

INSIGHTS OF THE MARRIAGE IN QATARI LITERATURE: A READING OF THREE SHORT STORIES

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Abstract. Arabist scholars have started quite recently to pay attention towards the fascinating Gulf literary production. However, Qatari literature remains one of the most under investigated subjects, especially in Europe, despite its interesting aspects and remarkable development.

Through the literary comparison of three short stories, namely *al-Ḥuṭwa al-aḥīra* (The Last Step) by Umm Akṭam, *Ṣafā' ar-rūḥ* (The Purity of Soul) by Nāṣir Ṣāliḥ al-Faḍāla, and *Ḥarām 'alayk* (Shame on You) by Muḥsin Fahd al-Hāġiri, this article aims to provide a thematic analysis of some insights of the marriage in Qatar. Through the short stories we will be able to explore the relationship between men and women related to the social local issues affecting the community at the time of writing.

Keywords: *Arabian Peninsula, Gulf Literature, Qatar, Short Story, Qatari Writers, Marriage.*

Introduction

Undoubtedly, when compared to other Arab countries, such as Egypt, Syria or Iraq, the narrative of the Arabian Peninsula is relatively young. Its development can only be concretely observed starting from the 1960s and 1970s (al-Dwīk 1989: 148; al-Nadawī 2007: 52). As Michalak-Pikulska writes (2016: 6), the literary flourishing was strongly influenced by contacts with certain Arab countries such as Syria or Egypt, but also by contacts with Europe, since the Arabs from the peninsula had visited Europe not only to familiarize with modern civilization, but also for study purposes and religious missionary activities. The literary production of some Gulf countries, for example of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, has only recently aroused the interest of both European and Arab scholars. In the introduction to the volume *Rose d'Arabia. Racconti di scrittrici dell'Arabia Saudita* (Roses of Arabia. Tales of women writers from Saudi Arabia), Camera d'Afflitto (2018: 16) proposes a reflection on Saudi short story by summing up how much the Eurocentric point of view tends to affect the reading of the short stories and novels originated in the Gulf countries, sometimes by prejudicing the quality of their literary production that may appear too obvious to the eyes of Westerners, but it should be bear in mind that every literary expression must be encouraged. This has to be done especially when it requires the reader's special attention towards the social sphere and not only to the artistic one.

Among the almost unknown countries in Europe from a literary point of view with interesting social and artistic spheres, there is Qatar, a country that is often brought up in reference to its relevance on the world geopolitical chessboard, rather than for its intellectual life.¹ Qatar has not only been investing a great deal in education and in the arts, but has also been strongly encouraging the dissemination of the literary production of Qatari authors for years. For these reasons, we have decided to dedicate this article to the Qatari literature, an undiscovered research field that deserves a closer look. Through a comparative analysis of three short stories that were written and published between the late 1970s and the end of the 1990s, their common theme, marriage, will be examined through the female and male points of views of authors and their characters. The aim is to reflect and delve into the social issues inside the man-woman relationship in the Qatari community at the time, and the stylistic-narrative changes in the short story devoted to this *topos*.

The Evolution of the Qatari Short Story

The great wealth acquired by Qatar, thanks to oil revenues during the 1950s, allowed the country to flourish not only economically, but also culturally, and the Qatari short story can be considered evidence of the country's intellectual and social transformations. Specifically, it was thanks to the advent of printing that the short story and the very short story written by local authors, both men and women, spread in Qatar in the early 1960s through local newspapers and magazines (often the editors themselves were writers).

As for some studies of Qatari short story, it is possible to identify three main generations of writers who have given depth to local literature, namely: the pioneer generation, represented by authors such as Yūsif an-Na'ma and Ibrāhīm Ṣaqr al-Mirrīhī, who had been writing between the 1960s and the mid-1970s, a middle generation, represented mainly by women writers – such as Kaṭṭam Ġabr al-Kuwārī, Nūra Āl Sa'ad, Ḥaṣṣa al-Ġabr, Ḥaṣṣa al-'Awaḍī – who had been showing a more solid artistic maturity, and the 'young' generation dating back to the end of 1994, represented by authors such as Ġamāl Fāyiz, Dalāl Ḥalīfa and Šamma al-Kuwārī (Kafud et al. 1996; al-Nadawī 2007: 63-68; Belabed 2023: 14).

However, as Salīm (2021: 40-42) points out, it should be specified that not all the short stories published immediately after the 1960s can be fully classified as such, since some lacked the typical narrative structures of this genre, and the characters, whose psychological traits were neglected, were not well developed. The short stories of the early period of the Qatari literature were a photographic illustration of events in traditional social life: they were a means for the author to express their reflections, especially on the social changes that were shaking the country (this was also the case of other Gulf countries undergoing a similar economic and cultural development). Nonetheless, these attempts at writing were valuable in the local context of those times and developed spontaneously along with social growth. Among the first works written between 1962 and 1971, are worth mentioning: *Bint al-ḥalīġ* (The Girl of the Gulf) and *Liqā' fī Bayrūt* (A Meeting in Beirut)

¹ Some Qatari stories and novels have already been translated into various European languages such as English, French, Italian and German. Nevertheless, critics about the Qatari literary production still exists.

by Yūsif al-Na'ma, the short story titled *al-Yatīm* (The Orphan) by 'Īsā Maṣṣūr of 1960, *Dikrā lan tamūt* (Memory Won't Die) by Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mālīk published in 1970, and *al-Hanīn* (Nostalgia) by Ibrāhīm Ṣaqr al-Mirrīhī of 1971.²

Gradually, the Qatari authors began to focus on the social problems of the contemporary world, dealing with topics such as the criticism of the dogmas of traditional society, concerning especially marriage, divorce, polygamy, women's emancipation, and the role of patriarchy in society. From the second half of the 1970s onwards, a more mature form of narrative, in terms of both quantity and quality, developed (al-Dwīk 1989:148; al-Nadawī 2007: 53). In fact, the authors of this period build the story around the description of the inner world of the protagonist and other characters, showing an improvement in style. Moreover, new narrative techniques were adopted, such as the use of inner monologue, stream of consciousness and symbolism, thanks to which a greater psychological analysis emerges, especially in the stories of women writers, such as Kalṭam Ḡabr al-Kuwārī, Nūra Āl Sa'ad and Umm Akṭam (Michalak-Pikulska 2016: 12; Subota 2018: 164).

Thematically, according to al-Nadawī (2007: 73-74), the literary output of the Qatari writers, who had been publishing since the late 1970s, approaches a romantic aesthetic and then takes a trend of realism in the early 1980s. It keeps making its way through the early 1990s, progressing to a more intimate and introspective narrative, and to an increasingly deeper psychology of the characters. In fact, the 1990s represent a new phase in Qatar's cultural transformation: a strong interest and awareness in the field of literature and art grows under the supervision and encouragement of local institutions, which highlight a new generation of Qatari talent through the organization of annual literary competitions and the awarding of prizes (al-Nadawī 2007: 73-74; Kāfūd 2005: 4-5). The themes addressed by the writers dealt with social criticism – including immigration and the role of Oriental expats within the Qatari society – and the conflict between tradition and progress. However, it should be noted that some social issues, such as family relations, the man-woman relationship, and the role of women in the local community, will also remain in the stories of the generations of writers of the 1990s, as some authors will go through a transition phase between the romantic and the realist current, preserving traces of both romantic and realist elements in their works.

Social and Narrative Insights of the Marriage in Qatar

According to the study of Nora bint Nasser bin Jassem Al Thani (2015: 55), “[f]amilies insist on marriage because they want to preserve ethics and honorable behavior; they are convinced that marriage is a protection against vice. This trend is inspired from Islam that invites youth to build Muslim virtuous families”. Thus, the theme of marriage also inevitably reverberates in local literature.

² Besides Umm Akṭam, among the best-known female writers of that time, we can find Kalṭam Ḡabr al-Kuwārī who since 1978, at a very young age, has been publishing various stories in local magazines. Although she belongs to the generation of the pioneers of the short story in Qatar, her style and themes are associated to the generation of ‘middle’ authors; thus, she is considered to be the artistic continuum between the two generations.

Most short stories – especially those of the 1980s and 1990s – propose a negative perception of this institution, where the husband is portrayed by a woman, mainly from a female point of view. Fahmī (1983: 8) observes that ‘marriage is the first symbol of the residue of customs and traditions’: that is why marriage has been a much-treasured theme by female writers, who have been very active in the intellectual community since the beginning of the Qatari literary production. They tell stories about unhappy or troubled unions as they are arranged by the families to strengthen their blood ties or for material and economic reasons³. They also focus on the relationship between husband and wife, often governed by the rigid rules of tradition and gender inequality. However, the female protagonists of these short stories do not only appear to be surrendering to being treated as objects; on the contrary: some of them are strong female personalities who tenaciously rebel against their fate, although often being hindered by other women such as their mothers or grandmothers. Despite this, especially in the stories of Umm Akṭam and Kaṭam Ġabr al-Kuwārī, most of the rebel heroines end up giving in and suffering their destiny. In keeping with modern times, however, the female protagonists turn into educated women who love and seek the understanding with their partner who in turn have become more affable in their attitudes towards the matrimony (Michalak-Pikulska 2016: 25).

In this framework, the considerations proposed by al-Dwīk (1989:150-151) in relation to the preponderant role of Qatari female writers confirm that writing was indeed a means of venting and escaping from the vortex of social frustrations that surround women. However, this does not mean that these feelings of impatience belong exclusively to the Qatari female generation, because it is also a characteristic of the male writers: in fact, the literary production by both sexes can be considered two sides of the same truth. And it is a fact that also male writers have been raising the issue of early marriages and of the deprivation of a woman’s right to choose her husband. Abū Šihāb (2016: 70) argues that the man’s role within the institution of marriage – which was perhaps more cohesive before the oil revolution and economic prosperity – according to most Qatari short stories dealing with this topic, appears deprived of his family duties. This is because he has adjusted to the needs and the pace of the times. So, in order to seek his ego, he often leaves his wife and children behind to travel and study or spend time having fun thanks to the new availability of money, while the woman remains faithful to her family. Albeit sometimes over-exaggerated in negatively presenting the marriage, the Qatari short story serves to expose the local and non-local communities to this social issue, by inviting the readers to ponder. The scholar (Abū Šihāb 2016: 66) then adds that in the Qatari short story there is a continuity in the manifestation of gender conflicts in the depth of marriage. Despite their sensitivity towards the social issue, Subota (2018: 165) states that the works of the men writers “did not give the reader such emotions and experiences for the fate of women as women’s short stories did. Instead, they were perceived as statements of the fact that backward traditions suppressing female identity dominate the society”. However, we do not consider this statement to be fully valid for all the short stories by male authors that

³ In most Qatari short stories, marriage is portrayed as a situation of unhappiness, experienced by the characters. However, this article does not intend to imply that all marriages in those times were unsuccessful. It aims to bring to light, through literature, a social issue that the Qatari authors perceive as being very consistent in the local community of the time.

deal with this issue, and we will find evidence of this in some of the short stories selected for this article.

In the following lines three short stories will be examined, namely *al-Ḥuṭwa al-'aḥīra* (The Last Step) by Umm Akṭam, *Ṣafā' ar-rūh* (Purity of Soul) by Nāṣir Ṣāliḥ al-Faḍāla, and finally *Ḥarām 'alayk* (Shame on You) by Muḥsin Fahd al-Hāḡirī⁴. The three selected stories, published between 1978 and the late 1990s, provide us with a broad overview of this topic. In fact, the authors of these short stories are one female and two males, who analyze the same theme through the eyes of very different characters, through whom the dogmas of the traditional structure of the local Qatari society are presented. In the first short story *al-Ḥuṭwa al-'aḥīra* (The Last Step) the protagonist is an unhappy woman victimized by her husband, portrayed by the artistic sensitivity of the writer Umm Akṭam. In the second, by the writer Nāṣir Ṣāliḥ al-Faḍāla, the main character is a disappointed man who feels betrayed by the western woman. In the third, an unhappy woman victimized by her insensitive husband is portrayed by Muḥsin Fahd al-Hāḡirī. Behind these choices lies the intention to have a fairly comprehensive range of perspectives on the theme of marriage in order to compare them by literary perspective.

The Last Step – Umm Akṭam

The short story *al-Ḥuṭwa al-'aḥīra* (The Last Step) by Umm Akṭam was published in July 1978 in issue 31 of the magazine *ad-Dawḥa*⁵. The author's real name is Fāṭima at-Turkī (b. 1950s), who used to sign herself with the pseudonyms of Umm Akṭam, or Sāra. Under those names she published more than 15 short stories in *ad-Dawḥa* magazine, from issue 30 of June 1978 to issue 122 of July 1985; however, no collection of her short stories has ever been published (Saleem 2021: 42-43). Despite the fact that the writer retired from literary life in the mid-1980s, she is still remembered as one of the pioneering women writers of the short story in Qatar, whose style was distinctive. A proof of this is the publication of several of her short stories in the most important Qatari magazine of the time, which was by no means taken for granted for a woman in Doha in the late 1970s.

Through this story, the author focuses on marriage based only on material advantages at the expense of the woman's happiness. The story is narrated in the first person with the use of inner monologue. However, the narrative structure approaches the stream of consciousness, which is definitely an innovative element in the Qatari short story for the time (al-Ḥāfiḡ et al. 2016: 662). Umm Akṭam does not mention anything in her story that would suggest that it takes place in Qatar.

The young female protagonist lives in a state of deep despair as she is married to a repulsive forty-year older man, who makes her very unhappy. The text opens with a descriptive sequence that is both lyrical and expressive, as the intensity of the protagonist's emotionality makes the language more akin to a poetic text: the reader is introduced into

⁴ English translation is by the author's article with the exception of *Ḥarām 'alayk* (Shame on You) by Muḥsin Fahd al-Hāḡirī that follows the translation in Al-Azab, Amir, Alshishakli, Samar Mahmood (trans.) *Crops. Anthology of Qatari Short Stories*, pp. 150-154, 2016.

⁵ In this article, we use the original version of the story, which was published in 1978 in issue 31 of *ad-Dawḥa* magazine, pp. 108-109.

the character's mind without any explanation or premise. In fact, the figure of the hated husband and the repulsion that the young woman feels for him are immediately presented through the use of metaphors and similes, as the following extract shows (1978: 108):

تطوقني كأخطبوط.. كخنجر تغرسه في عنقي المهزوم.. وأرتعد.. وأنتفض.. كمحارب
يحتضر.. وأعدو.. كأرنب بري جازع.. لأغتسل من رائحة الموت المتسلقة جسدي.

You wrap me up like an octopus, like a dagger plunged into my neck which gives in to you. I shake with convulsions, I tremble, like a dying warrior. I start running like a panicky wild rabbit, to shake the smell of death off my body.

Then the sequence is interrupted by a flashback: the protagonist jokes and plays carefree with her dear friend Sāra, also given in marriage to an old man 'thrown away like rubbish in the arms of an old man held up by a mountain of gold' (1978: 108). The protagonist will then give birth to a child that she subsequently rejects, blamed to be 'the fruit of the disappearance of joy from my lips'. But she does not give up and waits for the final step, which gives the story its title, namely the divorce from the man she detests so much. Her wait from that moment is described like "a bird that breathes in the scent of life behind the latticework of the cage and flaps its wings against the door of its prison and does not get tired of doing so" (1978: 109).

The story continues with a dialogue sequence in which the protagonist converses with her grandmother, a symbol of the clash between the old and the new generation. It is interesting to note that the protagonist never addresses her husband, as if to eliminate his presence altogether, hoping it was not true. The young woman thinks she has achieved her goal and has finally obtained the so longed repudiation so much that she impatiently asks her grandmother when the certificate is going to arrive. Her grandmother, in response, slaps her, accusing her of bringing shame to the family and sticks up for her husband who, having gone back to his first wife, has not decided to repudiate the protagonist, but to let her stay in their house and to support her and their young son (1978: 109):

أيها الحمقاء.. ها أنت تدفعين ثمن غرورك.. ومعاملتك الجافة لزوجك.. لقد نصحتك [...] لقد تزوج من فتاة أصغر منك سنًا وأكثر جمالاً.

What a fool! You are going to pay the price for your arrogance, your rude manners towards your husband. I warned you. [...] He is now married to a girl who is younger and prettier than you.

The entire story takes place in the house, while the temporal structure is characterized by a moderate use of analepsis (flashback). The story is made up of short sentences interrupted by points of suspension, which give the narrative text a distressing reading rhythm, as if the author intended to convey to the reader the 'hammering' of unhappiness suffered by the protagonist.

Thanks to a semi-poetic language studded with metaphors and similes, Umm Akṭam shows her pioneering expressive skills, which she lays bare part of the matrimonial reality of the Qatari society of the time with. In addition, the story is pervaded with her daring

artistic personality, so the reader is swallowed by a vortex that urges them to read it all in one breath.

***Purity of Soul* – Nāṣir Ṣāliḥ al-Faḍāla**

Ṣafā' ar-rūḥ (Purity of Soul) by Nāṣir Ṣāliḥ al-Faḍāla is one of the short stories awarded prizes in the literary competitions organized by the Department of Culture and Arts of the Ministry of Information of Qatar since the second half of the 1970s. It is included in the book that collects six other award-winning short stories entitled *Sab'at 'aṣwāṭ fī l-qīṣṣa al-qatariyya al-ḥadīṭa* (Seven Voices of the Qatari Modern Short Story), published in 1983 by the Department of Studies and Research with the Department of Culture and Arts⁶. The linguistic register used by the author is informal, which lends itself well to the narration of everyday family relationships. The author resorts to the use of metaphor and simile when referring to his women, but there is no deep analysis of the inner self of the characters, except for that of the protagonist, who, anyway, is described more superficially than the main character of *The Last Step* by Umm Akṭam.

The protagonist is Ḥālid, a young man who decides to move to London, to study medicine at university. The story opens with the separation of the two lovers, Ḥālid and Ṣafā', a cousin on his father's side, who promise not to forget each other and to wait for Ḥālid's return to Qatar before getting married. After this very brief preamble, it is immediately interesting to note the author's choice regarding the title: the word *ṣafā'*, which in Modern Standard Arabic primarily means 'purity', is also the name of Ḥālid's fiancée, as if it was a pun. Therefore, the title could be either interpreted as 'purity of soul' or 'Ṣafā' of my soul'. We will return to this point later.

The storytelling, through the voice of the inner narrator, goes on describing Ḥālid's feelings of alienation and nostalgia upon his arrival in Europe (2016: 145):

من دفء قطر وحنانها في أيام الشتاء إلى لفحة البرد القارسة في لندن، أشعرتني برودة الجو وكأنني
خرجت من ملابسي، عرياناً وسط زحام لم أعهده من قبل، الوجوه غير الوجوه، اللغة غير اللغة،
والنساء لا يخجلن من الغير أو من أنفسهنّ يكشفن أكثر مما يخفين.

From the nostalgia and mildness of Qatar in the winter days to the freezing cold of London, the biting air made me feel as if I had dropped my clothes, naked in the midst of a crowd I had never seen before, faces were not faces, language was not language, women with no shame of others or of themselves, exposed more than what they concealed.

Lost in his new London life, with his heart full of nostalgia for Qatar, Ḥālid's only comfort was reading the many letters he received from Ṣafā'. He concentrated on his studies and one day at university he met Janet, a beautiful British girl, with whom he began

⁶ It was not possible to find the original version published in 1983, so the Arabic version used for this analysis is the one included in the volume *Modern Literature of the Gulf* by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska (2016: 145-148).

to develop a strong friendship: she was always by his side, helped him by providing him with lecture notes, took care of him and assisted him when he got ill from the bitter cold he was not used to. So, he falls madly in love with her, slowly forgetting about his girlfriend Şafā' in Qatar (2016: 146):

كانت تعرف كيف تتلاعب بعواطفني، ترغبني وتصدني، تتساهل وتتشدد، كنت كالغريق في بحر هواها
لا أقوى على فراقها، كنت دائماً منجذباً لها تماماً كالفراشة التي أعماها نور المصباح عن ناره، شعرت
بحبها يجرف كياني، أهملت قراءة خطابات صفاء والرد عليها.

She knew how to play with my feelings, she desired me and rejected me, she was surrendering and uncompromising, it felt like I was drowning in the sea of her desire, and I did not have the strength to separate myself from her. I was always longing for her, just like the butterfly that is attracted by the light of a lamp, I felt a love for her that overwhelmed my being. I stopped reading and answering her letters.

Hālid decides to marry Janet, so their friends organize a party to celebrate the occasion. It is during this party that Hālid learns from one of his university friends that Janet is not a virgin and that she has had men before. Upset, Hālid feels cheated on, as he was confident, she was a pure woman, so he decides to leave immediately for Qatar, right after the party. Janet, unaware of the conversation between Hālid and his friend, invites him to return to her soon, but he replies sarcastically and pleads his 'pure' Şafā' to forgive him for breaking up with her (2016: 147-148):

” - إني عائد إلى قطر.. لا لأحصل على موافقة والدي على زواجك بل لأنزوج صفاء.. وأعود معها
لأكمل تعليمي. “
لم أعر ذهولها انتباها.. وحولت وجهي صوب المطار، وقد ارتسمت صورة صفاء بخجل العذراء..
ببسمه الحب البريء في كل وجه رأيته في المطار.
يا صفاء الروح والقلب اعذريني.. كادت بنات أوروبا ينسينني وجهك الضحوك.. يا صفاء الروح أنا
قادم.. قادم كي أجعل من حلم عمرك حقيقة تحميني من أفاعي الغرب..

- I am going back to Qatar not to get my father's consent to marry you, but to marry Şafā', be with her and finish my studies.

I paid no attention to her astonishment and headed for the airport, and the image of Şafā' and her virginal modesty and pure smile appeared before me, superimposed on every face I saw in the airport.

Şafā' of the soul and heart, forgive me. The girls of Europe were trying to make me forget your smiling face, Şafā' of the soul I am coming, I am coming to make the dream of your life come true, which will protect me from the vipers of the West...

However, a manly view of the idea of marriage is important to us because it contrasts with that of the female main characters of the other two stories analysed here, that is to say *The Last Step* and *Shame on You*. What role does the Qatari man of the time give to the institution of marriage and its local traditions? Does he prefer foreign women or Qatari women? In *Purity of Soul*, the desire to escape from one's own society and traditions emerges, but, as in most short stories published at the time, the characters eventually get

back to their roots, to the nest, and their attempts at rebellion often end in acceptance or surrender to what they are meant to be. The writer treats the paradox of the man-woman relationship between reality and dreams from a new angle in *Purity of Soul*, since it is set in a totally different context from the local one (al-Dwīk 1989: 151). But it is the local values that give human beings their individuality, and it is for this reason that the existence of the protagonist Ḥālīd is thus shaken up to the core, and according to Fahmī (1983: 14), traditions – namely that of marrying a cousin – become “a shield and protection from all storms” that influence the individual’s freedom of choice. In fact, Ḥālīd voluntarily decides to settle back in his country and to comply with the traditions, without any imposition. Regarding the pun in the title, the protagonist chooses Ṣafā’ as the embodiment of what, for him, in his world, is the purity of soul, whom he can finally share the rest of his life with. Behind these reflections lies the relevance of this prize-winning story, which was among the very first to portray the interaction between Western and Eastern civilisations through the perspective of an upcoming marriage (al-Nadawī 2007: 57).

Shame on You – Muḥsin Fahd al-Hāğirī

The writer Muḥsin Fahd al-Hāğirī (b. 1973) belongs to the generation of young Qatari writers who became well-known during the 1990s. He published three collections of short stories, namely *al-Balāğ* (The Report) in 1996, *Banāt Iblīs* (The Devil’s Daughters) in 1997 and *Ḥarām ‘alayk* (Shame on You) in 1998. The short story analysed here, gives the title to the last collection published by al-Hāğirī and was also included in the anthology entitled *Qīṭāf. Muḥtārāt min al-qīṣṣa al-qatariyya* (Crops. Anthology of Qatari Short Stories), which contains 13 short stories that have attracted critical interest.

Ḥarām ‘alayk (Shame on You) is the story of an unhappy marriage between a woman and an insensitive man, who constantly humiliates his wife. In the diegesis, ekphrastic sequences alternate with narrative excursus in which the external narrator relates the thoughts of the female protagonist. The narrative construction depends on the reiteration of the whispered phrase “Shame on You”, which is repeated six times in the text, each time introducing a different scene that crystallises the protagonist’s crisis (al-Hāfiz et al. 2016: 247). The opening immediately shows the reader the husband’s brutal and humiliating actions to the detriment of his wife (2017: 163):

«حرام عليك».. تقولها همساً عندما يوقظها من أحلى ساعات نومها في منتصف الليل ليمارس رجولته في ربع ساعة أو نصف ساعة، ليدير بعدها ظهره لها فيغبط في نوم عميق.

She whispered “shame on you” when he woke her up from the sweetest hours of her sleep in the middle of the night to show off his virility for fifteen or thirty minutes, only to turn his back to her afterwards and fall into a deep sleep. (2016: 151)

The story continues with the description of the husband who, while watching television, makes appreciations to the women on screen, careless of his wife’s presence. Then the narrator drags us into the mind of the protagonist, who feels oppressed and afraid of her husband, as we can read in the following extract (2017: 164):

كان بودها أن تصرخ لتخرج ما في جعبتها من أوجاع كتبتها عنه لفترة طويلة، ضاق صدرها بكل شيء، فلم يعد يطيق أكثر، امتلأ بتفاهاته واستهزائه وشماته وسخافته ووحشيته، وهي ما تفتأ تكتم همساتها عنه.

She wished she could shout to get out all the pain stored in her chest. She was fed up and couldn't get any more of his mocking, gloating, silliness, and brutality. She even muted her whispers. (2016: 152)

The considerations of the protagonist, presented by the narrator's voice, trigger a flashback that takes her back to her traumatic wedding night, when she naively thought her groom would be gentle, but instead, without even speaking to her, he starts kissing her violently and comes at her like a hurricane. Then he sits on the floor and begins to eat dinner without saying a word. She waits for him to invite her and share the food, but he does not, so the young bride sits next to him and extends a hand to take a bite, but the man begins to yell (2017: 166-167):

- اسمعي يا امرأة .. هذه أول وآخر مرة تأكلين فيها معي.. أنا أولاً. ثم تأتين من بعدي تأكلين.. أفهمت يا امرأة؟
صدمت لسماعها ذلك منه، وكاد أن يغمى عليها لولا أن تمالكت نفسها، وارتعشت وهي تقول له:
- حرام عليك.
لقد كانت أول مرة تقول فيها هذه الكلمات له، بل إنها أول مرة تعلن عما بداخلها له، لأنها بعد ذلك لم تستطع أن تفتح فمها بشيء.. طيلة حياتها.

- Listen, woman! This is the first and last time you are eating with me. Me first, then you come to eat after I finish, do you understand, woman?

She was shocked and about to faint, but she held her nerves. She was trembling when saying:

-Shame on you!

It was the first time she said such words; even it was the first time she declared what was in her mind because she couldn't utter a word ever after. (2016: 153-154)

Thus, during that night the woman hears her husband's first words to her and in response to them, for the last time in her life, she articulates the phrase 'Shame on you' out loud. The last lines of the story make the reader account for all the things that the woman, who is not even called by her name in the dialogue sequence, had been subjected to.

Concluding remarks

From our study it emerges that marriage is often linked to difficult situations in the Qatari short story, marriage often embodies disillusion for both sexes, but mainly hatred and woman's feeling that she is just something owned by a man, raising awareness in readers, and showing evidence of the beginning of social change in Qatari communities since many writers wrote about this situation of iniquity (Fahmī 1983: 8). From the narrative

perspective, the plot is almost inconspicuous, as the narrative is all about the psychology and emotions of the protagonist, so that the reader can empathise with their issues. Concerning language, it is not surprising that in the three selected stories, the use of the Qatari variety, for example in the dialogues, was not given attention to. This is likely due to the fact that Qatari authors of that time had to show their artistic and linguistic skills through a language of prestige – a language that was acquired even in a rather short period of time if one considers when the institutions of higher education were founded. So, it was unthinkable to use the local language for this purpose. As a matter of fact, the writing style could have also been influenced by the author's education background and their involvement in the intellectual Qatari community.

Therefore, the marriage becomes a means to investigate both social issues of the Qatari community at that time, and the different narrative styles that characterise the Qatari short story. In this regard, this article tried to reach this objective through the analysis of three sample short stories: *al-Ḥuṭwa al-'aḥīra* (The Last Step), *Ṣafā' ar-rūḥ* (Purity of Soul), and *Ḥarām 'alayk* (Shame on You).

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the latest short story of the selection is dated 1998, so there is no doubt that in more recent works the perspective on marriage has changed. For example, as observed by Abū Ṣihāb (2016: 69), the marriage in the Qatari short stories is today portrayed as a daily routine and it does not evoke any ecstasy or value. There is also an adaptation to modern times: for example, one of the spouses checks the other's mobile phone and finds out to be cheated on by checking social networks and apps such as WhatsApp or Instagram. This is the case of some short stories in the collection dated 2014 *Nawāfīd 'alā šurfat ar-ruḥ* (Windows at the Soul's Balcony) by the writer Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mālik: here it would also be interesting to investigate the institution of marriage in the post 2000s Qatari literature.

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