

## Narrative Clusters: A Reading Of Elmusadafa's *The Hyena's Journey*

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### Abstract.

This paper discusses the narrative structure of one of Suhair ElMusadafa's most recent novels, "The Hyena's Journey" (2018), translated into English by the author and published in Canada by El Haderoun Press in 2023. It will discuss this work in terms of its unique plot structure, philosophy of time, perspective and politics of form. It will argue that these narratological aspects in this particular novel offer re-definitions of conventional narrative cannon as defined by critics such as Gérard Genette in his "Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method" (1980), Gerald Prince in his "The Form and Functioning of Narrative" (1982), "A Dictionary of Narratology" (1987), and Meike Bal in her "Introduction to the Theory of Narrative" (1985). The novel offers unique approaches to some of the most fundamental aspects of these narrative elements in what this article terms consecutively: cluster plotting, parallel deconstructive time-order, contradictory introspective anti-identity personification and a politics of form that actively critiques and philosophically debunks readership cultural concepts and beliefs. As will become apparent, "The Hyena's Journey" offers a positive approach to current cultural dilemmas regarding identity, sociality and the function of literary discourse. The article seeks to shed light on the fascinating literary artistry used by this novel, away from its usual definitions as a manifestation of typical magic realism. "The Hyena's Journey" is explicated as contemporary work that operates within anti-identity social settings against a backdrop of paradoxical multicultural beliefs.

**Keywords:** Suhair ElMusadafa, postcolonial narrative, postmodern narrative theory, *The Hyena's Journey*.

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### I. Introduction: Language as the Site of Cultural Politics

Musadafa's creative journey started nearly three decades ago with the publication of her collected short stories "Soft Attack- هجوم وديع" in 1997. Her first novel, "A Girl Trying Her Fate- فتاة تجرب حقتها" was published with great success two years later in The UAE. Seven more novels were published consecutively from 2003 to 2021: "the Devils' Play-2003- لهوة الأبالسه", "Miss Egypt-2008- مس إيجيبت", "The Hyena's Journey-2013- رحلة", "Hot Whiteness-2015- بياض ساخن", "The Curse of Meit Rahena-2017- لعنة ميت رهينة", "The Day of Response Control—2019- يوم الثبات الانفعالي", and "The Forbidden Garden-2021- الحديقة المحرمة" (Ismaeel 2). This long history of narrative writing manifests itself quite clearly in the particular personality of her works' mode or general language and their intricate narrative lines and structure. Both aspects reflect a finely tuned narrative experience manifested as stories enriched by cultural and political stances. Musadafa has held various important posts and executive positions in the Egyptian ministry of culture across her career, keeping a very active role in the general women's rights movement across Egypt over the past two decades.

This political background informs much of this novel's formal aspects of the narrative structure. There are two apparent manifestations of this political intensity. The first is their insistence on historical positioning. This novel insists, quite vehemently, on describing the historical background of each series of events as and when they happen. Other than the obvious socio-historical political commentary on the present, the reason is to underline the philosophical reasoning behind form choices. In other words, history is utilized to add a further political depth of rootedness to the already critiqued present by underlining its historicity and relevance. The second is purely linguistic, where narrators, more or less, attempt the actual archaic language of the period in which they live. Naturally, this adds another dimension to the authenticity of the personnel as they enact events. However, more significantly, it offers a means to redefine the events and characters by learning their conceptual make-up regardless of the narrative's implied intentions. The language serves as a vehicle of the narrative philosophy of structure and a means to enlist insights into different concepts and ideals of different characters regardless of happenstance or sequences of events or tense. This is what Mikhail Bakhtin terms "heteroglossia" and defines in

terms of various intermingling discourses and styles in the voice of the speaker or narrator to define its particular linguistic fingerprint, being both very general and specific simultaneously. Bakhtin points out:

Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces, are brought to bear. The processes of centralizations and decentralization, unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is, in fact, an active participant in such speech diversity. Moreover, this active participation of every utterance in living heteroglossia determines the linguistic profile and style of the utterance to no less a degree than its inclusion in any normative-centralizing system of unitary language. Every utterance participates in the "unitary language" (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and, at the same time, partakes of the social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces". (Bakhtin 75)

When his countryman Tzvetan Todorov looks at this particular definition of Bakhtin regarding the nature of utterances in literature and language at large, he comments:

Every utterance, it will be recalled, is oriented toward a social horizon composed of semantic and evaluative elements; the number of these verbal and ideological horizons is high but not unlimited, and every utterance necessarily falls within one or more types of discourses determined by a horizon. (Todorov 56).

While expressions and utterances are necessarily orientated toward multidimensional ideological and social constructs, they are still just as much expressive of the significance and intentions implied in the voices they represent. Regardless of how many intersecting levels of meaning they are charged with, their ultimate pointedness, or "unity" in Bakhtin's words, cannot be ignored or set aside. The whole point of their pointedness is their heteroglossia, and the whole point of their heteroglossia is their pointedness.

In this particular novel, readers confront two, not one, narrators. Both are protagonists, first-person witnesses offering languages that differ not only in content but mainly in form. Jamal speaks in a modern Egyptian accent of the Arabic tongue, while ElSaouda speaks in an archaic accent where even animal names are unfamiliar.

Jamal's discourse is, on the one hand, a site of his culture's patriarchal medieval misogyny and, on the other, an individualist expression of a terrified mother-controlled untalented male who is full of cynicism and illusions about himself and the world around him:

I kept cheering Muhamed Said El Sahaf, Saddam's Minister of Mass-Media and his government's spokesman. He was reciting his war reports while I contemplated his green military uniform with its eagle badges, medals, and stars shouting cheerfully at her face," do you know what this word means "Auloug-bitches"? My woman does not like argumentation, but at the time, she smiled in despair, obscurity, and resentment till her dimples became even more seductive. She then quietly said while staring at El Sahaf's big mouth while shouting out his significant threats: the American Marines will invade the heart of Baghdad, with their first appearance precisely in Ferdaws Squair. Baghdad will fall for the second time and will be ruined. The pig will steal its wealth and monuments and divide it into battling factions while its women get raped in his prisons. Saddam himself will eventually be hanged. (Musadafa 20).

By contrast, ElSaouda is a site of her culture's rejection of anti-humanist rebelliousness. On a heteroglossia level, her character defies almost every concept of cultural or social value her society holds dear, including religious doctrines, concepts of women and their roles in the social space, and ideals of beauty and the value of life. In this sense, the time difference in the novel by historical references to the time of the great sedition does not seem relevant. Jamal and ElSaouda belong to the same historical context despite the apparent difference by hundreds of years between their timelines and aesthetic irony intended to install this absurdity as a target to underline successfully:

I had been plagued by love, living in great pain that dis-hungered my passion for life and dismayed even wolves, snakes, eagles, wild dogs, and whatever carried a claw or a canine tooth. This was all done to me, the one who buried heads and dug up bodies looking for a single man who besotted me! How dull had I become, and how blunt? It is I whose life passed like centuries of screams, spent to put human nature back the way God had intended it to be. I have entered life with nothing to cover my body nor some ornaments to distinguish me from others, no matter how common, and I shall leave life empty-handed as I entered. (Musadafa 68).

On an individual level, ElSaouda is the opposite of Jamal. She is a mother in all that the word might imply, encompassing and caring for everything and everyone in her vicinity, a matriarchal archetype that oozes wisdom and goodness. More significantly, perhaps, she is a faithful lover, like all female characters in this novel, whose chosen male figures offer only betrayal and cynicism; Jamal, Omar Ady, Jamal's father.

## II. Plot Structure or the Clustering of Micro-narratives:

The degree of narrativity of a given narrative depends partly on the extent to which that narrative fulfils a receiver's desire by representing oriented temporal wholes (prospectively from beginning to end and retrospectively from end to beginning) involving a conflict consisting of discrete, specific, and positive situations and events and meaningful in terms of a "human(ized) project". (Prince 65)

To best understand the various aspects involved in the structures of these narratives, it is essential to start with laying those structures first as they are and then as they should be understood from this article's point of view. There are two main aspects describing the significant events in this novel. The first is that it contains within itself the most fundamental aspects of narrative as defined by many of the most acknowledged critics in the field, such as Gerald Prince (2003) and Gerard Genette (1997). The two most fundamental aspects that universally define a narrative involve the sequencing of events and the presence of conflict, plot, or crisis. As Monika Fludernik suggests, "Narratives are based on cause-and-effect relationships that are applied to sequences of events" (Fludernik 2). The same effect more or less is offered in Gerard Genette's "Narrative Discourse" (1972)

The first meaning—the one nowadays most evident and most central in common usage—has *narrative* refers to the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events. A second meaning, less widespread but current today among analysts and theoreticians of narrative content, has *narrative* refers to the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of this discourse and to their several relations of linking, opposition, repetition, etc. (Genette 25)

Mieke Bal also expresses the same general idea:

A narrative text is a text in which an agent relates (tells) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings or a combination thereof. A story is a fabula that is presented in a certain manner. A fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. An event is the transition from one state to another state. Actors are agents that perform actions. They are not necessarily human. To act is defined here as a cause or to experience an event. (Bal 5)

In short, most conventional definitions of the narrative concentrate mainly on sequencing as one of its defining characteristics. Sequencing is, thus, the ordering or organization of linguistic material or events or acts in accordance with logic, tense or ideology. This is most often coupled with the presence of some conflict, crisis, or problem generally referred to in Prince's words as "human(ized) project" or "conflict" (Prince 65), Bal's as "a cause or experience" (Bal 5), and in Genette's (several relations of linking, opposition, repetition etc.)" (Genette 25).

Most events in this novel form smaller or minor independent narratives fulfilling the above definitions on a micro level while simultaneously participating in the overall narrative structure of the whole novel. That is to say that each event contains within itself the main features of a narrative, acting as a miniature or micro-narrative within the general story, for example.

In "The Hyena's Journey", the protagonist's colleague at work, Hassan Abdul Sabbour, offers a small story complete with its sequence of events, characters and conflict. As the novel tells us, Hassan is an excellent investigative reporter who has his drama to tell. In the context of work colleagues, Hassan is a small quantity of a lady's man who sleeps with pretty girls until satisfied, leaving them to their fates. However, this time he met a specific girl who scandalized him and exposed his weaknesses before his work colleagues to avenge her stolen honour. She ensured everyone knew his deficiencies and lies while exposing the masculine misogynistic concepts of women in Egypt at large. The micro-narrative contains sequencing of events starting at the beginning when we learn as readers of Hassan's excellent investigative reporting skills. Then we begin to understand the crisis or the humanizing problem surrounding his typical masculine personality as displayed by the novel. We then are introduced to the typical beautiful honorable flawless girl whom the novel has designed to be the victim and the later avenger. The maximum complexity or climax is reached when we learn that , like many girls before her, Hassan refused to honour his word and marry her after having his way with her. However, as honourable as she is depicted to be, she still manages to show his true colours to all his colleagues, as if they did not know, and exposes him for what he truly is. However, she shows him not as a dishonourable lair and patriarchal cynical, which would damage any reasonable mind's system of morality and sense of justice. Instead, she shows him as a sexually inept male who cannot satisfy a real woman, which is most damaging to a sexist mentality in a male-dominated society. The micro-story ends when readers learn that she went on to have a great career and personal life with a foreigner for a husband who adores her, while Hassan is anticipated to end up like nothing special.

Another micro-narrative in the same novel concerns the great-grandmother's adventure with Saif and Afraa. As the story begins to invent smaller narratives within the more general one of Jamal and his beautiful wife, readers learn of a great-grandmother, ElSaouda, who insisted on having her adventurous life story told from one generation to the other, landing in the end with Nirmine; Jamal's wife, as the last of those granddaughters. The timeline of the great-grandmother's life-long story is during the Islamic Great Sedition, one decade following the

prophet's death, "peace be upon him" when factions of different political and ideological orientations wared among one another.

-The micro-narrative starts with Saif and his men finding ElSaouda's din and deciding to destroy it and burn her alive as they have heard of her witchcraft and know she was guilty of blasphemy:

-I had my eyes fixed on his without a blink while he stood tall and flawless like a long spear before me. He said in evil-soaked steadiness with a scornful grin on his face:

-I swear I have never seen an uglier devil than your face, woman. You are only a foolish woman that God will surely disfigure like many people into monkeys.

-What is the judgement for being a witch: knights?

-Burning to the stake, Sir!

-May your mother mourn your death sooner! What else did you expect, man?

I kept repeating in whispers that my voice was only heard by him alone while his men were busy around him: "Woe on you, boy, how vain! Your likes are the ones who will destroy the earth and all on it. (Musadafa 64).

As they were gathering dried leaves to fill the hole they dug to burn her alive, Afaa, Saif's cousin and beloved who accompanied him on the trip, took it upon herself to save the old woman from that ominous fate by standing for her and shouting at Saif and his men to refrain from any harm to the old lady, else she would kill herself there and then. Saif, is described as "the most honourable amongst them" and "the noblest most generous of them all" (Musadafa 64). His cousin and beloved did not love him, and he wished for her love more than anything else. ElSaouda offered to conjure a talisman that would soften Afaa's heart towards him, and he promised to restore her belongings, give her a new tent and fulfil all her wants.

A small sequence of events that endures an ordering of emotions associated with several characters participating in a humanized conflict being resolved comically to a happy ending and a fulfilled denouement. All the above-quoted characteristics of a full-blown narrative are found in this small tale without exception. This includes the events, characters, and the arrangement of action into a conflict consisting of a climax, falling action and a resolution. The conflict between Saif and his rejecting beloved cousin participates in the more significant conflict embodying an ignorant, religiously fanatical society that condemns the innocent by word of mouth for blasphemy or religious difference. The climax is before the burning of ElSaouda, when Afaa intervenes on her behalf, changing the currents of events to her benefit and finishing the micro-plot. The end is when Afaa finally agrees to marry Saif, the man who adores her.

There are so many other micro-narratives involved in the construction of the general narrative form of this novel, such as the story behind the wife's literary background and gift as a novelist, the story of the grandmother, ElSaouda, and her life-long love relationship to Omar Ady along with her various adventures across the deserts, the story of Lyth and his relationship to the Grandmother, the story of the Lord Qaqa and his origins, the story of the life of Jamal's mother and her abortion, Hababa the singer whose identity is assumed by ElSaouda, the story of Bidour and her wall surrounding the land of the Pharaohs. Even minor characters like Eman, Nirmine's friend living in Britain, while not telling of a specific narrative, certainly imply one; being the person who left a debunked retrogressive misogynistic culture to a better one. Micro-narratives, both explicit and implicit, structure the whole novel.

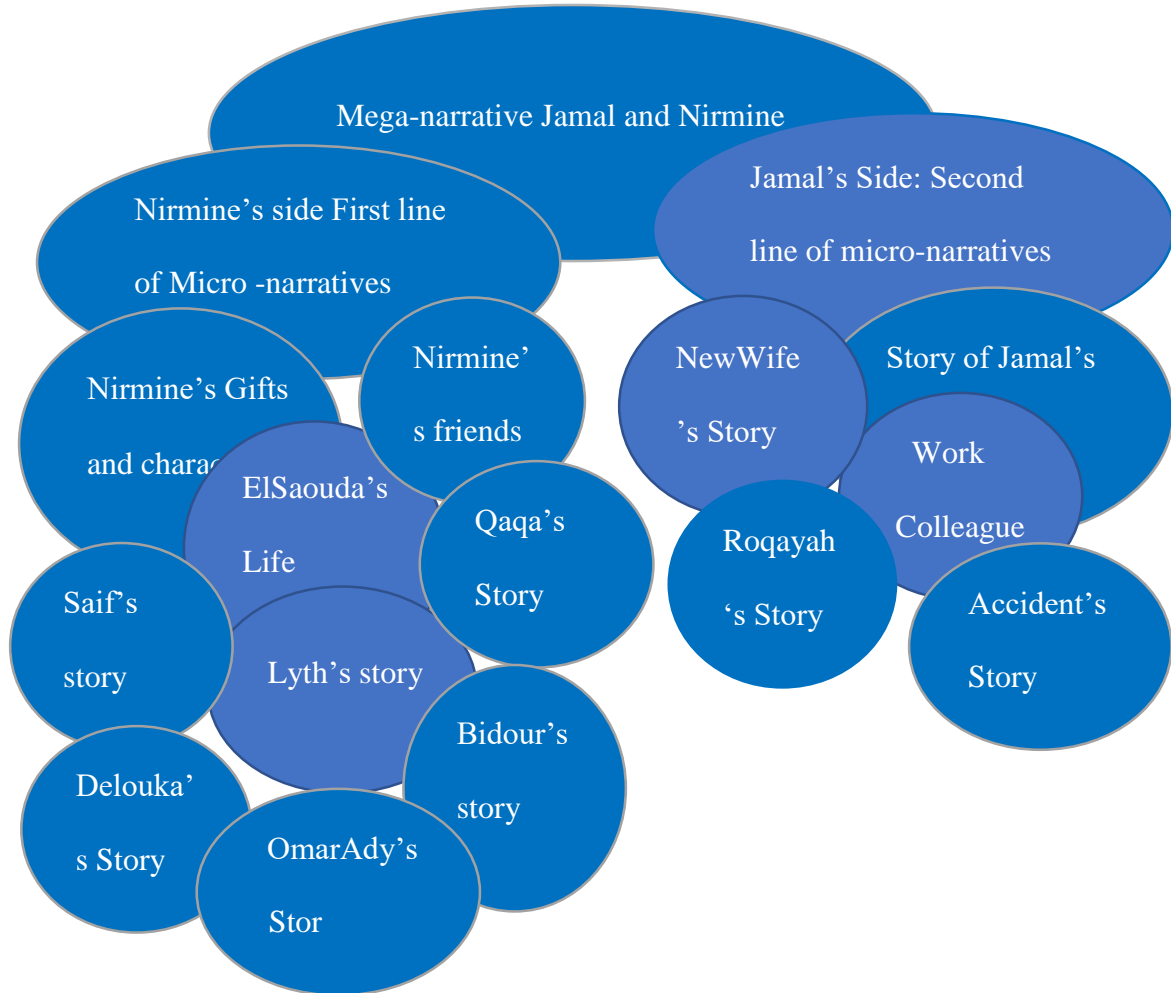
The general overall narrative line involves Jamal, and his wife, whom he had married and loved for many long years but whom he no longer wants because of her inability to bear children. From the beginning of the novel, which consists of eight chapters, and up to chapter three, this story of Jamal, his wife, work colleagues, mother and sisters continues in the first-person witness perspective, where the narrator is Jamal himself.

Reminiscent of Victorian Poetry's dramatic monologue (Campbell 48), the first-person voice exhibits some of the most sexist, misogynistic and patriarchal perspectivism his society endures. How Jamal controls his wife's every move and action, from dress code to movements, seems expressive of an essentially sick individual who embodies the worst in his cultural sexist habits and beliefs. He finds a piece of torn paper he collects to discover his wife's intentions to rewrite the story said to her through the ages about her great-grandmother. From then on, the story re-starts with the grandmother, ElSaouda, in the first-person witness perspective. However, this time, the first-person witness is a woman crossing the deserts searching for her beloved, who had long abandoned her. Along her journey, she encounters many other stories, some of which she witnesses herself, such as Saif's and Afaa's, or Lyth's, or the Lord Qaqa's, and others she only hears of, such as Bidour's, Dalouka's or Hababa's. The story goes back to Jamal and his wife in chapter six and the novel's end. Except for chapter seven which is more or less dedicated to female personal feelings when abandoned or betrayed by a lover, all other aspects of this novel concern the narrative structure presented. It is the only chapter in the novel that carries an internal title rather than only a number. "Of the Withdrawal of Love" details the moment-by-moment psychological contractions, upheaval and turmoil in a female psyche at the moment of being assured abandonment by her long-loved partner. Much reminiscent of the stream of consciousness as defined by Gerlad Prince in terms of "interior dialogue attempting to give the direct quotation of the mind" (Prince 94), the details of the innermost conflict of the female identity as opposed to the male in extremely emotional context:

You will watch yourself with him as if from a bird's eye view continuing your pumping of the well of love as much as possible, knowing how little time you have left with him. You will act more desperately than ever, but he is confident that everything he does will eliminate that love, which he sees as cursed. (Musadafa 98)

The second-person singular used during these pages makes for a delightful change to the first-person singular prevailing the narrative discourse in both storylines in this novel. This change, by itself, shifts the emphasis from any particular case or identity to a more general description of the female psyche.

The following diagram may be able to demonstrate the clustering of micro plots across the narrative landscape of this novel:



As the diagram above shows, *The Hyena's Journey* offers its own unique order through which events are not necessarily “logically” ordered, chronologically, or causally. Instead, events are offered in clusters of micro-plots where the ideological or political necessity of the form synthesizes their relationships.

-The Politics of Form: Parallel Deconstructive Time Order.

Here is the second aspect describing the events of this novel. It offers its particular order of component micro-plots, demonstrated in the diagram above, for aesthetic and cultural purposes. This paper means that this novel's rationale of the event-or micro-plot organization is not, in principle, governed but causality, chronology or even common sense. Instead, it offers its own very unique order of composition for cultural and aesthetic reasons. For example, the appearance of Elsaouda's story in the third chapter covering the main bulk of the novel spanning from chapters three to five does not serve any particular causal purpose. It could have appeared a chapter earlier, or later, with no real damage to the narrative landscape intended. The novel exaggerated and unnecessarily prolonged description of Jamal's inner masculine conflict regarding the whereabouts of his wife's manuscript or the literary value of the specimen he found. This suggests that the positioning of the Grandmother's Adventure story could have been introduced much earlier without affecting any of the implications suggested later on. What this informs the reader is much less about the causal or chronological arrangement and more about the political significance of form.

While it may be unjustifiable chronologically or causally to place such a micro plot in this specific place, it is very much so for ideological and cultural reasons. As Michael Toolan suggests, “judgments of coherence are very much based on what addressees assess as relevant and informative in the unique discursive circumstances of the individual text” (Toolan 44). The spot which this story occupies follows a long descriptive account of the kind of treatment of an unwanted wife a typical misogynist would commit. It is also an implicit critique of this culture's conceptual ailments against women, reiterated by the Male protagonist as social norms to affect the maximum impact on good readership. For example, readers learn that the male protagonist Jamal has forced his wife into a very narrow role of an in-house wife serving his needs, ignoring her very cultured and sophisticated mind and writing gifts and punishing her physically and psychologically every chance he gets.

This is the exact moment of saturation when readers have had quite enough of this sexist indulgent attitude and are ready for a change of perspective in which a speaker is no longer a man but a woman with both experience and wisdom. Here, in this exact spot, the significance of the shift is much more emphasized than if it had taken place earlier in the novel. The change, now, is quite dramatic from a narrow desire-based control-driven patriarchal viewing of the world to a much broader unsexist and matriarchal scope of vision that fights for man in the neutral sense of the word. This contrast of conceptual world viewings allows analyses to “map” the narrative action across the text's relevant cultural and aesthetic blueprints implied in the text. As Rick Altman suggests:

The process of mapping requires us to read one activity in terms of another, one character in terms of a counterpart. Following depends largely on linguistic meaning to develop its meaning; mapping, by contrast, involves a network of comparisons between diverse parts of the text, for only through sensitivity to the text's implied interconnections are we able to recognize situations where different textual meanings arise out of similar linguistic situations and so fully realize mapping's capacity for recognizing and respecting difference. (Altman 295).

The contrast does not stop only with the two first-person narrator protagonists in terms of ironic fanatical past versus supposedly advanced tolerant present, patriarchal versus matriarchal politics of control, or totalitarian versus plural moral idealism. It continues regarding secondary personalities like Nirmine and Ady as partners in dual relationships and Lyth and Jamal's mothers as companions in the life story. Where men are in control, the partner Nirmine is treated with contempt undeservingly and unjustly. By contrast, when women are in control, the partner, Ady, or even Lyth, is treated with the utmost reverence and care, if undeservingly.

Nirmine is a talented writer who had two novels published to her name, married to Jamal, whose opinions and investigative reporting skills, not to mention academic education and background, are all relatively modest, if not downright humble. She deserves every bit of respect and reverence possible in a relationship. However, she is treated as an ignorant good—a for-nothing housewife who would only use a computer for cooking recipes:

-I ask her more than once, pointing at the computer.

-What do you do with it?

She answers impatiently:

-I learn to type.

-Why do you do that?

She replies while trying to hide her charming sarcastic smile, with her long, fascinating looks that she has been throwing at me like piercing darts for the past few days, and since she knew, somehow, I was remarrying again. I could not translate the look except by using one word: Why? She overlooks my question, seemingly tossing it in the nearest rubbish bin while saying in a weepy voice: I do not still know how to add vowels to the transcribed Arabic letters. There must be a way on the computer to do just that, and I will find it out.

- However, have you written new cooking recipes?

I had made sure not to have home internet, satisfied with the USB internet that I stick into my laptop whenever needed. When I saw her moving from my office to the computer, I realized she had taught herself how to write on it since she first entered the house, precisely when I forgot to switch it off after I finished working. (Musadafa 91)

By contrast, Omar Ady, the beloved of ElSaouda, the great-grandmother, while being described as “more ignorant than a scorpion,” “uglier than a Baboon,” and “more deceitful and treacherous than a wolf” (Musadafa 78), is treated with utmost love and care. ElSaouda's sole reason for embarking on such a journey across barren deserts is to find him after he had abandoned her for war spoils. She remained loyal to her love of him until she found him and discovered how he profiteered from all warring factions by selling them arms regardless of cause or misery. A morally debunked man, Omar Ady, deficient in both form and content, is treated with the utmost respect and care. By contrast, a moral noblewoman, Nirmine, efficient in form and content, is treated with the utmost disdain and indifference. The difference between the two treatments is concentrated in matriarchal wisdom; the kind of feminine thoughtfulness and complexity the novel detracts from any masculine conceptualization of life. All the male characters in the novel present defective worldviews; even Lyth, the faithful companion and

loyal friend, is seen unfit to carry out the kind of wisdom the matriarchal ElSaouda has collected over the years about life and humanity. He is treated for mental illness as he continues publicizing Saoud's message and words.

However, it is not only the ordering of micro-plots within the narrative landscape that signifies particular aesthetic significance and cultural feminist ideologies. Two primary timelines form two main skeletons to which the various micro-narratives in this novel attach and function; the Jamal timeline and the ElSaouda timeline. Even when realizing that Saouda's life story had happened more than a millennia ago, during the time of the Great Sedition in Islamic history, the positioning and concentration of the novel on such a story force its details in the parallel forefront with Jamal's supposedly main storyline. What readers encounter in this novel are two almost independent timelines or clusters of events feeding on one another's cultural relevance to the past and the present.

For example, the religious fanaticism of the warring factions described by ElSaouda, typified by Saif's swift judgement to burn her alive, echoes Jamal's insistence on covering up his wife from head to toe with a Niqab:

I catch myself supporting the freedom of those women with naked arms and legs. I who has forced the dimples to wear a whole-body veil, not to mention forcing her into a handful of roles in life, all designed to serve me. I look at her while moving the car, but I quickly re-concentrate on the road when I discover she had been looking at me all that past time with a slight sarcastic grin on her face realizing seemingly everything I said to myself in the past few moments. (Musadafa 93)

The parallels and contrasts continue between the two clusters of events or timelines. Lord Qaqa and the editor-in-chief, Essam Elshanawany, are both in charge of their people, honest and hard-working in the service of their respective causes. Both are soft with women without being vulgar or resentful. Both inspire great respect in the eyes of their followers and have apparent wisdom in their viewpoints. Both are not parties to any specific fanatical or zealous ideology, religious or otherwise. The views of one timeline are echoed by the views of the other, and the character traits of one are similarly echoed by their counterparts in the other. This back-and-forth echoing effect delineates time itself in readership, deflating the two timelines together when it comes to human wisdom and cultural ideals of justice and pluralism.

El Shanawany defends the honour of the girl deceived by Gassan Abdul Sabour just as vehemently as Lord Qaqa defends ElSaouda's. Where past and present are concerned, the two characters deflate the very concept of pastness, the very concept of the present, seeking universal, timeless values endorsed by the different perspectives of both narrators. This deflation of time is significant in more than one sense. First, it argues against any claim of progress or advancement made on behalf of extremist viewpoints by ironically echoing their emphases from across the ages. In doing this, it also repositions current zealous religious discourse in its "correct" timeline, pushing it back hundreds of years in the past. Secondly, it attempts to deconstruct any sense of the unity of time where clear cultural and ideological boundaries are visible between present and past, now and then. M. H. Abrams defines a deconstructive reading as

A deconstructive reading sets out to show that conflicting forces within the text itself serve to dissipate the seeming definiteness of its structure and meanings into an indefinite array of incompatible and undecidable possibilities. (Abrams 55)

This is precisely what the two times lines, represented by the two clusters of micro-plots demonstrated above, do in their combination and contrastive parallelism. They serve to redefine one another's "definitiveness" ceaselessly, dissolving the time boundaries between ideals and identities. As Michael Bamberg suggests, "narrating enables speakers/writers to disassociate the speaking/writing self from the act of speaking, to take a reflective position vis-à-vis self as → character (Bamberg 132). As readers, we do not, for instance, know for sure what ElSaouda is talking about when she sets her famous warnings of the warring factions; who is Lyth's warning when he cries: "Did we not scream in the deserts warning you will forever be imprisoned inside your damn tents?" or what epoch does ElSaouda mean when she prophesizes: "you will remain stuck to the day of judgement on the spot of sand under which you buried your female newborns alive? Yes, we have". (Musadafa 63) Jamal's present and ElSaouda's past inform one another so much that boundaries between them seem almost always faked or unnecessary. As Egyptian critic Azaa Mazen suggests:

ElElSaouda had decided to liberate herself and her granddaughters through narration, for knowledge of injustice is the first step in resisting persecution... Nirmine broke her great-grandmother's will by telling the story to the public, regardless of sex or kinship, taking writing as her means of liberating all. Here, the two separate narrative lines meet, and Nirmine's voice of the present effectively echoes ElSaouda's of the past across fourteen hundred years. (Mazen )

Perspective and Archetype: Contradictive Introspective Anti-Identity Personification

Perspective in the narrative may be defined as the way the representation of the story is influenced by the position, personality and values of the narrator, the characters and, possibly, other, more hypothetical entities in the story world. The more common term in Anglo-American criticism, which will be treated as equivalent here, is "point of view" (Burkhard 384)

The first-person voice in which both main protagonists in this novel offer their utterances informs readers of much more than their respective viewpoints or perspectives as defined above. Firstly, Both storylines are

narrated in the form of a monologue; Jamal's main mega- and the ElSaouda's micro-plots, which indicates that every utterance they make is an expression of their perspectives; "their personality and values" as Burkhard suggests. However, readers learn more than just those perspectives as stances in life. Most of the expressions offered by Jamal seem to define a general stereotype more strongly than they express any particular identity. For example, in the very few pages of chapter one, readers learn that Jamal had killed his wife and saw her dangling tongue protrude off her face as her body is silenced once and forever:

Why should I be scared, not of that pile of smooth flesh whose happiness depends entirely on my fingers' play or disinterest? I could see her blue face and long dangling tongue protruding from the mouse, which is pretty disgusting to me now. I lay on my old bed and awaited like in the good old days whenever I wanted to make mischief. I used to smoke a cigarette then or masturbate while watching the thighs of my favourite movie star. I await in this still state of contemplation till the ugly hoarse voice finishes the Aser call for prayer. (Musadafa 11)

Readers later learn that such descriptions are only parts of Jamal's daydreaming fantasies expressing deep hatred not of his wife but of her feminine talent and intellectual capabilities. Immediately before she leaves his house for good, after divorcing her, Jamal admits to himself that he loves her deeply. The question, then, becomes why he would resent her when in love with her just as much. The only plausible answer to this question seems to roam around the idea that his character is presented more as an archetype of Medieval masculinity in this culture which rejects any threat to its patriarchal control and demeaning manipulation of the female body and psyche. Jamal is no longer only a middle-aged male in a typical misogynistic culture but is himself that male culture as a whole, with its phallogocentric views of life, love and being. He is the typical archetype of his culture's type of misogyny.

ElSaouda, on the other hand, offers a different archetype: the voice of wisdom in a time of fanaticism and anarchy, which only happens to be feminine. It represents human conscientiousness and refined morality. Her representation of herself as just another example of a lost female voice in the male-dominated wilderness extends to represent wisdom through the universality of her message. Here femininity and wisdom are more or less equated and advocated by the general discourse of the novel, which dedicates a whole chapter describing male abandonment and manipulation politics.

The first-person singular voice is intentionally chosen for credibility; the more personal and monologous, the more believable. As general and archetypal as they are, both the characters of Jamal and ElSaouda, represent patriarchal cultural sexism versus feminine universal wisdom of peace and nobility. They are also attempts at establishing identities, believable ones.

Jamal's archetypal representation of male control seems entirely credible and effective in describing his culture's tendencies toward narrowing the role of women to traditional, almost medieval roles and functions. Reasons may vary from religious to habitual, but the result remains the same; his culture controls women's lives in almost every aspect imaginable, from dress code to jobs and family values. Nothing Jamal expresses in this novel. No matter how odd looking or unsuitable seems radically contradictory to his culture's concept of female functions and roles in society. Nirmine's daily housewife routine, her way of dressing, and her expectation of treatment from her husband all testify to her cultural concept of women's role in life and society. Other characters around Jamal, like the lady's man: Hassan Abdul Sabbour, the Chief Editor: Mr Shanawany, or even the tea-man, all express the same cultural medieval stance towards women though in different capacities. Mr ElShanawany, and the office-man, represent a fatherly stance wishing daughters quiet lives behind decent husbands, not playful playboys. Mr Abdul Sabour's stance reflects the same values but from a different spectrum. He is himself the playboy he might warn his daughter against, a typical stud in his sexist cultural definition.

Jamal's identity as a person is not as convincing as his as an archetype. His cynicism is almost absolute, as his violence, control manipulation of his wife, and disregard for her talents. Such traits, in principle, could not be present in reality as pure as they are found in this character. This novel's cultural cause emphasizes archetypes, not personalities, patterns of conceptual injustice toward women and their true worth in society, not exceptional cases of male or female domination. This is because the main critique in this novel is mounted against concepts of women in the cultural mentality of the age; their function in society, value, moral roles and general practical worth, not of any particular cases of injustice or oppression. Most characters in this novel do not as much represent individual identities as they do their general types in the culture. The typical flanderer: is Mr Abdulsabour; the typical boss: is Mr ElShanawany; the typical female protégé / victim is Miss Aydah Ramzy; the typical Mother. None of the characters carries what may be seen as ir-repeatable characteristics or personality traits. They all seem allegoric than mimetic or actual. Again, the reason is simply that the emphasis of the narrative discourse in this particular novel is generalizing and not personalizing. It is to do with cultural taboos and general concepts of worth and value rather than the intricacies of the human psyche.

In this sense, this novel's identities are not identifiable or easily digestible in readership. Most of the time, reasonable readers might find it almost impossible to identify with the traits of a character like Jamal. For instance, Jamal's murderous daydreaming, which felt on the surface like an actual murder at the beginning of the novel, is almost impossible to identify with at any level. However, when coupled with his admission of love for



his wife at the novel's end, the impossibility of identification increases since the contradiction does not make much sense to any reasonable mind. Identification with Jamal becomes almost impossible in the middle of the narrative when readers learn how he tortures his wife, all for being unable to bear him children.

The same could be said about Nirmine, the wife, in how she succumbs to her husband's ill-treatment, to ElSaouda and how she endures the journey to find an abandoning worthless partner, to Ayah Ramzy regarding her treatment by Abdul Sabour, and almost all other characters in this work. As characters, people of psychological and intellectual substance, they all seem very difficult to fathom, let alone identify with, or feel attached to. However, as archetypes, generalized patterns of concepts, value systems and sets of behaviours present in society, they seem to fit perfectly.

Aa Bamberg suggests "claims to identity begin with the continuity/change dilemma and from there venture into issues of uniqueness and agency; self and sense of self begin by constructing agency and differentiating self from others and then go on to navigate the waters of continuity and change" (Bamberg 132). As readers, we could very much observe "continuity" in Jamal's character. He is a very typical wife-abuser who is governed by his culture's prevalent misogynistic concepts and behaviours:

I never felt guilty towards her nor despicable for spying on a heap of flesh created only for pleasure. (23) Like it or not, we all took part in this conspiracy of silence. We are protecting our gains as males; I think that women of this society remain our maids and whores. (Musadafa 26)

There is continuity in character with the typical patterns they represent, but not enough uniqueness and agency" to distinguish them above all else, even within their chosen archetype. The same is true with Nirmine. She is a talented writer and a sophisticated intellectual who is treated much worse than a sex slave by her husband without the least rebelliousness at any level of the relationship. She remained to the novel's last words, entirely surrendered to her abuser. Her intellectual sophistication and writing talents did not participate in the composition of her character. Where is her "uniqueness and agency" even within her archetype as an abused, manipulated and oppressed wife? She never even confronted her husband as she knew he was marrying another, but surrendered to his every abusive move and action. To a reasonable reader, this does not seem credible or believable. It is because she is a model of behaviour; a representation of his kind, rather than an actual flesh-and-blood character unique in every way possible.

The same could be said about every significant character in this work. Let us, for example, take ElSaouda, whose visible wisdom and insight have somehow skipped informing her of the true nature of her beloved and, thence, of the futility of her life-long journey looking for him. As experienced and knowledgeable as she is depicted to be, she is still incapable of fathoming some fundamental issues in the very fabric of her lover's personality. The woman who faces warriors and wild animals cannot draw the most straightforward conclusions about her man. Let us see what she says about who she is:

I was the shrewdest, most warned against viewer by many con artists and smarties. I had trodden carefully, preferring silence over exposure of those who sold out their souls for money so long as God himself did not show them up.... Many calamities and afflictions competed for me, like Arabs for power regardless of blood cost. As insightful a viewer, as they say, I have been, I couldn't find many ways to evade them except by going to the wilderness.... I, who wandered for years in the wilderness, was chasing what exactly; wild well-formed lions in power holding swords towards a hoped future that will never come? I have been sickened so many times by my visions, despaired by the reality, for no water well remained untanned with their blood. Even Hyenas had given up on me after they had been checking me in the past now and then. (Musadafa 83)

However, her conclusions and admissions are futile since they have not affected her personality significantly. Her journey remained the same, and her wisdom remained encapsulated with the contours of commentary on the mentality of the age describing its inhumanity and shallowness. She remained an archetype, a feminine model of sorts, where matriarchal intellectuality challenges existent gender politics.

However, this emphasis on the archetype rather than the identity is not a naïve or a simple omission in writing. On the contrary, it is a deliberate creative necessity to avoid distorting those archetypes' effectiveness. By avoiding omitting visible particularity or believable identities, the narrative exalts their generality as targets of its irony and critique. Readers could hardly hold their breaths when hearing Jamal's various monologues regarding his constant abuse and demeaning of his wife. If these monologues included elements of "uniqueness and agency" (Bamberg 132), their impact would have been much less in readership. In other words, if particular individualizing traits were added to each of these characters, their psychological impact on readership would have been neutralized. Readers would not have hated or rejected, or accepted their respective attitudes and value systems as strongly.

*Allegoric Allusions: The Hyena's Symbolism*

Each of the eight chapters comprising this work is preceded by a paragraph describing some of Hyenas' social behaviours or physical traits and capabilities. Here is that paragraph before chapter 7:

Following how many stab wounds, help screams, wishes for survival, and memories of past life would the prey of a Hyena die as it is devoured alive? What would she see if it could while the rest of the pack crowded over her body? Since hardly anything would be left of her, Hyenas would defecate in her place. Leaning on their

naturally amputated tails, they will also engage in conversation only they can understand. It has been said that their incomprehensible dialogue is sometimes termed "Hyenas's anus talk". (Musadafa 95)

Each of these paragraphs represents a general Allegoric background against which the following chapter's meanings should be viewed and interpreted. Chapter seven in particular, is the only one with a separate section and title, "of the Withdrawal of Love," describing the second person singular: "you", how an abandoned betrayed female like Nirmine should feel confronting the details of abuse and ill-treatment by her partner. At the same time, the paragraph preceding this chapter speaks of the feelings of the Hyenas victims. The allegory is quite obvious. As Michael Toolan suggests: "In guiding us to the heart of its matter (a heart that we experience, and not merely 'process' or read), the narrative text must chart a way between the rock of predictability and the hard place of impenetrability" (Toolan 307).

Every narrative that wishes to signify a level of symbolism beyond the apparent meaningfulness of its various textual aspects has to strike the tricky balance between "predictability and impenetrability". In other words, it has to balance its aesthetic impacts of suspense, fulfilment, identification etc., with its offered complexity or richness of meaning. The symbolism it contains must weigh up the simplicity and surprise of its textual materials and events, not the opposite.

The Hyena's Journey beautifully does just that. As in chapter seven, each paragraph depicts the traits relevant to the following part of the novel. It offers an allegoric background against which meanings detailed in each chapter can be further interpreted and -redefined to maximize their richness without compromising their understandability or ease of perception.

The general image of The Hyena as the most despicable, cynical and opportunist among wild animals redefines the background of the victims in this novel being all females oppressed and victimized by the male figures in their culture. The various metaphors and descriptions of Hyenas' inhumanity and lack of conscience are meant to describe male gender-action of this culture's males as they grow up and live. Almost every aspect of meanness and oppression depicted at the beginning of each chapter is reflected after that in detail by masculinity and male figures against their female counterparts.

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