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Female Inferiority, Existential Representation, and Heritage: A Feminist Reading of A Jewish Saviour by Salmah Al Moushi

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Abstract

Arabic feminist narratives have taken significant steps towards developing their unique narratives amidst numerous other discourses that attempt to confiscate their elements. The features constituting Arab feminist discourse have been numerous and varied, but narrative stereotypes and repeated disclosures almost dominated the general direction of Arab feminist narrative themes. Accordingly, this research paper adopts a non-stereotypical approach towards investigating the investment of feminist narratives in cultural potentials and the choices of experimentation. This paper stemmed from the following research problem: Have Arab women narratives been able, in some of their aspects, to represent cultural potentials and questions of experimentation in formulating their feminist discourse in a way that bridges the gap, both in form and content, between them and the overall Arab narrative? This study has taken *A Jewish Savior* (2016), a novel by the Saudi writer Salmah Al Moushi, as a model that examines the employment of heritage in framing female inferiority existentially through a non-stereotypical proposal both in form and content. This study has been surrounded by many pitfalls; hence, it seeks to evaluate the novel's ability to overcome them in its capacity as a recently published feminist model. The novel will be analyzed from a feminist point of view with a special focus on existential representation and ideology, polyphony and experimentation attempts, and textual transcendence and the cognitive employment of heritage.

Keywords: Arab feminist discourse, existentialism, female inferiority heritage, feminism and identity, *Jewish Savior*, Salmah al Moushi

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Introduction

Most feminist writings stem from a problem stated as “the presence of a cultural defect in our everyday lives” (Al Saegh, 2008, p. 201), leading to the necessity to differentiate between the themes involving men and women. Despite women’s themes being accepted initially within the concept of women forming a specific awareness about themselves and that they “do not see things as men do” (Selden, 1985, p. 196), Arab feminist writings in the past decade have witnessed a transformation in themes which resist the idea of marginalizing ideology, heritage and experimentation while structuring the narrative text. These elements are essential requirements for narrative writing in general and acquire a sense of deepness and the ability to keep up with other forms of literature without expressing the gender-based anxieties imposed during the early stages of the formation of the feminist narrative in which feminist writing met the condition of “the presence of the woman’s/ writer’s awareness of herself and her existence” (Al Ghuthami, 1996, p. 182).

The transformational stage in the feminist mentality still needs further liberation in terms of cultural traditions and dominant practices. According to Simone de Beauvoir (1949) the restrictions imposed on women as a result of their upbringing and cultural assumptions limit their creative capabilities. However, introducing the liberation of women was limited in some Arab feminist writings to the concept of gender for some time. Such women writers exerted all their efforts to uplift spirits against the predominance of masculinity in a way that created stereotypical themes and enabled the cultural system to penetrate their writings (Shamali, 2016). This led to the exposure of feminists’ efforts to a large degree in terms of the themes they provided, which were pivoted around the same idea using the same instruments. In no way does this undermine the legitimacy of their themes. However, it should be taken into consideration that feminist writings during that period suffered from a stereotype that had to be avoided through new means, techniques, and themes. These would enable feminist discourse to keep up with developments, renew itself and allow itself to be affected by other literal models that are capable of this renovation and manifestation.

Such change can be achieved by supporting feminist thought in novel writing through ideology, the energy brought by heritage, and experimentation efforts. Kristeva (1994) says:

The issue of strangeness is connected to gender difference. We, men and women, are different creatures. The women of my generation who developed the feminist movement following the year 1968 insisted primarily on difference. According to Simone de Beauvoir, for instance, the issue was one of exposing identity or equality between men and women. An individual could realize that it was a struggle for equal pay and equal rights... but for another generation, the issue was a recognition of difference, an issue of facing (strangeness) and coexisting with it, not as two rival groups and not based hatred but as two independent entities, each respecting the other (the stranger). (p. 53)

Clearly, Kristeva encourages reconsidering the feminist writing style regarding its logical discourse. The current novel-writing scene provides us with feminist writing models which have

dispensed of the common stereotypes and have adopted new ideas and themes. One example is *A Jewish Savior* by the Saudi novelist, Al Moushi (2016). The novel is catching in its title and new in its theme as it presents the suffering of women throughout a collective history of fixed mentalities, rather than being caused by a person, man or woman, against women. The writer drew from existential references in her cultural themes. The question to be asked is: To what extent did she succeed in representing the modernizing discourse of her idea?

This study aims to reveal the existential representations in *A Jewish Savior* by Salmah Al Moushi and to explore the expressive instruments she used in her novel's discourse- whether being ideological, drawn from heritage, or experimental- in resisting the idea of female inferiority throughout history of humanity and in presenting solid feminine models capable of changing this idea. Therefore, this study draws on feminist criticism as a foundation to solve the study problem. The study is a theoretical effort which seeks to evaluate and explore the novel through three significant aspects: Existential representation and ideology, Polyphony and experimentation attempts, and Textual transcendences and the cognitive employment of heritage.

1- Existential Representation and Ideology

Representation refers to all forms of the Other's presence in a literary text, at the levels of characters or relationships of time, place, and cultural symbols (Al Zahrani, 2007, p. 51). It is a philosophical term used in Semiotics and suggests that the role of language is to represent things or to be instilled on a nonlinguistic reality. According to this understanding, words were seen as signs representing objects in the world (Al Qadi et al., 2010, p. 112). Feminist writing showed great creativity in representing its ideas through language, coupled with a strong narrative and representation to produce the knowledge it aspires to. Therefore, whereas Semiotics limits the process of representation to language and analyzes it as closed or constant, later developments dealt with representation as a source of producing knowledge (Hall, 2003, p.42). This knowledge produced by feminist discourse shapes the identity which represents the core of the feminist narrative. It suggests the idea of liberating itself from the masculine institution and its stagnant texts. This is caused by a state of "dynamic correlation between the referential experience and the narrative form, or between history and structure, which characterizes the feminist narrative in a way that this narrative represents the discourse of the Self in this world" (Bu Izza, 2017, p. 31) in resistance to the privileges of patriarchal control which lives by its cultural and social support and is not inherited through instinct or nature. Therefore, it is the "result of gender and not sexuality. It results from culture, not nature" (Bu Izza, 2017, p. 35). This conclusion has created a state of fruitful conflict between feminist narratives in the form of resisting the idea of gender from the novel's point of view on one hand, and rejecting narrative representations of female inferiority and existence on the other hand. Therefore, female inferiority and female existence are evident in the struggle between meanings (the signified) and images (the signifier) rather than at the level of the traditional conflict between masculinity and femininity. It is more involved with the textual, documentary, and fundamentalist conflict, which has consolidated the inferiority of the female through divine and mythological scriptures. Therefore, the representations of pain are positioned against the models of defeat, submission, and loss.

A Jewish Savior is distinguished by a double narrative structure. It is a narrative of two stories: the story of “Majd” with her lover “Ghaith,” and another story narrated by “Majd” about a Yemeni Jewish orphan girl named “Yusha”. The narrator, Majd, is described by her best friend, Anoud:

She would only see me as a radically educated person- as she used to describe me. In her mind, I was probably only a bohemian, liberated, suspicious and strange girl. She could be right about me as each of us has her own way of living, which she has created for herself, or which has made her the person she is. Each one’s daily life has developed differently. (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 99)

Majd represents a model of an educated girl who thinks differently than other normal girls. Knowledge and culture have refined her and made her deeper and more sophisticated. She is can provide a deep existential vision about the female in this life. The story narrator divides the novel’s pages in half between “Majd” and “Yusha”. Yusha has suffered from being an orphan living in an orphanage after losing her entire family in a traffic accident. Her grandfather, Afiazer, is her only alive relative. She begins her journey in search of salvation amid consecutive pain and loss, and resistance to the static heritage of scriptures and ideas.

Majd creates a model of the woman who resists through wisdom, knowledge, and science: “I believe that the essence of the soul is its ability to think logically. This does not depend on whether you are a man or a woman” (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 67). She then earns the right to develop the feminine Self. Thus, a female is more capable of writing about other females, and she can reclaim the power of steering the boat, of representation, speech, and expression of the female as the Self, away from the stereotypical binary opposition of masculinity and femininity, and feminist identity politics. *A Jewish Savior* symbolizes continuity, salvation, and passing through the gateway of pain to reclaim the lost essence and reshape the image. Therefore, the female is not only a body, a flesh; she is also a “body-self” (Lakoff and Johnson, 2016, p. 9).

This Self cannot live without a discourse resisting the dominant social and cultural powers through a text that rebuilds the feminist identity amid the inflicted pain and regressive scriptures. Helen Gilbert (2000) describes the idea of representation as a reflection of “identity, voice, and hence empowerment” (Gilbert and Tompkins, 2000, p. 6). This cannot be without having a voice and the ability of representing it.

Through Majd, the story’s narrator, Al Moushi introduces an existential representation of female inferiority and women’s dilemmas throughout history in a way that leads us to reconsider the dominant fundamentals and our convictions. The protagonist, Yusha, says, “A person can be free inside his mind and not somewhere else. Yes, that is the truth” (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 117). The achievement of the existentialism of the woman/the narrator and the woman whose story is being narrated requires a belief of and a practice that “their existence is not merely a departure from the probable to reality; neither is it simply continuing to live a negative life” (Hilal, 2012, p. 320). The matter is more profound and effective because existence “has a positive implication through which a person can accomplish himself in his own world... but humans exist because they surpass this to reach their own ‘self’ with an awareness that needs continuous being...and this being needs

a choice” (p. 320). This choice needs to be made based on freedom and contemplation, which is where “Majd” quotes the Greek novelist, Kazantzakis: “Oh, when will a human being become free like this; I hope for nothing. I am not afraid of anything. I am free” (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 43).

Existential representations in Al Moushi’s text are abundant in a way that shows the value of freedom of writing for a female. “Nobody knows that my anxiousness is a large existential one. My senses are unable to feel my dreadful existential boredom” (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 70). Such freedom achieves the desired existential basis as existential anxiousness requires the novelist to search for the essence of things: “My permanent search for the essence of things exposes the world around me and returns me to the starting point...everyone here is wearing a mask” (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 98). This search moves away from the stereotypical conflict between femininity and masculinity to a new level of existential conflict that places both women and men before a deeper and more critical problem: “I am like all those people... I am searching for the answers that would make my soul at peace with something” (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 237). This choice to move forward in search for an answer follows taking a risk “because making a choice is a type of risk” (Hilal, 2012, p. 320). The significance of the centrality of existence is paramount in feminist writings in a way that develops the conflict to a new level that involves nurturing the soul away from the problem of the body. The narrator has cited a line by Sartre that states: “We do not know what we want and yet we are responsible for what we are- that is the fact” (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 98). What we are is what represents the centrality of existence for a female narrator. The narrator, “Majd,” and the narrated, “Yusha”, both suffer severe conditions that are not directly related to the patriarchal institution. The orphanhood suffered by Yusha is caused by fate and is exemplified by Jewish teachings that firmly state the idea of female inferiority. On the other hand, “Majd” suffers from her longing for “Ghaith.” “Ghaith” is her salvation and remedy and, therefore, she had to face his prolonged absence through reading, writing, and indulging deeply into different thoughts and ideologies, out of her belief that “every life is important in a way or another and no life is complete in our deep existence. We are not perfect” (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 109).

The idea of imperfection provides existential comfort to the narrator’s soul. Her protagonist resists the notion of female inferiority and fluctuates between the fakeness of life and the absurdity of waiting:

Here I am waking up to another fake day, other boring details, many lies, unjustified patience, a tiring wait for a life that will not come. I do not know what it is with me. I have started to wake up every morning and sit and think about life and death, about absurdity, about nothing, about the Mahdi and the Messiah, the antichrist, and about the shopkeeper who will bring the bread and milk. (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 80)

This degree of existential sophistication in the theme reveals a delicate representation of feminist writers’ feelings towards their existence. The issue has exceeded the idea of gender to the notion of existence in its complete form.

The idea of existential representation in the novel is coupled with the representation of female inferiority in religious scriptures and the cultural heritage of humanity. The narrator, “Majd”, is

keen on proving this idea through her resistance. She puts much effort into extracting its foundations to suit the case of her protagonist, “Yusha”, who is searching for her salvation from her pain and loss: “There is an ancient heritage circulating between the people of that land suggesting that females are unwelcomed, and that it is difficult for a family to accept having a girl as she is born with nine curses that come along with her” (*A Jewish Savior*, 18). This text is mentioned in the context of exposing the idea of women’s inferiority in the Jewish teachings, representing a problem for “Yusha” and a reason behind her harsh life being a female. Therefore, she had to look for her salvation, even in death. Females are equated with sin and inferiority: “Thank God I was not created a woman”, in an early announcement that steals the female’s self and deprives her of her natural authority to compete, learn and prove herself, and not to be limited to a narrow spiritual corner created for her by others as confinement of nonnegotiable concepts.

Yusha, we were not in the Haredim community. Men in Haredi Judaism have numerous servants. They have creatures to deliver children and please and serve them. A man must not walk between two women or two dogs or two pigs. Women are not allowed to walk on the men’s side of the road. He who teaches his daughter the Torah is teaching her sin, and the Torah is better burned than handed to a woman. (*A Jewish Savior*, 152)

These foundations in the Jewish faith on the concept of inferiority surpass the limitations of community and culture, which can be overcome in one way or another to become sacred ideas embedded in minds and souls, and cannot be violated. The narrator’s use of such texts mentioned by the story’s characters is a form of advancing the struggle to a religious text level more than it being a social norm that could be limited through writing: “Believe me, the Lord did not create us for Him to punish us and then regret our existence” (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 135). The narrator adds a representation of the value of women in the Christian and Islamic faiths by saying:

The Talmud describes women as a bag of filth and the Jewish religion stresses that women should be prevented from receiving an education and that they are unclean and impure. No problem! We were not the only ones described as unclean, sinful and evil. Christians believe that women are originally impure and unclean, and Islam sees them as lacking sanity, unclean, and as symbols of satanic seduction. I have learned that they have the same fundamental teachings regarding women. Religions are surprisingly similar, and long ago, people were debating whether women had souls or not. (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 135)

This large number of religious texts and scriptures symbolize an acceptance of the unrivaled idea of inferiority in religious doctrines, as mentioned by Yusha, who feels the weight of these texts on her shoulders to the extent of expulsion. Therefore, she confronts them through contemplation and by bearing the pain while waiting for salvation:

Why do I always have to be the girl who vigorously defends her human species, which has been cursed since eternity and was always the weaker, the lower, and the lesser? How can women reconcile with this history? My heart has become more valuable through the years, and I no longer need to share myself with a life that is unlike me. (*A Jewish Savior*, pp. 134-135)

Existential representations of women's inferiority reoccur throughout the work, whether by the narrator, "Majd," the protagonist, "Yusha," or her friend, "Eliana." These sorts of utterances serve as a step closer to salvation that will not be achieved without dismantling these widespread authoritative texts, which gain their power from their religious references.

Feminist texts try, through their transformations, to avoid confrontation with the patriarchal authority, favoring to deal with the fundamental texts that control society's understandings and conduct. Such a confrontation with religious texts requires two mutual actions, the act of reading and the act of writing. There must be no submission to the authority of those texts or the viciousness of society.

The term "salvation" develops throughout the novel, starting with the title. The term is suggested in the second word of the title and in the form of the active participle "savior" in an indication of Yusha's ability to provide salvation and grant it to whoever needs it, such as the narrator, "Majd," and "Eliana." Therefore, "Yusha" would be a provider and a receiver of salvation at the same time. The following lines are by Eliana, Yusha's friend:

We did not commit any sins, but we are saved through our fates as lonely orphans confined to this place, these conditions and these times. We cannot but move on with patience and satisfaction and live as saved ones. My mother told me before she died: I fear that I will pass away one day and that you will not find your way. Indeed, she predicted the path which I will not know how to pass. (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 172).

The place, time, and loneliness imposed a condition of 'no choice' on Yusha and Eliana. The latter presented a hopeless submissive discourse towards the destiny of the Jewish girl with no salvation in near sight. On the other hand, Yusha, saw a glimpse of hope towards salvation and experienced this hope with vigor and patience with the help of her grandfather, Afeazer. Yusha says:

Do you think that salvation means to celebrate history's slaughtering and wars committed by our ancestors? No, my friend, salvation is that love and dedication given to you by your grandmother. She was your Christ and Savior. Get up and celebrate her, light up some colorful candles and wish her soul some peace. (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 147).

Salvation is not achieved by glorifying and sanctifying scriptures without reviewing or assessing them. Also, women should dedicate themselves to giving love to one another because love and education are safe paths towards salvation from the tyranny of scriptures and their teachings. After experiencing much pain and oppression, and after gathering her determination to overcome her ordeal, Yusha says, "Indeed, you have chosen the way to save your soul. Don't you agree that through embodiment, return, and liberty from the agonies, pain, and sufferings, the soul is purified and can, therefore, reach perfection?" (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 200).

A question that must be raised here is will females succeed in reaching this level of spiritual salvation amid this segregating and oppressive existential representation of their inferiority? The

answer lies in the ability of the female model to stand firm and transform her pain into positive energy. Such transformation is not achieved by all the feminist symbols in the novel. For example, Majd is neither able to gain inspiration for salvation from the cultural scriptures living inside her nor is she able to find salvation in her protagonist, Yusha. On the other hand, Yusha succeeds in crossing the road leading to salvation despite her harsh conditions and being surrounded by Jewish scriptures and teachings imposed on girls of her age. Majd says at the end of the novel, "Blessed are the deprived ones who chased love naked, bare and honest...those who were saved by pain and separation" (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 257). She also adds, "Blessed are the orphans who only needed a little window to look through and see the sky. They were saved by their orphanhood. Blessed are the ones whose lives stood still and hung between their hearts and the skies" (p. 257).

In this monologue, Majd acknowledges that Yusha successfully finds salvation, whereas she is not able to follow steps. Whereas both experienced suffering, the model provided by Majd in her capacity as a narrator and novelist, in the form of Yusha, is more capable of transforming the ills of pain and orphanhood into a remedy. It is as if the current state of suffering experienced by feminism is similar to that of orphanhood and rupture, which cannot be overcome without confronting scriptures with knowledge and separation, pain and weakness with patience and determination. Yusha's salvation is achieved through contemplation, knowledge and patience, not through withdrawal and surrender. Mohammed Gheneimi Hilal says about existentialism, "Were he to withdraw himself and try to achieve his individual goals, which he does not share with his people or class, he would become a rebel. There is a difference between a legitimate revolution and rebellion as the latter is inhumane and violates human principles" (Hilal, 2012, p. 321).

Clearly, *A Jewish Savior* addresses abundantly Jewish Talmudic teachings that intensify the suffering experienced by Yusha. Such scriptures required substantial effort exerted by the author to explore them and connect them with the story's events. She addresses the Feast of Lots (Purim), which is celebrated on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of Adar (p. 144). She also explores the strict view of the Haredi community towards women (p. 151), the Jewish Sabbath (p. 165), the reincarnation of souls to better the soul (p. 200), the Day of Atonement (p. 203), the Thirteen Principles of Faith (p. 219), the circumcision ceremony (p. 232) and many other Jewish events that are connected to the lives of Yusha, Yamen, Eliana, Afeazer (the grandfather), the mother, Seraphim, and Shammash (the father). This effort enhances the scope of the work. It supports the argument that female suffering is already enrooted in doctrine scriptures and is not merely the product of patriarchal control overpower. It also reveals the power of women's writings, their understanding of ideology, their use of it, as well as their ability to dig deep into its roots. It also forshadowed their ability to create a situation of intellectual discussion on a human level among all nations to clarify female inferiority representations, the features of their existence, and to try to eliminate them.

2- Polyphony and Experimentation Attempts

The issue of polyphony in the narrative discourse stems from multilingualism. This is a key idea in novel writing, according to Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), who asserts that the novel is "a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 33). Therefore, what we say in a novel

must have various voice options, implying that language supersedes the idea of the relationship between the uttered and the uttering to something more complex. In its experimentation phase, the Arabic novel has achieved a noticeable level of maturity regarding the idea of polyphony in the novel genre, mimicking the variety in Arab life.

Through the aforementioned, it can be said that Bakhtin construes the idea of polyphony from “the flow of linguistic forms, methods and specific structures of different origins, between speakers living in a specific society. These forms, methods, and structures cannot be attributed to the sole subjectivity of the speaker” (Saveurs & Raemdonck, 2009, p.100). Therefore, Bakhtin implies that the theme of polyphony is the principle behind the theory of language and literary discourses. The voices within a novel engage in dialogue, indicating a dialogue between different ideologies without defeating the others, whereas characters present themselves through the representations of names, characteristics, actions, and appearances. These voices achieve the principle of dialogue and eliminates the idea of monophony, as is the case in poetry.

A Jewish Savior is divided into two generative stories. Whereas the title foreshadows the second story only, the novel is narrated by an educated narrator while expressing her conditions and crushed soul due to her current reality and explaining the effects of her suffering more than the reasons behind it. Her chronic suffering drives her to begin writing a novel about ‘Yusha,’ an orphan Yemeni Jewish girl who had no fortunes in life. Therefore, the narrator faces Yusha’s challenging conditions, orphanhood, and rupture through patience, contemplation and deep knowledge leading to the protection of her ‘Self’.

The novel is woven in style similar to that of *The Thousand Nights and One Night*, which supports the idea of polyphony. The novelist/ woman uses “Majd” as her narrator. Majd reveals her tragedy without determining the specific reasons for her sorrow except “Ghaith” leaving her and not visiting or calling her too often. Therefore, “Majd” turns to writing as a way for salvation by depicting the tragedy of Yusha. The narrator directs narration as she tells her own story or that good part of it to find a spot with a clear vision allowing her to own her female voice and diminish the effects of dependency on patriarchal literature. Through her determination to hold the right to her narrative and that of her protagonist Yusha- who is a symbol of marginalization, as her issue is beyond the geographical interests of Arab feminist writings- the narrator can elevate her case to a comprehensive human-level away from the guidance of creeds and the pressures of hatred.

Assigning the powers of representation to a female narrator attempts to own the voice, direct the discourse and reclaim the female Self. Further, the novel has even granted the narrative authority in some parts to Yusha for her to provide a perspective on her reality through representation, not speech. Because Yusha symbolizes the oppressed stolen women by means of a cultural ideological setting, therefore, discourse must be confronted with discourse, raising the value of experimentation in the novel’s structure by achieving a state of narrative duality with consent between Majd and Yusha’s stories. This duality creates a form of narrative reinforcement, which is meant to be in its own self. Majd says while chatting to her friend, Anoud, “My thoughts are confused. You know that I am busy writing the events of my novel these days. I want to finish before the end of April” (*A Jewish Savior*, 73). In another context, she says, “I have to make my

coffee and start completing my novel. The story is calling on me to write it" (*A Jewish Savior*, 83). Within this duality is intentionality to construct this narrative reinforcement between two stories. Despite the difference in time and place settings, the space for oppression and suffering is the same. Women's worries can only be solved by women. It is a narration action that overcomes geographical, religious, and cultural obstacles to create a unified case involving pain, exclusion, orphanhood, and separation. However, these conditions form the path to salvation. Majd" says:

I have a sadistic tendency to torture myself when I'm writing stories about people's suffering. I have this deep urge to share their agonies. I would feel ashamed of myself to write a story about a tortured soul while sitting on a riverbank, or writing in a luxurious place, or while eating tasty food. I have this obsession to share with them...their most real agonies (*A Jewish Savior*, pp.14-15).

The lines reflect the voice of the novel's primary narrator and the clear statement about her intentions to share the agonies of women with them, regardless of the differences. She declares that sharing the sufferings and refractions is a remedy to her soul, as much as it reflects the woman's ability to unveil her voice which intersects with the voices of other females.

Majd, the narrator, is keen on highlighting her name in the novel as a clear announcement of her issue. She narrates her story publically and speaks with Ghaith openly. This dialogue highlights her name as she does not remain unknown: "Oh, Majd! It is more like a divine holocaust to purify the soul" (*A Jewish Savior*, 52). This issue of highlighting the narrator's name reveals her voice and identity directly to enable her to use them in confronting the identities (masculine or feminine) that try to deprive her of her feminist voice.

The narrator did not hesitate in directing the whips of her criticism towards other women whom she sees as unworthy:

Women are everywhere standing under dim candle lights, smoking cigarettes in a way that shows that they are doing so to prove to themselves that they are strong and liberated. Colored faces, fake actions, and gestures which ignite a silent rage inside of me...they are an example of women who think that personal importance and worth lie in the jewelry they are wearing or in smoking a cigarette in an unprofessional way. (*A Jewish Savior*, 90)

In a different context, she adds by saying, "They are in a bitter, psychotic conflict between what they want and what they are" (*A Jewish Savior*, 96). The narrator tries through her narrative voice to criticize women who are unprepared to have the awareness required to advance their cause and appear as composed individuals, therefore, to allow them to face masculine dominance, which is acquired along with the weapons of ideological and heritage scriptures. Hence, it is no wonder that the narrator describes herself as a bohemian, liberated, mysterious and weird girl, which she justifies confirming that each of us has his/her own particular life. Such belief eliminates the individual voice and supports the idea of polyphony, which is the novel's purpose.

The narrator is keen on restructuring the voice representations in the novel by resisting rival thoughts through action and patience, and describing cases of suffering. The novel does not

represent events as much as it represents thoughts and allows a discussion between them. Therefore, the characters' views are expressed in the form of conflicting voices, suffering is exchanged, oppression is confronted by force, and wisdom is confronted by knowledge. Contrary to usual feminist novels, this novel does not conform to the typical layout of story narration which involves a rational development of the plot where one voice is in control. Instead, the narrator divides the narrative authority between herself and the protagonist Yusha in a way that builds the narrative representation on a dual basis of vision- as mentioned above. This narrative technique allows the protagonist to narrate part of her story using her own voice, not that of the narrator. After gaining the choice to narrate part of her story, Yusha says:

I have been a sad girl from the start. Now, they are calling me weird, and to them, I am close to being mad...Had I not become very tolerant and forgiving while looking at them- all of them- I would have become the same as them, cruel, unable to forgive and ignorant of the truth. (*A Jewish Savior*, pp. 175-176)

Obviously, this duality in a narration has caused splits in the story's structure, which have resulted in highlighting other similar stories such as the suffering of 'Yamen', the deaf girl who was Yusha's roommate in the orphanage. Yusha says, "I would complain a lot about her silence. She would not say or reject anything; she is just silent! Her silence led me to talk to myself, to find my inner voice" (*A Jewish Savior*, 191). Yusha discovers the meaning of a person finding her inner voice. She is able to talk to it, complain to it, criticize it, scold it, torture it, and even insult it. This deafness can be interpreted metaphorically as the forcefully imposed silence that appeared in many women's stories, women who were forgotten or enslaved. So, how can we reach salvation through silence?

When Eliana comes to the orphanage, she becomes Yusha's roommate. Quickly she begins to talk about her tragic family life and the cruelty of her parents which is dictated by a religious doctrine. She belongs to a Jewish community called the Haredim. She believes that she was a normal quiet child who was "immersed in silence and fear. I learned to be afraid at a very young age, maybe when I began to fear animals, people, strangers, physical pain, sickness, and even death which I began fearing and not understanding" (*A Jewish Savior*, 191). Eliana has witnessed all forms of human humiliation, terror, physical pain, illness, and defeat. She has faced many ordeals and experienced them to the fullest which has shaped her personality.

This tale reproduction produces the story's theme and founds for the notion of desired salvation. Majd narrates her social ordeal and her pain due to her distance from Ghaith, who has a mirage dimension in work. She then resorts to Yusha's story, pleading for salvation. Yusha tells her story and is not hesitant to make way for the presentation of other women who also deserve salvation. The rotation takes place in an experimental structure consistent with the meaning presented by the novel. And this harmony is coupled with the narrator's announcement of the idea:

Why should I always have to be the person vigorously defending my human-kind which has been cursed since ancient times...female power has been obliterated intentionally and placed in the dark for the past 4000 years. How have humans been misled about the truth

of the female as being
motherhood...mercy...life...truth...justice...dignity...knowledge...and enlightenment?
(*A Jewish Savior*, pp.134-135)

The narrator's voice as such limits the stereotypes abundant in feminist writings as this voice calls for reviewing the injustice inflicted upon females throughout entire human history.

These branching paths in the story's narrative structure have paved the way to employ some epistemological issues related to the story's subject and the intention behind writing it. There is a clear surpassing of the gender problem which shaped feminism in the Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Woolf phases and the era to follow, in favor of other issues of knowledge which are firmly attached to feminism such as orphanhood, doctrines, and wise manhood (in the form of the grandfather, Afeazer, and the absent lover, Ghaith).

The idea of polyphony could not have been achieved as desired without the narrator, Majd, and the protagonist, Yusha, resorting to the act of writing. "There is no reason to live except to write the final scripture which I wish to produce as a way of trying to create an absurd tale" (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 188). The narrator, who is busy putting herself together, does not monopolize the narration to her own, personal story. The novel is divided into fourteen unnumbered sections, each of which begins with a quotation cited either from Arabic or world heritage. These sections are split evenly between the two stories, which is a sign of the equal importance of both narratives. Therefore, Majd, the narrator, is granted the right to represent her voice and express her thoughts strongly. Thus, the narrator has provided a narrative style that consolidates the independence of the work's characters and provides them with the freedom to suggest, complain. The first-person pronoun also has an essential role in enhancing this right, dispensing of the option to use an overall narrator with complete knowledge who narrates but does not participate in the events. The use of the first person-pronoun, whose knowledge is the same as that of the characters, is a form of presenting the witnessing narrator as the work does not need to reveal the hidden features of the characters, and those characters do not need a representative and are capable of expressing themselves, as noticed throughout the work.

The above-mentioned has achieved freedom in the structure of the novel's form in an untraditional way caused by the experimentation efforts exerted in writing. This novel does not seek simply to tell a story, but it provides a new model that dispenses the stereotypical theme and presents a narrative structure that grants the work freedom from the authority of form. Such technique has provided a space for expression and performance, which has guaranteed highlighting suffering and its causes and has provided an element of surprise in the methods of the presentation without depending on the authority of events, their succession, and the suspense they create.

The polyphony connected to the discourse structure imposes restrictions on the author's powers preventing her from forcing her will on the other characters. Accordingly, the reader is authorized to reorder the story's events and decide their meanings and significance. The reader is also the one who predicts their endings in light of the semantic oppositions, different points of view, and the perspectives of the narrators who represent speaking entities because "identity is achieved by

reclaiming voice and speech and by owning your discourse” (Bu Izza, 2017, p. 43). This personal discourse resists stereotypical images and fake beings. It pushes towards reconsidering the past and future, and puts limits to the incursions of dominant cultural representations through personifying the feminist voice and making it heard without the guardianship of the narration. This also leads to the personification of women’s individual experiences more than placing the blame on others. Kristeva wonders why strangers make her so anxious. She answers, “Maybe there is something wrong inside me, or maybe there is an unsolved problem or something unwise in me that brings me sorrow. And instead of solving this problem, I blame the stranger as if he were a scapegoat” (1994, p. 52). These lines indicate a transformational feature in feminist themes which have begun to address

the conscious and unconscious structure of the forces of fear, desire and repression among individuals, and women, in particular, to extract the coercions imposed on them which impede their creativity and conceal their genius, yes the genius of women! This transformation may be achieved by rereading her maps, providing new mental considerations, and mutual planning with men without distancing or oppressing them (Bakai, 2018, p. 66).

It is a retreat from mental and intellectual conflicts produced by feminist writings in their early stages and a refusal to submit to those ideas that insist on dismantling patriarchal dominance through hatred, exposure, and marginalization without looking deep into the consciousness of women’s individual experiences within the law of polyphony, which females seldom perfect in their narratives. Resorting to this approach by a small number of feminist writers is a reestablishment of their consciousness via imposing their voices through their texts.

3- Trans-textuality (Textual transcendence) and the Cognitive Employment of Heritage

The idea of textual transcendences surpasses the formal framework into becoming signs that cannot be understood without analysis, interpretation, and revelation of their apparent and concealed relationships within the whole text in which they are included in. Gerard Genette says, “I do not currently care about the text except for its textual transcendence; anything that, openly or secretly, connects a text with other texts” (Genette, 1985, p. 17). Textual transcendences, in their capacity as an advanced term for thresholds, involve texts that strive to build a particular cultural structure where the text rotates consciously in its sphere. They include intertextuality within a text, moving us from the idea of intertextuality to that of transposition because the text must interact with its title, preface, conclusion, and subtitles.

The novel used several forms of textual transcendence to highlight the idea of the existential representation of female inferiority. It used these transcendences as cultural shields through which it refutes these thoughts deeply rooted in successive ideologies throughout the ages. The novel made use of fourteen texts which were cited throughout its sections and which intersected textually with more than twenty quotations from the vast heritage of both global and Arab intellectuals from various places and eras. Thus, through textual transcendence, the author tries to raise the value of the existential representation of females in her novel as her feminist cause is not haunted by

resisting direct patriarchal dominance but aims to find a place for women's writings on the human cultural map.

3.1 Citation texts

The novel included several quotations in its sections with different cultural references. These quotations began with a poetic passage by the contemporary Iraqi poet, Hamdan Tahir Al Maliki, which was followed by two quotes by the Greek novelist, Nikos Kazantzakis, two quotes by the Russian poet, Anna Akhmatova, two other quotations by the American poet, Sylvia Plath, a quotes by the French singer, Edith Piaf, a quote by the Brazilian novelist, Paulo Coelho, a quote by the Austrian poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, a quote by the Russian novelist, Dostoevsky, and a final quote from the "Song of Songs" in the Old Testament. This large number of quotes proves that this novel is guided by previous works of culture, framed by deep citations, and is an extension to deep human knowledge, not detached from it.

In the first quote, Hamdan Al Maliki says, "I am a seed that fell/ from a bird in the sky/ it grew in a strange land/ I was carried by the boats/ and the whimpers of the flute/ and hid behind the singer's throat" (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 7). The lines provide an excellent example of an existential citation that resembles the state of hopelessness and foreshadows the significant questions asked by the narrator, Majd, who nurtured her confusion through knowledge and different cultures. She believes that "everyone is walking relentlessly through the path of the big universal plan" (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 7). This quotation raises the value of the lost "I" searching for salvation. This "I" is also present in the second quotation from *The fratricides*; a novel by Nikos Kazantzakis: "Oh God, do a miracle. Help me. How do you want me to stand alone in the face of the whole world?" (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 20). This quotation intersects with the events of the second section of the novel, which is an introduction to the orphanhood. Yusha will be experiencing orphanhood when she loses her whole family in a traffic accident. She has nothing left in her life at the age of thirteen except her grandfather, Afeazer, and the orphanage. She is chased everywhere by death, oppression, marginalization, and alienation, and must find her way to salvation as she resists a massive heritage of unjust scriptures. In another part of the novel, another quotation by the same Greek novelist is mentioned: "'I am free'... 'No, you're not free. The string you're tied to is perhaps no longer than other people's. That's all. You're on a long piece of string'" (*A Jewish Savior*, 42). This quotation resonates with the characters' search for freedom. The narrator enhances this passage by a state of extended contemplation, as she believes that freedom is nothing but an illusion and by a large amount of intertextuality throughout the work.

The Russian poet Anna Akhmatova also appears in two quotations: "Perhaps, The final turn is that/ Oh, how strongly grabs us/The secret plot of fate" (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 28). Humans are unable to face their realities. How can Yusha face her life while entrapped inside the orphanage and captivated by religious scriptures? These quotes embody the sphere of helplessness, usurpation, melancholy, and bleakness. The writer then makes use of a poetic passage by the American poet Sylvia Plath: "Which such blight wrought on our bankrupt estate/ What ceremony of words can patch the havoc?" (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 57). This quotation is mentioned in the context of Majd's long and cruel waiting for "Ghaith," whom she has been thinking about for a long time awaiting his return. He is her only hope of a worthy life

With Yusha's growing suffering in the orphanage, the novel begins a new section with a quotation by the French singer, Edith Piaf: "No more smiles, no more tears/...Ring the bells/ Now it's done, why be brave?/ Why should I live like this?/ Shall I wait by the grave..." (A *Jewish Savior*, p. 101) This quotation reflects the

tremendous amount of sadness in Yusha's life. She prefers death to the hell of the orphanage as she says: "Oh Lord, give me a chance to die peacefully and gracefully. Take me to you away from this punishing world!" (A *Jewish Savior*, p. 101). Her words echo the pain reflected in the Prelude of Talal ('stopping by the ruins') by the grieving voice of the nostalgic poet, thus foreshadowing the psychological composition of the characters.

With the development of the novel's events, a new phase of transformation leading to salvation begins. Taming pain is Yusha's passport to freedom. Such transformation brings to the novelist's mind Paolo Cohelo's famous words: "Since the dawn of time man understands that suffering, faced with no fear, is his passport to freedom" (A *Jewish Savior*, p. 110). Yusha manages to tame her life with the help of her grandfather, Afeazer, who is a brilliant example of wise, balanced masculinity. In the orphanage, Yusha suffers a life under siege despite the food, drink, and shelter. Her soul is imprisoned and she yearns for salvation. Pain is not measured through other people's eyes; it is massive in its effect on the tortured person. Thus Yusha quotes the Portuguese novelist, Jose Saramago, who says, "Excuse me but what you see as little...I see as everything" (A *Jewish Savior*, p. 158). Pain is neither relative nor subject to different points of view. Pain is painful whether small or enormous.

In the context of Yusha overcoming her crisis and finding her soul's salvation, the words by Reiner Maria Rilke, the Bohemian Austrian poet, in his portrayal of the birth of Venus, are quoted: "And as the scream slowly closed again/ and from the sky's pale light and brightness fell back into the mute fishes' chasm/ the sea gave birth" (A *Jewish Savior*, p. 222). This quotation creates a framework for the state of salvation that Yusha is going through after acquiring wisdom from her grandfather. Indeed, pain is the best tamer of the maladies of the soul. The novelist concludes her quotations with the Song of Songs (the Song of Solomon) from the Old Testament, and she chooses this part

O daughters of Jerusalem, I adjure you, if you find my beloved, tell him I am sick with love. How is your beloved better than others, the most beautiful of women? How is your beloved better than others that you so charge us? (A *Jewish Savior*, p. 251)

With these lines, the novelist ends the final part of the novel, which witnesses Ghaith's long absence and Majd's suffering. Such pain has motivated Majd's embark on writing her book and her occupation with Yusha's tragedy.

3.2 Intertextuality

The novel is inspired by too many cultural texts which were embedded alongside its events, creating a state of intellectual interconnection with more supreme texts which enrich the meaning.

This intertextuality is of variable types: legendary (Brometheus, Sisyphus and, God Enki), novelistic (Ghassan Kanafani, Kafka, Kazantzakis, Bukowski, Galeano, Sabato and James Dashner), poetic (Dante, Mahmoud Darwish, Al Hallaj, Sylvia Plath, Rimbaud, and Rilke), in addition to quotations from Sartre and Goethe. This traditional and contemporary intertextuality has created intellectual and cultural interconnection, which has enriched the novel. Such intertextuality reflects that the narrator is a bibliophile reader who resorts to knowledge as a lifestyle contrary to most other women.

Among the intertextuality that mimics the narrator's feelings is the German philosopher Goethe's play, *Faust*. She says,

What is happening to human masses is more like Goethe's prophesy of the soul of Faust having a firm grip on man's neck. Man has sold his soul to the devil and has become merely a creature made of clay. He is breakable. How easy it is to break this fragile rubble! I think that everything that is happening to me is because I am different than others. I do not belong much to their confusing world. I know I have a greater destiny. (*A Jewish Savior*, 59)

The novel's use of intertextuality with the legend of Faust allows the narrator to define her position in society. The whole idea here is based on the loss of principles in favor of pathetic sensual desires to the extent that the narrator feels like a stranger who is forced to live in a foreign land.

This alienation experienced by Majd is also present in Sartre's words which are also quoted in the novel: "man is responsible for what he is" (*A Jewish Savior*, p. 98), although he does not know what he wants. One existential principle dictates that the combination of ignorance, loss, and responsibility is inevitable. For responsibility to be complete, two things have to be practiced; reading and writing. "Majd" believes that all one has to do is "to complete this play called Life!" (p. 155). She needs to finish reading *The Angel of Darkness* by Ernesto Sabato, which she started reading the night before. She describes the novel as "a form of human madness! In the evening, I also have to complete writing the remaining chapters of my novel. I hope to finish in the coming days" (p. 155). Indeed, reading and writing are two necessary actions she uses to face reality and find herself a suitable place in her dark world. Reading and writing require the presence of traditional, creative, and legendary texts which can lift the narrator, keep her alive, and guarantee her salvation from the darkness of the soul and the domination of scriptures.

Conclusion

The novel presents a new deep model of the image of women in modern feminism. This model is armed with knowledge, intellect, and existential principles and has the right to develop the Self through its superior capacity to write about the female and reclaim its authority to guide and represent without the stereotypical comparisons between masculinity and femininity involved in the politics of feminist identity perspective. The novel shows a divergence from the intellectual and mental conflicts produced by feminist writings in their early stages, which were preoccupied with dismantling patriarchal dominance through hatred and marginalization in favor of digging deep into the conscience of women's individual experiences.

The novel enhances the idea of constructing the feminist identity by owning a narrative voice that refutes the inferiority of the female through existential representations. The novel shows the value of women's freedom in writing. The idea of existential representation is coupled with the centrality of religious scriptures and human cultural heritage, a centrality that controls the understanding society and of social laws. This confrontation requires two combined actions to be practiced by women; the act of reading and the act of writing.

Regarding the narrative structure, the novel is divided into two generative stories allowing polyphony with the consideration that writing is a way of reaching salvation and that this new form limits the effects of subjugation to masculine literature and allows women the right to own a narrative that combats marginalization. This is proof of the importance of experimenting with the novel's structure by creating a narrative duality supported by profound quotations and intertextuality that form a continuity of human knowledge.

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