cultural reasons. In addition, the society's unfair norms and the country's strict laws.

The writer, to a greater extent, has succeeded in reflecting the critical and global issues in the Gulf society as a whole. These problems are hybridity, identity loss, exploitation of immigrated

workers and servants, racial and social discrimination, female hegemony, and social injustice. The novel accurately traces the long journey of one's lost entity and his/her desperate attempt to regain his/her true identity.

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