

The Portrayed Image of Woman in Short Stories Written by Qatari Female Writers

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Abstract

This paper explores how patriarchal culture is reflected on short stories written by Qatari female writers. It examines the represented image of woman, and to which extent the female characters in these short stories reflect the patriarchal perception of woman. Six short stories written by three female Qatari writers. Content analysis is used to analyze the text and capture the frequent themes. Two main themes are found in the six short stories. The first one is the image of woman as a mother and wife, the second one is the superiority of man. The writers succeed in documenting the struggle and oppression woman face in patriarchal societies. The short stories did not address many sensitive gender topics due to the fact that Qatar is a conservative society. discussing woman's rights in literature in traditional society has limits and red lines that writers are not allowed to cross it.

Keywords: short stories, gender and woman, Qatar, patriarchy.

Introduction:

Culture has significant influence on the creative expressions such as literature and arts. Its values are imbedded, discussed, and challenged in the creative productions. It is through literature and arts individuals document the collective experiences, make the voice of marginalized people heard, and resist the dominant ideology. Therefore, the creative productions provide precious spaces to investigate the most significant aspects, thoughts, and issues of a culture.

Literature reflects cultural stereotypes and standards and collective thoughts to pave the way for social changes. Reviewing the world of emotions and ethics provides new insights for the readers (Azcona, 2010). Woman and gender are one of the most significant issue in Qatar as a patriarchal society, where women are marginalized. Indeed, Patriarchal culture promotes the superiority of males and imposes their authorities inside and outside their family. Therefore, women under patriarchy system access power through their relative males, which enforce the inferiority of woman and her need to be protected and controlled (Eickelman, 1984).

Gender and women literature has been utilized in Arab societies for many decades to raise the awareness of the struggle of woman. Nawal Alsadawi on of the significant example in this filed who articulates in her novels the oppression imposes of Egyptian woman. However, the cultural difference between Egypt and Qatar as a conservative society has it is impact on the writers' ability to reflect and discuss all the topics related to gender inequality.

Woman in Patriarchal Culture:

The roots of patriarchy in Arab countries are found in the pre-Islamic period, where the chiefdom was a main character of society. Chiefdom as a system was a result of the socio-economic relationships in the rural systems, which at that time shaped the Arab region. In fact, the tribal relationships and connections paved the way to chiefdom, because of the importance it imposes on kinship and blood relations. individuals under this system need to provide loyalty and obedience in exchange of belonging and protection.

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The structured triable system is built on *asabiyyah* that consider the family as the basic unit of society. It also considers the clan and the tribes as an extension of the family. *Asabiyyah* strength the tribe's control and authority as an entity. This authority exists on many levels, the father's authority in his family. The shaikh control the tribe, therefore, a male dominated narrative is a main principle of the tribal societies. (Al-Haidari, 2016)

According to Al-Haidari (2016) there are three forms of oppression women face under patriarchal system: One is specified oppression based on a man's feeling of superiority over a woman as means to achieve his own personal and public interests. It eradicates the voice of women, diminishing their importance and social role. It causes lack of female integration and an absence of social harmony between the genders. The second form is paternalistic patriarchal oppression, which manifests itself as the domination of men in the family, society, and authority. It is often expressed through absurd control of the male of the female, such as a father's over the mother and the children. They are blindly obedient to the male figure, even if the female is older or more mature. Finally, the last form is institutionalized oppression – that is oppression embedded in the positive and customary laws of the country. These subjugate women's social, economic, and political rights, further hindering progress and potential for equality.

Woman in patriarchal societies is considered the presenter of the family and the tribe's honor. Therefore, she needs to be watched and controlled, because when she act immorally she hurt the reputation of a whole tribe. Therefore, modesty is an important aspect in these societies. In fact , the ideology of women's inferiority is not associated with women's rational ability nor her legal status, but rather to her ethical ability. It is believed that women are the initiators of any sexual relation (Antoun, 1968). Some practices are imposed on women to maintain their modesty. For instance ; covering women faces to make them invisible in public space, as well as, impose gender segregation. (Antoun, 1968; Doumato, 1992)

Modesty also identified through some personal traits such as bashfulness , humbleness , diffidence and shyness (Antoun, 1968; Eickelman, 1984). According to Eickelman (1984) define the Arabic word *Mustahya* as a feeling of embarrassment because of acting unacceptably in presence of higher people, which enforce the inferiority of women and the superiority of men.

It is important to note that contrary to popular thought, gender inequality and the oppression of women is not a reasoned with biological, religious, or psychological beliefs. In fact, social factors are what contribute to the continued subjugation of women– most explicitly men's personal interests to gain power and control.

Patriarchal System in Qatar:

In conservative societies, like Qatar, cultural and religious practices contributed to shaping gender identity. For instance, gender segregation in gulf societies promotes some values as modesty and shyness as key component of femininity, and as a result create social rules to maintain this segregation, besides transforming it to next generation. The Bedouins' social life is divided in two. In one side are men and on the other side are women and children. This segregation could be seen in private and public places. However, it is a relatively informal and flexible as it depends mainly on mutual avoidance. Men and women had different type of activities as a result of sexual separation of work. The main reason behind this segregation is to protect society from any inappropriate sexual interaction between both sexes. (Abu-Lughod, 1985) Later on , especially after Islamic Iranian revolution, in gulf societies a great importance put on female modesty and Islamic clothing, and a return to a Sharia law interpreted in ways detrimental to women was seen. Spreading polygamy, restricting divorce rights, and emphasizing the inferiority of women to men were supported by many Islamic scholars. On the other hands, improvements of the status of women were seen in areas as education and participating in public life. Educational and professional chances has grown, largely unaffected by the waves of conservatism and Islamic fundamentalism. (Ramazani, 1985)

Although woman in Islam is free from discrimination which they received in pre- Islam era. And she can practice any kind of political and economy activities, but it shouldn't interfere with her role as a wife and mother, as being a mother is perceived as the highest status. She is also highly respected and should be guarded and protected as a pearl. However, Muslims' interpretation of Islam made men the high- handed in their relationship with women (SalahS.Al-Mannai, 2010)

LouayBahry and Phebe Marr in thier study found that Qatari women life in the last 20 years has changed. Young women are not kept in their parents' home for waiting marriage. They through education and work have achieved a lot, many now are living as nuclear families where they have more freedom to raise their children. However, there are some boundaries that Qatar women cannot across, but are gradually expanding. Actually, Qatari women steps are supported by ruling family, and affected positively by the social changing in Qatar. Nevertheless, society in Qatar still traditional and conservative with a slow social reform. (Marr, Summer 2005)

Al Ghanim and Badahdah(2017) examined the changes in attitudes related to woman and gender in a conducted survey. The survey reveals that Qatari prefer large families, having more male children, and early marriage. 75 % of the participants stated that the decision related to children and house are made by husband and wife.

The result also shows that gender equality is accepted. However, studying deeply, the attitudes towards gender roles in other studies reveals patriarchal thoughts toward of women's roles. According to AL Ghanim (2017) there is a dominance of patriarchal ideology regarding gender roles in Qatar. the study shows that 31% of the female participants believe that women not supposed to choose their husbands, while 59 % of the men believe the same, which suggests that men follow more to patriarchal values and prefer to have the power over the family. 83% of participants believe that the father has the right to stop his daughter's marriage.

Al Ghanim (2017) states that the patriarchal ideology in Qatar society shapes the attitude towards gender role despite the impact of modernization. Qatari men and woman have almost similar perception of gender role, they believe that some work is not suitable for woman especially media because it could harm the tribe's reputation. The structured relationship especially blood relation is the main motive behind the attitude toward women's role, which reduce the options and opportunities a woman can has. Despite women's desire to adapt new roles instead of being just mothers and wives, they surrender to the patriarchal system and male authority when they face social resistance.

According to Golkowska (2017) Qatari women appreciate the opportunities they have to access education and work. However, their big concern is to make balance between the cultural expectation and the career requirements. For them, the social expectations are a form of pressure that prevent them from fully take advantage of the modernity in society. Therefore, the prioritize the familial commitments over individualistic ambition. the study of reveals how young Qatari women feel guilty and inadequate when they fail to meet the social and traditional norms and beliefs. Which Golkowska consider as the hidden cost of the noticeable gain . the study reveals how young Qatari woman try to achieve more agency through adjustment to the traditional gender norms. For instance; in marriage contract they have article that allow woman to continue her education and work . Abaya also another example for the adjustment young women in Qatar have, as the new colored abaya shows how Qatari women are trying to express themselves without clashing with social norms.

Harkness (2018) describes the strategies that Qatari women use to modify, adjust, reimagine their hijab to adapt to the social changes. He interpreted the hijab micro practices as a no movement resistance, different from the traditional feminist movement where activists openly demonstrate and rebel, no movement resistance made up of practices that are became as daily practices.

The interviewed Qatari women in this study who are against hijab tend to understand the controlling of women through their clothing in individualistic terms. They relate to this oppression to the family members, like the father or the mother and view it as strict clothing regulations, rather than a part of a gender inequality system that was formed and protected by institutions such as family, government and religion. They overlook the link between these institutions and the patriarchal system. One of the women stated that she and her peers continue pushing the boundaries through hijab micro practices and hopes that one day Qatari women can take off the abaya. On the other hand, some women expressed their desire to look modern and stylish while keeping their identity as Muslim women.

Alghanim (2009) in her study "violence against women in Qatari Society" shows some aspects of the dominant patriarchal culture in Qatar. She explained the type of violence women face and their responses and their thoughts about violence. She explains women's silence in terms of the cultural image of women. According to Al Ghanim women are culturally portrayed as weak, dependent, lacking authority and in need of a man's protection. Women stated that they usually keep silent about violence to protect the abuser or to avoid more punishment and scandal. The majority of the abused women have not reported being victims of violence to the police or any official institute. Moreover, most of the abusers are the males in the family (brothers, fathers, and husbands) in addition to mothers. this shows how women are controlled by patriarchal thoughts of womanhood and family to the extent that they accept being violated.

Objectives:

This paper attempts to explore the cultural impact on creative productions such as short stories written by Qatari females. it aims to:

- a) examine the portrayed image of woman in short stories written by Qatari female writers.
- b) investigates to which extent the patriarchal culture is reflected in the selected short stories.

Methodology

Six short stories were selected to examine how woman was portrayed, the short stories were selected based on two main criteria: first, the main character in the story should be woman. Second, it should be written by a Qatari female writer, the convening sampling was used. Searching in Ministry of culture for Qatari female authors.

I have a list of four significant female authors who write short stories. However, after searching for their books, one of them I could not find her books. Reading the four authors books, stories that meet the criteria were chosen.

Name of the story	The author
My Friend	Dalal Khalifa
She creates a forest for herself	Dalal Khalifa
The honorable lady	Huda Al Naimi
After the second millennium	Huda Al Naimi
The woman who looks for love	Khalthem Jabr
Happens to others	Huda Al Naimi

Content analysis is the main data collecting method in this study. The qualitative content analysis is used to investigate the characteristics of language without excluding it from its contextual meaning of the written materials. (Budd & Thorp 1967)

Axial coding was then used to identify main categories and arrange open codes based on what meaning they reveal. Axial coding went through number of attempts, first I wanted to identify the main themes in the short stories. After attentive reading for the first axial coding attempt and deep thinking, I recoded them based on the research questions as it seeks a patriarchy culture impact and the image of woman. therefore, I categorized the data to reflect these two main aspects.

Result and Discussion:

The collected data from the six short stories reveals two main themes in how woman is portrayed. 1) She is presented as a wife and mother.2) the second themes is the superiority of man. The portrayed women in the six short stories are in align with the struggle and marginalization women face under patriarchy. The hidden messages imbedded in these stories are a call to take further step to achieve gender equality.

Woman as a wife and mother:

Woman is portrayed as a social role, with emphasizing on the importance being a mother or a wife in the short story "the woman who looks for love", the main character has the same approach. she considers marriage to achieve stable life. The following quotes indicates the impact marriage has on women's' life.

"I said:Ghanim, my parents want me to marry a man they know. You looked at me and said: really? Then you kept silent. I though you really don't care, you know that I spent my life searching for stable life, for a home instead of living into two different houses of divorced parents" "Then I became a wife, I had stable life. I became the leady of the luxury quit house."

The woman in the short stories is searching for stability through marriage and motherhood. Scarifying love in order to achieve this was her only option. She also acts submissively and wait to a man to rescue her. This is typically the image of a woman in patriarchal society. It is the first duty of a woman is to be a wife and a mother to reproduce more generation. Moreover, it is sometimes considered as national duty to reproducing and it prioritize over any other tasks especially when the population is small. (Doumato1992) (Moghadam 2004).'

In fact. Four of the analyzed stories show the main characters are presented as wives and mothers, one is a wife who suffer because she is sterile in "My Friend" story, two are mothers who suffer because of their children in "The woman who looks for love" , and " Happen to others", and the fourth one in " The honorable lady" is a widow. In the four stories being a woman is presented as a tough experience, being a mother or trying to be , having children or childless all are presented in a way reflects how adopting the role of wife or a mother requires meeting some social expectations. As a wife you are expected to sacrifice to keep the love of your husband or to still a married woman. Here are some quotes support this approach; The sterile woman in "My Friend" story after her husband got married to her friend in order tohave children is saying:

"Every pregnancy was taking my away, as if I am alone in a bout sailing away, I know I commit a sin when I prevent your two babies from coming to life , It was a crime against you , him and the two babies"

Another quote emphasizes the importance of fertility, the woman in "Happens to others" story says:

It happened to my mother; she delivered the baby after seven months pregnancy. He could not survive; he prefers to leave rather than join 7 siblings I am the oldest one of them. My mother cried in a way I didn't expect, I was hearing her crying all the night.

I don't think she is sad because she lost the baby, she just wanted to prove to her neighbors that she still keeps her fertility because she was close to menopause, and she couldn't. "It was happening to others a lot, I didn't stop when it happened to me, I just went to my room to sleep, and I haven't wake up since then.

The woman in "the woman who looks for love" story describe the absence of her husband and her feeling of loneliness:

"No one is screaming in this house, my husband spend his time with his friends until the early morning .. the house is overwhelmed with quietness and silence, at least my baby can sleep all the night, no one bother him."

The widow woman in "The honorable lady" how she lived her life in the shadow of a famous man, a description that reflects how are women in general are shadow of their men, she says:

for two years, you were the wife no one knows, then for 20 years you were his widow, he was the people's loved king, when he died you discovered that he is still with you , living inside your black dress , stuck to your skin. You are not allowed to delete him from your memory as you did with your father and uncle

Through highlighting the experiences of being wives and mothers , the writers capture the essence of the pressure of social expectations on woman, The willing to scarify very precious friendship just to keep a man - like the woman in the story" my friend" – the attachment a woman have to their fertility to the point the could suicide when then lose a child- like the woman in " happen to other" – the living with an absent husband just to have a family – like the woman in " the woman who looks for love" , all these experiences are in align with patriarchal perception of woman. According to Kandiyoti (1988) woman gain access to power through the union with their children especially sons. Therefore, fertility is a source of security and stability in woman's life. Moreover, women are expected to keep the family together. Because the family has a significant role in traditional societies. the structure of patricidal society is based of the union of small families to form tribes, where the power distributed in a hierarchal order. woman in the bottom of this hierarchal order receive all the burden of maintaining the family consistent (Al Haidari, 2003) According to Al-Manni (2010) woman in Islam can practice any kind of political and economy activities, but it shouldn't interfere with her role as wife and mother, as being a mother is perceived as the highest status. This indicates the importance of family life in Qatar society. woman achieving marriage and motherhood meets the need to be socially identified, belong and recognized.

Superiority of man:

The analysis reveals the superiority on man. The man is a source of pain and fear of the female characters in the stories. He can hurt the woman emotionally and destroy her self-confidence. For instance, the woman in "My Friend" story, scarified to keep the man she loves by letting him marry to have children, and she choose her best friend to be his second wife. She Said:

"In a great love moment, I agreed to let him marry to have children, he asked to choose a second wife, and since I did, all love moment between us died. Despite his efforts to prove his love after having a second wife, I totally lost my self-confidence."

In the story "She creates forest for herself", the woman seems passive, calm, beautiful and naïve. She seems afraid of the power of man. Quotes from the story support this perception:

ever tigers are not safe, they are surrounded always by threats, this what the tiger female discovered while running in the forest "Female tiger fears the hunters' guns. She knows that she cannot defeat them without gun, but gun is dirty and devilish, a bullet which is not sharp as her tooth can change everything" "The butterfly is screaming, but she has no voice. Spiders net in old places are stronger than her colorful wings.

woman has no power nor options to confront the power of man. The two characters know to which extent man can destroy their life. However, they do not resist, but surrender. in fact, it is one of the main principles of patriarchal ideology, the superiority of men and the inferiority of woman.

In "My Friend Story" the woman lost her friendship in order to keep the man she loves So, she is a wounded woman and wife who had to share her husband with her best friend, because she can't have children. Both women the second and first wife suffered because they want to gain the love of a man, the first one suffered because she could not be a mother, she lost her best friend and her self-esteem in order to make a man satisfied. Here is a quota shows her relationship with him:

" I didn't expect my husband to love you, I don't know why I suppose that both of you will consider this marriage as official duty. In a great love moment, I agreed to let him marry to have children, he asked to choose a second wife, and since I did, all love moment between us died. Despite his efforts to prove his love after having a second wife, I totally lost my self-confidence."

In the story "After second millennium " the relation with man is the woman's priority. The Shahrazad in the story is a strong, independent, and intelligent queen, she had the chance to get divorced from Shahriar, the king who prison her for one thousand and one night, but she prefers to stay under his control, she was delighted when insist not to leave her.

In " She creates forest for herself" The woman is scare from men and thinks they can destroy her life. The man was the source of pain, joy and disappointment. Her relationship with him has changed her. It made her ferocious. Although she was as a deer passive and calm, and as a butterfly beautiful and naïve, but she was also the ferocious tiger. The man was the reason behind moving from one personality to the other. Here is a quote show how she perceives her relationship with him:

" even tigers are not safe, they are surrounded always by threats, this what the tiger female discovered while running in the forest " "Female tiger fears the hunters' guns. She knows that she cannot defeat them without gun, but gun is dirty and devilish, a bullet which is not sharp as her tooth can change everything."

The widow lady in "honorable lady" had two relationship with two men, one prison her in the black dress after he died, the other had free her when she loved him. She left her black dresses to colorful ones, until he just disappears. Then she went back to her black dress. Her life was black and colorful based on the man's presence. Here is a quote she describes her relationship with her died husband:

for two years, you were the wife no one knows, then for 20 years you were his widow, he was the people's loved king, when he died you discovered that he is still with you , living inside your black dress , stuck to your skin. You are not allowed to delete him from your memory as you did with your father and uncle.

The female characters perceive themselves as inferior comparing to the men in their life. The queen woman in "the new millennium "has everything she needs,the population of the kingdom were only women, the only man was her husband, when they ask her to send him out of the kingdom, she didn't it symbolize the inferiority a woman in patriarchal society seems comparing to men. She is unable to see herself equal to him.

The inferiority of woman in the short stories echoes the patriarchal perception of gendered modesty, because ideology of women's inferiority is not associated with women's rational ability nor her legal status, but rather to her ethical ability. It is believed that women are the initiators of any sexual relation (Antoun, 1968) therefore; man derived their superiority from being more ethically and intelligently trusted.

Conclusion:

The writers in their short stories presented woman through two main themes. The first theme is the image of a wife and mother, where the female characters in these stories suffer through their marriage but has no option but to be patient and submissive. They accept living with many difficult situations just to stay married. The second theme is the superiority of men, where the woman in the stories seems afraid of confront men, in need for the man protection and love. The male characters in the stories are powerful and able to destroy the female's life. These themes reflect the experience of being a woman in a patriarchal society. The writers documented the struggle of Qatari women in their literatures. Although the sample is small, as the analyzed stories are six, but some sensitive gender topics were not raised, for instance; violence against woman, sexual abuse, reproduction rights, discrimination against women through regulation and rules ..etc. this could be a result of the conservative nature of Qatar society, and the absence of effective feminist movements in Qatar, which makes it difficult and risky for Qatari female writers to investigate such sensitive topics.

Appendix (1)

My Friend, by Dalal Khalifa: The main character in the story is a wife who is infertile, and because of her husband's desire to have children, she suggested to choose the second wife. She convince her best friend to marry her husband, because she though they will respect her and will not love each other. The friend married the husband, they loved each other, and the friend got pregnant. The wife asked the friend to spend her last months before giving birth at her home, because she wanted to take care of her friend. After few days the friend lost the baby, the same story happened again with the second pregnancy, because the wife mixed some herbs with her friend's food every time.

In her third pregnancy, the friend lived with her mother until she gave birth for her only child. Later on when the husband died, the wife admit to her friend what she did. She told her, when my husband died, I felt finally that you became again my best friend.

She creates forest for herself, by Dalal Khalifa. The main character in the story is a single woman who search for the ideal man. She was in three affairs. The writer describes the woman as a one with three types of personalities, the butterfly, the deer and the tiger.

In the beginning she was just like a deer , calm and waiting all the time for the right person, however while she was waiting she used to have some affairs just to enjoy her time. One of them wanted to marry her, but she preferred to keep him waiting until she finds a better man. The second man she had to fight with his cousin to win him , but his cousin married him and he was not strong enough to make a decision. The third one left her and married a daughter of rich man. During this time she was also as a butterfly flying from a flower to another, until a spider ate her. After these disappointment she became like a tiger, running all the time in the forest , afraid of the hunter because with a small bullet he can kill her. The three men came back, she asked them to divorce their wives before marrying them, and they did, then she left them heartbroken as a revenge. The tiger was proud of herself. . Suddenly she found the ideal man, but she knows that the three men are just waiting for a chance to destroy her. She was as a tiger running in the forest trying to hide from hunters and waiting for the right time.

Happens to others by Huda Al Naimi: The woman in this story is a mother who lost her child. Before becoming a mother, some of her relative lost their children, even her mother and her cat. But she though that these mothers are using their sadness to gain attention or to achieve some goals. Like her cousin who left her husband because he was the reason behind her baby's death. The woman though it is just a way to get divorced and marry the man she loved before her marriage. Until she became a mother and lost her baby, that when she just went to her room and slept forever.

After the second millennium by Huda Al Naimi: In this story Shahrazad after the thousand and one night has succeed in taking Shahriar place. Finally, she became in power. All historian women visited her in the palace ,Balqis the queen of Sa'aba , Liala and Buthina the lovers of tow Arab famous poets Qais and Jammel. All the men were send out of the kingdom, the only man remain in the kingdom was Shahriar. Shahrazad start making decisions, all her decisions were historical ones, she formed women army to fight all the historical famous battles that men fought. The history was rewritten to take the men's glory. Elizabeth was there in the palace and she suggested to send Shahriar out of the kingdom, because it became women's kingdom, and the Queen Sharazad was the only one who still married. Sharazad asked him in front of all the women to divorce her and he refused. She smiled but didn't want anyone to notice, she asked him again to divorce her and he said NO, then sharazed looked to her surround women and said: Dear ladies, since we achieved our goals, and sending Sharazad out of the kingdom is the last remain goal, and as you can see he is stubborn, so I need thousand and one night to convince him to divorce me.

The honorable lady, by Huda Al Naimi: The woman here is a wife of the previous president, he died after just two years of their marriage. She was a journalist went to make an interview with him, he loved her and proposed for her. She felt so lucky. After his death, she spent about 20 years living in black clothes and attending all the formal occasion as the previous first lady. She became a national symbol, she wasn't happy but she felt that her life is owned by her people, as if she is no longer a human being but a lived that remind people with the president the love so much. Everything changed when a young man loves her. Suddenly she felt alive again after along resistance, she started paying colored clothes, and planning to travel with him. The young man left her heartbroken and she retained to her black clothes and continue her life as a national symbol.

The woman who looks for love by Khaltham Jaber The woman in this story is a daughter of divorced parents, she used to live is a house full of fights and conflicts until their parents got divorced. She was always searching for security and love. She loved a man from lower class, and because her father will not let her marry such man, she wanted him to be brave enough and fight for their love, but he didn't. Then she marry a man from the same class, she knew that her loved man cried a lot when he knows. But for her, she didn't not have any other choice. Her life with her husband was al life without emotions and communication, but it was a quit home, where at least – as her thinks- no screaming and shouting would scare her son.

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