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The portrayal of woman in Arab contemporary feminine literature, in *The Black Suits You Well* (2012) Ahlem Mosteghanemi and *The Map Of Love* (1999) Ahdef Soueif

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Dedication

*In the name of Allah, most merciful, most compassionate
I must first thank Allah for enabling me to finish this work.*

This work is dedicated to my father MOHAMED, may Allah rest his soul in peace and reward him Eden. All your encouragements are still guiding me every day. I am sure you would be the happiest person to see this work accomplished.

I dedicate this work to my beloved mother may Allah reward her for her amazing efforts for me, and to my dear brother Rafik. Thank you for supporting me in our hard moments.

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Abstract

The reader of Arab feminine literature can observe the progress that the field is witnessing since last decade. Indeed, contemporary literary works try to follow the political and social events, in order to reflect reality through fictional stories and characters. With regard to the portrayal of woman in Arab feminine literary works, I chose to analyse feminine major characters in two dissimilar novels: “The Black Suits You Well” (2012) of Ahlem Mostghanemi and “The Map Of Love” (1999) of Ahdef Soueif ; Using qualitative research method to find out the manner the protagonists are demonstrated, which is inspired from the different views of the two writers toward woman situation and identity. Mostghanemi displays the brave woman challenging difficulties in her social life, but she is totally manipulated and exploited emotionally in her love affair. On the other hand, Ahdef Soueif exposes a different woman model, who is aware of her identity and her inner capacities, she is a good partner who supports her husband and works with him equally to succeed their life. Thus, these two studies drove to observe an example of women seeking to perform their feminine identity in a successful version, which is through their roles and reactions to life events.

Key words:Feminine literature, Ahlem Mostghanemi, Ahdef Soueif, patriarchial society, feminine identity, love story, The Black Suits You Well, The Map Of Love, successful women.

General introduction

Women have always played roles in literature and dealing with feminine Arab literature, one can have an overview about what is happening in the Arab society, an image about woman's daily life. Women writers have, in varying degrees, attempted to delineate their struggle against discrimination and oppression to assert their personalities and individualities. That was by sharing stories of lifestyle in the Arab world.

Even though Arab woman could achieve many crucial goals in life like high level studies, working in various fields which were limited by the masculine presence; she still suffers from being considered as weak and inferior to man, that she needs to get married and construct family to be recognised as a successful individual in the Arab society.

However, the successful new generation of Arab women are trying to alter these views to women, besides fighting the traditional discrimination gender stereotypes that decrease woman capacity only to be a wife or mother occupied just by homework and children needs.

This dissertation is a request to identify the presentation of woman's role in Arab feminine literature. *The Black Suits You Well* by Ahlem Mostghanemi and *The Map Of Love* by Ahdef Soueif are selected samples through which the portrayal of woman is different from each other.

The aim behind this dissertation is to uncover the form woman is exposed in Arab contemporary feminine literary works. Furthermore, this thesis attempts at demonstrating the manner both writers express their opinions through love stories novels. So, the questions that could be raised in the sake of this study are:

1 – How is woman presented in modern Arab literary works?

2- How is the voice of Ahlem Mosteghanemi revealed through the portrayal of her female character in *The Black Suits You Well*?

3- To what extent is Ahdef Soueif's depiction of her female protagonist different from that of Mostghanemi?

This dissertation is divided into three chapters, the first one is a theoretical part entitled: A philosophical inquiry to gender, which explores some important concepts focusing on some famous feminist and sociologist theories like Foucault and Friedan.

The second chapter, however, draws an attention to a literary analysis of Ahlem Mostghanemi's novel: *The Black Suits You Well* much attention has been drawn to the female character reactions toward her patriarchal society.

The third chapter deals also with a textual analysis of Soueif's *The Map Of Love* in which the female protagonist Anna is studied by explaining her acts and roles in regard to her life incidents, her equal efforts with her husband to preserve her life.

Introduction:

Indeed, there is general agreement among psychologists that gender is the single most important social category in people's lives (Bem 1993)

Before digging deep into the gender research, it's crucial to investigate some feminist sociologist ideas that have a great contribution to the concept of gender and woman situation progress. Michel Foucault and Betty Friedan are among the famous theorists who highlighted the gender scholarship.

Foucault had a position towards woman's issues, which was mentioned in his books: *The Subject and Power* and *History of sexuality*. Foucault's claims were among the first tools used in defending the equality between man and woman in every society.

Moreover, Betty Friedan had contributed in altering the woman's situation in the United States of America, through her book *The feminine mystique*. She participated in the feminist movement activities that achieved many objectives of woman's rights.

Furthermore, Feminism which is a political, social and cultural movement inspired many writers mainly women to write about woman problems portrayed in literature novels and stories, where characters and events reflect real people's life struggles.

1-Gender:

The concept of gender was first introduced as a social in 1970s, it was used to differentiate between biological sex differences and the manner they present behaviour and social role, which are set as either masculine or feminine, when this concept emerged it aimed to clear that sex biological differences do not signify woman's weakness or inferiority. (Jane Pilcher & Imelda Whelehan p56)

Moreover, gender perspective varies from a society to another, it is changed according to the culture and religion characteristics too, thus socialisation differs from an environment to another, children at their young age are taught behaviour that they should perform in their daily life, including how to interact with others of their same sex or its opposite in their home or outside it, furthermore some acts are considered as forbidden to a particular sex and permitted for the other.(www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/understanding/gender-definition/en/)

Simone de Beauvoir had inspected gender distinction in *The Second Sex* two decades before, with her statement that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (de Beauvoir 1972: 295). De Beauvoir's analysis femininity is a deficit that has an impact in hierarchical opposition, where the masculine is always the superior dominant and the feminine one is the inferior. Thus, patriarchy uses the woman's biological characteristics to assume her weakness. (Jane Pilcher & Imelda Whelehan p56)

In the other side, Butler -the feminist philosopher- explains: 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; gender identity is performatively constructed by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results.' (*Gender Trouble* p25). Which means, gender is a performance and a behaviour; it's what you *do* at particular times, rather than a universal *who you are*. So Buttler defines gender as a performative act done by the individual.

1-a. The Foucauldian version

Methods used in the past to enforce social submission were brutal, involving huge assaults against the body, however modern society has seen the emergence of increasingly invasive aspects of power, which creates a more restrictive social and psychological control than was thus possible.

Foucault in his label from discipline and punish describes how the female body has been discursively constructed as inferior yet also threatening to man, the body is an over-determined site of power for feminists as well as for Foucault.

Woman's association with body nature is strengthened by biological essentialist and determinist paradigms which define woman according to her reproductive physiology, she is just feeble and passive. (Foucault, p87)

When we mention power and body, Foucault suggests a modern notion of sexuality which can be useful to feminism; In the seventeenth century, 'power over life' evolves two basic forms that link together by a whole assemblage of power relations. First, body as a machine, its disciplining was guaranteed by the procedures of power that characterized the 'disciplines, an anatomy-politics of the human body.' Second, body as the basis of the biological processes, body imbued with the mechanics of life such as propagation, births, and morality. (Angela King p30)

Woman has been measured and judged against the norm of man, the essential human subject, the idea of men and women as opposites is supported by polarized categories such as mind, body, culture, nature and have been influenced with gender ideologies. Man is mind and represents culture, the rational, unified, thinking subject, woman is body and represents by instinct and physical need. (Angela King p31)

Foucault's theories have been useful to feminism in their challenge to paradigms of western thought taken for granted since the enlightenment, he critiques the classical ways of thinking about the subject as a rational, unified being with a fixed core or essence, arguing that « nothing in man-not even his body is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men » (Foucault p87)

There is no natural body or essential human subject who is « amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies » (foucault p 217)

Rather than undermining sociologist feminism Foucault's ideas can complement and enhance a socialist feminist position.

Foucault aims to encourage creativity which is significant for oppressed individuals because one's action can be a function of unequal power relations that can insist binary opposition. Freedom refers to the individual's ability to trespass limits and to alter how one adopts particular set of power relations or to reverse the power relation themselves. It is, in fact, an invention of alternative to a current practice. Thus, it can be argued that Foucault's notion of power has a theory of agency implicit within it.

Moreover, Foucault's statement of power appears particularly useful for feminist theory in several ways. Especially in a second wave feminist literature, it has taken up Foucault's work on power, his *Power/Knowledge* and *The History of Sexuality*, in a different way. It influences the possibilities of resistance over the fact of domination and assertion that individuals contest fixed identities and relations in subtle ways. Thus, it is particular helpful for feminists who want to show the diverse sources for women's subordination. As Foucault explains that there is no centralized oppressor, but rather the habits and comportment of masculinity and femininity that women perpetuate themselves through dieting, exercise,

fashion, beauty techniques, which implicate the lived experiences of women's bodies. Women are socialized to be for others, for men. Affectively, it is difficult for women to distance themselves of these practices as they consider themselves in terms of how they are perceived by others. (Angela King 31)

In his regard, a woman's worth is often dependent on the male gaze. Thus, Foucault's understanding of power recognizes its various effects and women's role in their own oppression resulting in an understanding that moves beyond victimization. If feminism attaches to an emancipatory project for female victims of power, it will preserve the old dichotomies of power in spite of itself. In other words, traditional feminist theory cannot explain the pleasure that women may derive from performing these practices because it posits a singular view of femininity as oppressive.

In fact, Foucault's response is possible to support a feminist identity. Foucault's historicized identity does not deny the reality of sexual identity, but demonstrates its limitations and dangers. To displace sex as the foundation of identity, he rejects the essentialist assumption that identity is a basis for a community. However, a characteristic to unify women is constructed through the act itself.

Although the docile bodies thesis is later modified by Foucault in order to have a less reductionist conception of the subject. Moreover, this label has been used by feminists of this first wave of Foucauldian feminist literature in the description of contemporary practices of femininity.

Female resistance

Foucault's work was taken differently by another wave of feminist literature, emphasizing that resistance may face the reality of domination, in other words where power is exercised, resistance emerges as a reaction, there is no absolute power and dominance, they are always

faced by rebellion and refusal (Foucault P 213), thus woman shows resistance when man attempts to explore her, her body, her feelings, or her efforts. And that's by imposing her identity as a second part of the society, which may threaten man's dominance and power that he desires to impose on her mainly in patriarchal societies.

However, man's authority can't find a way to exist only if the woman recognizes that, so his dominance depends on woman's actions and reactions, she can be a docile dependant member or an independent individual who shows refusal to exploitation and inequality. It is related to her decision of the way she views herself in her social environment.

As it's mentioned by Foucault claims, where there is power, there is resistance, only the actors may change, but this fact exists in the most of cases. In feminism, it is clearer presented in the nature of relations that join both man and woman, which is described in feminine literature stories.

1-b. theories by Betty Friedan

1-b-1. Gender/ Femininity

In the early 1920's feminism realised a huge leap forward causing women to be recognized as people rather than property, however in the early 1960's many women claimed that there was still a need for the realisation of that gain. Before 1960, equality was just a thought in the mind of every woman in America, but now women believed that they had to fight for equal rights. One of these women was author Betty Friedan who by her writing altered the way we view equality.

On February 19, 1963, Betty Friedan made the first step in the "second wave feminism" movement with her book *The Feminine Mystique*. Which was a book that encouraged women to search for new roles and responsibilities, and to seek identity socially and professionally.it

was said that Friedan's book was the first attempt that allowed woman to work outside of the house and at real jobs.

Betty Friedan in her famous book that arose a huge debate, by criticising the belief that woman's occupation is limited through childrearing and homemaking. Thus, it had a real impact on waves of feminism and it transformed the social fabric of the united states and countries in all the world.

Friedan claims that a woman is handicapped by her sex, and handicaps society, either by slavishly copying the pattern of man's advance in the professions, or by refusing to compete with man at all. which means she reveals that being a woman is a social obstacle that holds her from realising her dreams and from having an active professional life. She adds that women can be responsible for their social situation "Men are not the enemy, but the fellow victims. The real enemy is women's denigration of themselves". Friedan assumes that only woman can be responsible of her acts in society, mainly when she represents the traditional picture of femininity. As Friedan says "When she stopped conforming to the conventional picture of femininity she finally began to enjoy being a woman "

To conclude, the feminine mystique argues that women are victims of wrong beliefs about their identity and roles in their lives through their husbands and children. Those beliefs erase their identity and existence but to serve their families. Which creates a less vulnerable and important role for women in their society.(Brown Ltd, THE CRISIS IN WOMEN'S IDENTITY)

2. Feminism:

It is in a politics: a recognition of the historical and cultural subordination of women (the only world-wide majority to be treated as a minority), and a resolve to do something about it. Feminist thought has developed since the dramatic interventions of the suffrage Era, when those who believed in fighting for women's rights rallied around one central cause, women's right to vote. (Lizbeth Goodman, *Literature and Gender*, 1996. The Open University, p X)

Feminism is a school of thought and an ideological movement that is concerned with defending women's rights and promoting equality between genders.

The feminist movement in the United States and in all the world was a social and political change that sought to build equality for women. The movement transformed the lives of many individual women and exerted a profound effect upon American society during the twentieth century.

Through the first two decades of the century, women's groups in the United States struggled to win women's right in suffrage, crowing in the ratification of a constitutional amendment in 1920 that legalized women's right to vote. later during the twentieth century, women's groups also succeeded to advocate for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Though this proposed constitutional amendment ultimately failed to gain approval in the late 1970s, this was a first platform in raising women rights to be a recognized case that needs to be defended.

The period between 1917 and the early 1960s had witnessed the two world wars and a subsequent economic revolution that gave many American women the chance to enter the workplace. However, women joining workforce enlightened them about their unequal economic and social status. This was strongly mentioned by Betty Friedan in her enormously influential *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) called "the problem that has no name."

Later on, in 1964 feminism gained an important objective which was by the passage of the civil rights act. Many feminists claimed for the ban on racial discrimination, legalized by the Civil Rights Act, to apply to gender discrimination as well. Moreover, the student movement achieved to lead many younger citizens to demand for social and cultural equality between the two genders, through protesting and manifesting clearly for their agenda goals.

Furthermore, the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 created an official office for defending women concerns. Leaders such as Friedan, Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm, and Gloria Steinem obliged politicians to become aware of women's concerns and to work on legislation in order to develop the situation that women are living. In the same period, many other organizations emerged to seek for woman rights.

Despite the obstacles faced by the feminist movement, feminists maintained pressure on legislators to address women's issues such as reproductive rights, pay equity, affirmative action, sexual harassment, and the handling of rape victims in the courts. All in all the 1960s achievements were called the first wave of feminism, the activists of the 1970s and 1980s have been called the "second wave." In the 1990s there emerged a "third wave" of feminists, which was concerned with many of the same causes as their anticipants, but now aiming to work from legal and political side rather than only criticising. This new feminist generation claims the need to a wider landscape of feminism, including global networking, human rights, worldwide economic justice, and problems concerning race, gender and class.

3. Gender equality vs the other

3-a. Equality

Equality is being the same, mainly in terms of social status or legal/ political rights. Since men had a higher social status historically in addition to more legal and political rights comparing to women, equal rights feminists started from the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century to claim about their legal rights concerning education, property, employment and the vote. (Jane Pilcher & Imelda Whelehan p37)

However, debate was raised to define by which standard the achievement of equality is to be judged, does it mean that women have to react as masculine norms and nature in every life sphere? many other questions were raised to define what are gender equality aims.

Feminists started firstly to claim for maternal rights (birth control and protective employment) then they moved to redirect women away from being only concerned with domestic affairs, and to re-orient them to the public sphere just like men.

In the other side, gender studies still face the issue of whether women and men should be considered equal and treated in the same way regardless to their differences, that should be taken into consideration within their equal treatment. Thus, three feminist theorist's groups emerged to the landscape of gender studies: Equality, difference and diversity. Equality theorists believe that men and women have no differences and should be treated equally in the various domains of life, contrary to that, difference theorists claim that men and women should be treated in the same way but regarding to their non-similarities. In the other side, Diversity theorists criticise both equality and difference theories, they claim that difference between men and women creates such a social diversity in roles; So, they are equal but diverse.

The clash was always between equality theorists and the idea of the other which is portrayed in Arabic feminist literature, which is due to the patriarchal society that supports this belief.

In other words, the man is the normative and woman is the other, as the French writer Simone de Beauvoir argued before, the concept of 'the Other' describes women's status in patriarchal, androcentric cultures. While men are 'the One', women are 'the Other', beings defined only in relation to men. A woman, de Beauvoir claimed, is 'defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – (she is the other 16) Here De Beauvoir reveals the contradiction of man in seeking to impose himself by denoting the existence of woman, and in the same time the recognition of man to be superior cannot be made only by the approval of the other who is the woman. So the man can't be the one, unless woman (the other) recognizes that.

Furthermore, in her book *The Other Sex* De Beauvoir explained that women are responsible of their social state and being considered as the other, which is through their acts and acceptance to be treated as the other who is inferior than the one the man.

The concept of the other is the contrast obstacle of equality, mainly in Arab societies woman is treated as inferior to man, weak, passive and dependant to the patriarchal rules in her society.

Thus, feminist activists face always this opposition of the other, and search to defeat their claims concerning woman situation. (Jane Pilcher & Imelda Whelehan p 37)

3-b-1. Patriarchy

The literary meaning of patriarchal is the rule of male over a social group (a family or tribe), the patriarch , mainly the elder head of a social community has a legal power over others in the social unity, especially over young members of women and children. But from the early twentieth century, feminists have utilized this term to describe masculine domination over women.

The concept of patriarchy was the path to the emergence of many theories in gender studies that deal with woman's subordination to man. Three of the most interesting theories of patriarchy are the following: 'radical feminist', 'Marxist feminist' and 'dual systems theory'. In 'radical feminist' analyses, patriarchy is considered as the main division in society, where inequalities between men and women are biological. In the further grouping of feminist analyses, called the Marxist feminism.

patriarchy is argued from the workings of the capitalist economic system; Furthermore, the third group called the dual systems theory, it is a synthesis of Marxist and radical feminist accounts of gender relations. Where patriarchy is considered as interdependent to capitalism.

In her theory of patriarchy, Walby (1990) argues to have overcome the earlier problems of reductionism, universalism and the tendency to lose agency in social and historical processes. Walby thinks that patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. Walby claims six structures of patriarchy (household production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality, culture) that all of them are argued investigate the truth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of women's subordination.

Walby believes that in Britain for example, patriarchy witnessed a transformation from the private form it deals with family only, woman has a limited contribution in public life to the

public form women are not excluded from public life but they suffer from segregation and marginalization.

Walby says that patriarchy has merely changed its form so that now, as she puts it, rather than being restricted to the household, women have 'the whole of society in which to roam and be exploited' (201) In this quote, Walby presents a real radical feminist view of woman's social situation, she finds that woman are suffering from the whole society not only in their houses, which can be true in some cases.

However i disagree with Walby for the idea that woman is exploited from the whole society, it is related to her choices and her behaviour that can permits people to exploit her, if woman does not permit to others to exploit her, they just can't be her exploiter ; so I don't agree with the victimization of woman in society.(Jane Pilcher & Imelda Whelehan p 93).

3-b-2: Patriarchy in the Arab world:

Arab families can be described as highly patriarchal, where man is considered as the protector of woman, as a result he has authority over her, this patriarchal system has an impact on the social order in general. (Suad Jozeph 195)

Women in Arab culture are thought to obey and apply their male relatives orders (fathers, brothers, grand-parents, uncles, and sometimes male cousins); Yet, not only females who have to respect the family elders, young men are asked to submit to them.(Suad Jozeph 196)

In the other hand, elder women have also a degree of control over young people, but not similarly to the one men have in the Arab family, however there are exceptions in patriarchal system: Rules don't give authority only to the elder one over the others, a financially powerful

young brother can have more power than an older brother in the family; Furthermore, a sister can use power over her brothers if she owns independent wealth. (Suad Jozeph p 197)

4. Family commitment:

In the Arab old society, family was the first oppressive site for woman, where she was under the mercy of fathers, brothers or husbands. Where the law of patriarchy was the dominant in all spheres of woman's life; the social arrangements like kinship and romantic love was forbidden for woman as a kind of the repressive acts of the patriarchal regime.

Feminists had given two definitions to family: First, as a social arrangement, related to historical shifts yet based on the close kinship ties. And second as an ideology of communication appreciated by everyone. It is the way how family is presented; family has two major roles, it protects us from the outside world and socialises us into it, through different agents of socialisation: parents, school and media. It is the place where the child acquires morality and normality norms.

As Freud made clear, the family is also the place where the child receives his neuroses and phobias; where he grows up sexually well- or mal-adjusted. A good family life strengthens the individual with a long-lasting cushion against hard periods in social and professional life; However, it might be the first place where he faces obstacles and barriers to his success.

The concept of family is still used in debates for the elimination of social values, mother and father role should be according to feminists united to do activities together; taking care of children needs, dividing home chores and sharing every event in family life together. This change was due to that feminists blame feminism to be the reason behind families collapsing, woman had to work inside and outside the home, taking care of family and participating in the workplace was destroying many families' structures. Since woman finds herself uncappable

to balance between the two roles and missions, by result her job or her house ends to be in deficit of managing and caring.

In the other hand, if we want to describe how the feminine situation is in the Arab world, we can deduce that there an issue of taking choices, whether to serve family needs and devote the major part of woman's life to it, or to take the challenge to defeat patriarchal obstacles in the path of woman's success. This creates the dilemmabetween obeying family rules or rebelling against the patriarchal laws that oppress woman's existence; despite the fact that the Arabic society still can be found as patriarchal oppressing women.

Contemporary society has known a certain progress towards woman's rights in education, work, voting, protection laws from abuse and segregations. This evolution has opened in a certain way the doors to woman's freedom to choose the role she wants to do in life. Arabic woman is now able to write and express herself, which created a rich field of feminine literature to the Arabic contemporary culture. (Jane Pilcher & Imelda Whelehan p43)

5: Arab women's writing:

Feminism pushed women writers to emphasize on the role played by literature to oppose and be against gender discrimination; the ways in which social conditions and literary traditions concerning gender discrimination have influenced one another. The concept gained proper identification in the literary field in the period of 1960s. Before that, feminism was reduced to only the authorship of female writers and the portrayal given to women in literature with the help of female characters. The situation of women in society was described by the events faced by fictional female characters and their responses to these circumstances.

Feminine literature deals with social, cultural, educational, professional and financial issues that face woman in real life, in addition to that it shows the reaction of society via efforts in order to maintain the effects of patriarchal superiority.

Feminine literature witnessed a real growth in the twentieth century, via a new group of female writers aimed to make woman's voice heard and noticed besides defending feminism through discussing woman issues in Arab society, concerning identity and hierarchy from a female view, so who are the famous female writers behind Arabic feminine literature?

Layla Baalbaki: She was known as one of the pioneers of women's writing in the Arab world, Layla Baalbaki was one of the first writers to introduce woman's voice in Arab literature, insisting mostly on female problems, her famous successful work is "I live" written in 1958, the story events are about a young Lebanese woman when she tries to recognize her place in the world; seeking for political, social and financial liberty.

Another famous Arab writer: **Assia Djebbar** who is an Algerian feminist idol, she is known by her portrayal of Algerian woman within a post-colonial context. Her literary works consisted of short stories like, *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* (1980), taken inspiration from Delacroix's famous *the women of Algiers* (1834) which dealt with orientalist and patriarchal circumstances in the contemporary Algerian society where woman was treated unequally to man.

Djebbar used the French language in her novels like: *les Enfants du nouveau monde* (1962; *children of the New World*) and its sequel, *Les Alouettes naïves* (1967; *The Naïve Larks*), characterized the evolution through describing Algerian women contribution to the revolution war. (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Assia-Djebar>).

Fatima Mernissi: it will be unethical to mention the Magrebian feminine literature without introducing the well-known Islamic feminist, Fatima Mernissi who lighted the role given to woman in Islamic Magrebian society.

Her first work *Beyond the veil* (1975) is known as a reference text in feminist eastern studies, portraying the female sexuality within the historic context of Islam; her works themes emphasized on woman issues like patriarchal obstacles, and handicaps.

(<https://theculturetrip.com>)

Ahlem Mostghanemi: graduated with a PHD degree from Sorbonne university in sociology studies, she was known by her first translated works from Arabic to English language, she wrote first a collection of poetry, then she moved to fictional novels.

Mostghanemi's successful literary works gain many achievements, like Naguib Mahfouz Medal for literature. Her most known works are: *The Memory Of the Flesh*, *Chaos of the senses*, *Passer-by a Bed* and *the black suits you well*. She depicts Algerian history events within a fictional love stories. (<http://www.ib-article.com/>)

I have chosen her novel *the black suits you well* (2012) to work on in my dissertation, because it is a feminist social literature, and the language used is symbolic and serves its objective.

In the other side, **Ahdef El Soueif** is an Egyptian Arab writer who writes in the English language is a typical feminist writer, she is a novelist and short story writer, she obtained PhD in linguistics at the University of Lancaster. She is known by her three short stories collections; *Aisha* (1983), and *The Sandpiper* (1999) and her latest work is a s collection of short story, *I Think of You*. She has written also two novels; *In the Eye of The Sun* (1993) and *The Map of Love* (1999).and she has written a book also:*Mezzatera* in 2004.

(Dr Nick Turner, 2009.<https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/ahdaf-soueif>)

Her novel *The Map of Love* (1999) was nominated for the **Man Booker Prize** and subsequently translated into 21 languages, which I choose to discuss his character Hana in my third chapter of my research dissertation.

Conclusion

This chapter deals with a brief defining of some basic feminist concepts which are crucial in gender scholarship. They are: equality, the other, family, patriarchy; through these definitions we can deduce a background to this research paper.

Furthermore, this chapter includes a brief Feminism history that its path was made by many theorists, for instance Michel Foucault, Betty Friedan, Judith Butler; who contributed in creating the new feminist atmosphere that seeks to improve woman's situation in a social concept.

Therefore, the following chapter will analyse the work of Ahlem Mosteghanemi from the perspective of our theoretical chapter.

Introduction

It is probably that in literature more than in any other artistic sphere that Arab women could have an identity, a recognizable voice, and a long history. Literature is supposed to reflect reality, social life, everyday challenges, that is why it is a tool used by woman to express herself, her social situation facing discrimination and oppression, mainly in the Arab society where patriarchy may be still dominating in every event of life, female writers use fictional characters to describe their social environment and woman's life struggles.

Additionally, literature is known as the mirror of society, through reading different novels and stories you can discover the nature of different societies, for instance Arab feminine literature depicts the daily combat of woman to assert their existence in their societies.

Women in the contemporary Arab world witnessed a social and political transformation that was reflected in gaining many rights like access to school and professional life. In this chapter I will discuss how Ahlem Mosteghanemi portrayed the personality of Hala El Wafi in her novel "The Black Suits You Well", as an example of Algerian woman challenging many life difficulties in her patriarchal Arab society.

1-Ahlem Mostghanemi from a sociologist to a feminist

“Ahlem is an Algerian sun that illuminates the Arab world”, declared the president Ahmed Ben Bella(www.adab.com/literature)

Mosteghanemi is considered as one of the most famous successful female writers in the Arab world. She is known first with a radio show before becoming a poet, then writer of novels. Her famous novel, *The Bridges of Constantine*, won acclaim when it was published in the UK in 2014. It was the first of an award-winning trilogy, of which this is the second volume.

Mosteghanemi was born in 1953 in Tunis, she is the first female Algerian author of Arabic-language works, which are the first ones to be translated into English language. She entered the field of writing by broadcasting her poetry on national radio to support her family after the sickness of her father.

She earned a Licence degree in Arabic Literature from the University of Algiers in 1973, and also published her first poetry collection *The Harbour of Days*. She published her first novel, *Memory in the Flesh* in 1993 in Beirut, Lebanon where she lives till the present time, it has sold over a million copies across the Arab-world. It was translated into English by the American University in Cairo Press in 2000, after winning the 1998 Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature. In 2013, her *Black Suits You Well* was on the long list for the Sheikh Zayed Book Award. Lately she was named by the UNESCO as peace artist in 2016. (<http://www.independent.co.uk>. Saturday 10 January 2015).

Through love stories, Mostghanemi exposes her ideas and points of view concerning social and political history events in the Arab world mainly in Algeria. Mostghanemi followed her university studies at the Sorbonne, where in 1982 she obtained a doctorate in Sociology. Her thesis explored the misunderstanding and malaise between both sexes in the Algerian society which influenced her writing style and analysis of society components and

transformations, Mosteghanemi's writing is a literary work rich of a psychological and social reasoning of the different events mentioned in the stories.

Mosteghanemi's choice to write in Arabic and the topics discussed in her novels are directly inspired from the Algerian Revolution and Independence, In this research dissertation I will tackle the image of the feminist heroine in *The Black Suits you Well* and her reaction to the social obstacles and events.

Moreover, Mosteghanemi's battle against sexism is through the portrayal of feminist literature as a genre that tries to discover the female experience facing the opposition between the male and female in the Arab patriarchal society.

Furthermore, Mosteghanemi's writing is also known of the symbolism of Algerian geography and history landscape, she relies every event to the history circumstances as colonialism, she depicts the Algerian individual as a warrior struggling with life as he did with French colonialism, woman characters in her novels are inspired from the power of resistance, desire of freedom, and the action of independence from patriarchal obstacles as it was the case with the French enemy. (<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/>).

2-A Summary of the black suits you well

The Black Suits You Well succeeded to capture the Arab literature fans by its special story, where the Cinderella is left by her prince in the middle of the party. It is a love story about a young Algerian woman Hala al Waffi who was a teacher at primary school then turned to a singer, she is the daughter of a famous Algerian singer and a Syrian woman, Hala and her mother leave Algeria after the murder of her father and her brother by terrorists in the Black Decade of Algeria.

The story events start after the immigration of Hala to Syria and her emergence as a singer in the world of art. Being presented in a TV show, Hala was first introduced to Talal Al Hachem, the Lebanon rich man, who turns later to a lover that follows her everywhere by sending roses and cards after each show or concert.

Furthermore, the climax of the story emerges when Hala after a period of resistance and deny falls in love with her follower, without recognizing that this new love adventure will cost her a lot, mainly on the emotional side. She lost the game in front of power of the money and the masculine privilege, his insistence was never an indication that he will win her attention and her sacrifice as a woman who never accepts to be ignored or used only for one night pleasure; After trying many times to reach her, he finally arrived at his objective by creating a dependant woman waiting for the mercy of his attention and his free time to remember that she existed once in his life.

Mostghanemi takes the reader from the events occurring in Beirut and Paris moving to Algeria, by narrating political and social important events, and revealing how Hala brother was killed by terrorists. After a misunderstanding, he found himself a member of a terrorist group, then he was executed by his comrades; as well she narrates the way the father of Hala

was murdered playing his Aoud at wedding party, his sin was being an artist and trying to defeat fear projected to art and freedom.

The historical side too is not ignored in the novel, Mosteghanemi depicts how the grandfather of Hala, and the people of that small village Merwana had lived the Algerian Revolution. She describes how they used to sing to forget their pain, how screaming symbolised their everyday life.

Moving to the present time, Mosteghanemi describes how Talal has seen Hala as a playing doll, he remembers her only when his busy life circumstances permit. After many meetings, Hala decided to step back from the love adventure that crossed her life and turned her lost and dependant to the existence of that man, she decided to follow her life independently and brings what helps her to forget the pain caused by that relationship.

The main characters of the story are not numerous, Hala, Talal as major protagonists, her mom and cousin as fade characters, where the focus is on their actions most of the time. The end of the love story in the novel is really unexpected, the deception of the main protagonist from being considered as only a sex object or a leisure time person, this causes much pain to her heart, and obliges her to end the relation so fast without losing more of her dignity in front of that rich carless man.

3- Analysis of the black suits you well

Reading *The Black Suits You Well* draws a painting full of multiple colours used by Ahlem Mosteghanemi to portray woman's situation in Arab world, where love, pride, strength, loyalty are gathered in a harmonic expressions; with an extreme aesthetic tonality, Mosteghanemi steals the reader's attention and brings him to the world of Hala who suffers from many harsh deceptions, and tries to stand up facing the music alone.

The personal life events of Ahlem Mosteghanemi influenced her writing a lot, in each of her novels the reader sees the shadow of her life, her principles, ideas and experiences, reflecting in the story characters mainly in their social problems, as she faced hard times with her family in exile and her father's sickness, that obliged her to face life alone at a very young age, then traveling to Lebanon alone. All these events affected Mosteghanemi's style of writing from just an author to an experienced person with an autobiographical touch in her literary works, without ignoring the effect of her career as a sociologist on her view of describing people's behaviours in addition to criticising many values of Arab society.

What makes *The Black Suits You Well* a typical Algerian novel with excellence is the way Mosteghanemi relates the character's actions and reactions to the political and historical events in Algeria, Mosteghanemi describes the personality of Hala as a portrayal of the Arab and the Algerian modern woman who succeeds to defeat many patriarchal obstacles in her life, however she still feels insecure and weak trying to face hardships alone.

The novel narrates a love story that ends up by hurting Hala and breaking her heart, she resists her so-called lover who tries to impress her by his money and power, she depicts the pride in the Algerian female which is inspired from the patriarchal rebellious society, this later is shaped through the historical events that made the modern Algeria. Mosteghanemi mentions the small details about Awres, that she describes as a source of pride to Hala, in this region

the people face the colonialism and terrorists with intensity, Hala was loyal to remember her father and brother with every memory, the black that she was wearing indicates her resistance and determination, she was a woman with a man behaviour.

4- The Black Suits You Well from a feminist perspective

Feminism is present as the principal theme of the novel, woman is trying to reject the weak or inferior role, even as a member of the Arab society , this can be evident with the personality of Hala, who refuses to give up on her life after many harmful events, that destroyed her family , her country and her heart also, it's a symbolism of combat and resistance in front of various hardships, it's an example of an independent modern woman , however the Arab touch and the Algerian in particular is present in the novel through a combination created by Ahlem Mosteghanemi between modernity and originality, which is by showing Hala as a modern free woman that choose her life style independently ,yet in the same time she preserves her Arabic identity and her Algerian pride facing all hard challenges, even in her emotional life, Hala never gives up on her social environment, it may be noticeable that this combination creates a specific Algerian woman story in the contemporary life. "This woman uses her feminine skills in a form of a masculine acts, and that's what creates her strength" (Ahlem Mostghanemi 84)

"هذه امرأة تكمن أدواتها النسائية في صفاتها الرجالية"

6- Hala as the other vs family commitment

in *The Back Suits You Well*, Hala was characterized as the other, she was described mainly in the beginning of the novel as a woman trying to hide her weakness through a black dress that she never leaves a part, she uses that colour as a protection from man's eyes, she felt insecure after losing her father and brother, she felt weak uncovered that she is in need of vagueness to save her life from the others, especially those who destroyed her family, she was brave and weak in the same time, she was trying to be strong, which portrays the reality of the Arab woman, how she finds herself alone in a masculine society.

The harm caused by her lover was because of her feeling inferior in front of his masculine power and financial authority, she was considered as the other, facing a member from the dominant part of Arab society. It was the male character who decides the time and the place of meeting, he manipulates her according to his time management, like the master and slave, Hala turned to a powerless caring woman who has feeling for that rich man, yet she is in the waiting list of his attention like other previous and following women, whom he experienced in his life, she had to wait for his decision and his actions, he was the master and she was the dependant waiting for his desire to create her destiny. "He knows a lot about her, and she knows just a few, he created a love dilemma for her, where she could not find an escape, she was lost between two rose bunches and two phone calls. (Ahlem Mostghanemi 53)

رجل لا تعرفه الا قليلا. ويعرفها كثيرا. أدخلها في حالة دوام عشقي يصعب الخروج منها. أسكنها في مساحة وسطية بين باقتين وهاتفين. على حافة حرائق الانتظار.

The position given to woman as the other weak in the story is created by her acceptance in the beginning yet she regrets that renunciation by her, and she decides to go back to her independent life hiding that pain in her heart for ever, this decision can be considered as a sign of power rather than weakness, it's she who decided to end the relation at the end.

The concept of otherness is conferred clearly in describing Hala as the woman (the other) in front of art combatants who were declaring that singing is a sin, and whoever dare to face them is considered as a guilty wanted for punishment; Hala alWaffi feels always odd in a strange world where the stronger is the dominant, violence is the power, fear is the protection.

She decides to face her father's murders with her voice as a weapon, she prefers to not give up in order not to offer them another victory by killing her talent too. "A round? A round has two people at two sides, not only one facing punches from everyone. A lonely woman in box round without a man protection, without wearing strong gloves, or even holding a white handkerchief used to announce giving up, for her losing is not an option, thus men desire to defeat her, that's why I and my mother decided to leave Algeria to Syria her original country" (Ahlem Mostghanemi 16)

إن امرأة واقفة في حلبة ملاكمة، دون أن يحمي ظهرها رجل، ودون أن تضع قفازات الملاكم، أو تحمل في جيبها المنديل “
”الذي يلقي لإعلان الإستسلام، احتمال الخسارة غير وارد بالنسبة لها، لذا تتفتح بشجاعتها شهية الرجال على هزيمتها

It is impossible to deny how the importance of family was mentioned in the novel of Ahlem Mosteghanemi, she emphasised how the major protagonist was influenced by what happened to her family members and her life choices was inspired from her family events.

In the other side, the character of Hala El wafi shows a real inside struggle between taking the responsibility of her family or following her own independent career and chasing her dreams, in the same time family created a various patriarchal obstacles in her way, it is presented when she describes how she hides her singing concert from some of the family members , even though her cousin who lives in France encouraged her by assisting her concert , she kept the event hidden from other family members in Algeria.

In the Arab world Love was always considered as a crime and shame mainly for a girl , she is not accepted in her society and family if she falls in love with a man outside a legal

relationship, being in a relationship with a man is a taboo secret matter, this belief is inspired from Islamic sacred religion and Arabic traditions, however hypocrisy might be the symbol of the Arab society , people insist on what to be shown in front of others, yet they commit sins in private, in addition to that they permit for a man to be in a relationship with the other sex under the context of he is a man , free to do what he wants, even playing with a woman feelings is not considered as bad act, a sign of patriarchal discrimination in Arab world. «she never could live a love story, in her town, love is considered as a forbidden sin”(Ahlem Mostghanemi 25)

لم يمهلها القدر وقتا كافيا لقصة حب. في مدينتي تلك, الحب ضرب من الاثم"

Thus, Hala was hiding her love story from everyone in her environment, only he young cousin tells her the latest events briefly since she needs her help to cover her absence by an invented excuse. This feeling of doing something wrong and shame was circling her life and pushing her to rethink each time about her acts in her love affair, this regret feeling was torturing Hala only, the man was never described as feeling shame or insecure, it is a try to describe the woman emotional situation in the Arab world. She is terrified from the ghost of discovering her love affair.

Hala was so attached to her family, putting her familial engagements in the first place than her love, this is a characteristic of the Arabic personality of woman, woman devotes her life to her family, the big or the small one and even both of the two. However, man is free to choose when to give importance to his life and when to focus on his family matters.“While she was thinking, it came to her mind the fact she is getting old, and how she could refuse to marry her fiancé two years before, by her decision she put her family in an embarrassing situation, since they were afraid she will never get married in her life” (Ahlem Mostghanemi p16)

أوصلها التفكير الى العمر الذي يمضي بها. وذلك الشاب الذي كانت ستتزوجه و تخلت قبل سنتين عنه. فأثارت بذلك غضب أهلها. خشية ان تذبل في انتظار خطيب لا يأتي.

This clear difference between man and woman situation in the Arab world shows the lack in the patriarchal society in dealing with women recognition as a second part of society.

7-Hala reaction to her patriarchal environment

The shadow of a feminist combating issues against woman is so clear in The Black Suits You Well, Mosteghanemi views can be discovered easily, she is known for her criticism to the Arab society wrong norms and ideas, she tries to depict the free woman inside her, since she was studying the trouble between man and woman in the Algerian society, she builds a disapproval on her deep sociological analysis as a sociologist and an Arab woman raised in an Arab society.

Mosteghanemi describes the way woman can confront hardships caused by her environment in the Arab world, and she faces the winds alone and carries her success without giving up on her objectives. "A woman that never fears death, but she fears life with its spotlights" (Ahlem Mosteghanemi 15)

"!!إنها امرأة لا تهاب الموت..ولكنها تخاف الحياة فى أضوائها الكاشفة"

In the story Hala was portrayed as a brave woman challenging terrorists through her singing and her performance. Moreover, she chose to be independent from her uncles, she expresses herself with liberty in TV shows, which is surprising for a young lady coming from El Awres, where women are restricted by many social norms that still exist till now, woman is considered as weak dependant to man decisions in her life. Hala once declared:

"Now, you can say I am terrified more from my relatives, a woman like me does not fear killers as much her restrictive society, where honour decides who to leave alive, emotional terrorism is harsher than terrorists murder

crimes. You can guess, when I was first on stage, I was scared from my relatives more than terrorists themselves, since I come from a city in El Awres region, there no mercy with honour issues” (Ahlem Mostghanemi 16)

لقد غير تهديد الأقارب سلم مخاوفي. ان امرأة لا تخشى القتلة. تخاف مجتمعا يتحكم الشرف في رقابه. ثمة إرهاب معنوي يفوق جرائم الإرهابيين. تصور حين وقفت على الخشبة لأول مرة. كان خوفي من أقاربي يفوق خوفي من الإرهابيين أنفسهم. أنا ابنة مدينة عند أقدام الاوراس لا تساهل فيها مع الشرف.

Thus, the reader feels astonished how can a young woman be that much brave and audacious, it's the intention of Mosteghanemi behind this portrayal, she attempts to present the situation of modern Arab woman in our society, in the same time she relates the harsh events of Hala life to her personality and behaviour, her grief turned her to an iron woman that fears nothing in life.

Conclusion

The Black Suits You Well by Ahlem Mosteghanemi is a sample from the contemporary Arab feminine literature, published in 2012. It is inspired from the modern Algerian society, that was constructed after various historical and political events.

After conducting the novel analysis, the findings declare that the major character Hala depicts an example of woman resistance to various deceptions, among them there is love deceit. Merely, she could pick herself up and move forward in her life, announcing that her dignity was sharp enough to save her from a destructive love affair.

Introduction

Dealing previously with *The Black Suits You Well* was an example of how woman can be oppressed and exploited emotionally in the Arab world, however the coming discussion in this chapter will be totally the opposite. It is about a love story between two people coming from different backgrounds and cultures who both will sacrifice for the sake of their love and marriage, both man and woman in this story will work to achieve a happy life in the middle of many hard circumstances and troubles created by their societies or their countries political problems.

Thus, the following discussion of *The Map Of Love* of Ahdef Soueif will depict the character of Anna as a second woman example in my research dissertation. The aim behind this analysis is to arrive to a clear various study of how woman can be portrayed in Arab contemporary literature. The different nationalities of writers meet in a shared point which is describing the modern woman.

1-Ahdef Soueif the world writer

Ahdaf Soueif is considered as a world writer and she is one of the leaders of feminine literature in the Arab world, she is an Egyptian short story writer and a novelist. She graduated with a PHD degree from the university of Lancaster, England; she wrote many short stories: *Aicha* (1983), *The Sandpiper* (1999) and her most recent literary production *I think of you*(1996). She wrote other novels too: *In the Eye of the sun* (1992) which was approved by Edward Said when published, and *The Map of Love* (1999) she wrote a book also, *Mezzatera* (2004).

Soueif's birth was in Cairo, Egypt, Yet her life was in England, she had two failed marriage experiences, one with an Egyptian and the other with an English poet, those two experiences influenced her central themes, thus the reader feels the shadow of her emotional life in her stories.

Soueif's novels deal with the hybridity in culture between Egyptian and English one, through love relationships that join generally an English woman and an Egyptian man; for instance, her first novel "*In the Eye of The Sun*"ensues Egyptian women who live in Egypt and England. Furthermore, her second novel *The Map of Love* is about a love story between an Egyptian nationalist and an English Victorian lady.

Ahdef Soueif is living actually in both London and Cairo, her writing is published regularly for The Guardian newspaper; Soueif is also a political commentator on the Palestinian issue. She is the founder of the Palestinian festival of literature. (Dr Nick British council)

Soueif's love of her country Egypt and the pride of her Arab identity both pushed her to present a good image about the Arab woman specifically, however after the Arab Spring events, Soueif criticized the political situation of the Arab world to be passive and weak,

mainly the latest events in Egypt in 2011, which was mentioned later on in January 2012 entitled as *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution* – a personal account of the first year of the Egyptian political events. Her novel *The Map of Love* (1999) was nominated for the Man Booker Prize and translated into 21 languages over the world.

Arab readers say that although Soueif writes in English they can clearly deduce the Arabic through the English, and it may be obvious that she draws a mixture between the Arabic and English culture. (www.goodreads.com)

2- A Summary of the Map Of Love

Ahdef Soueif in her novel *The Map of Love*, narrates love stories, through a mixture between the past and the present time, the first one occurs when Lady Anna Winterbourne travels to Egypt after the death of her husband in the war.

During the wounds of widowhood and for the sake of her archaeology and painting enthusiasm, she starts to do visits to historical sites in Egypt which she heard a lot about , Anna is keen of adventures and tourism, that pushes her to disguise herself in a man outfit to see the pyramids; In one of her visits a group kidnaps her for political issues, which join her with the wife of an Egyptian protestor Layla EL Baroudi, who is the sister of Sharif , the nationalist who will love lady Anna when his eyes first meet hers in his castle where she was taken as a hostage, And he promises to help her reach her goals. In the desert of Sinai, Anna and Sherif fall in love for each other; Later on, Anna decides to leave to England, and Sharif proposes marriage. Despite all the problems that will face their marriage, the couple decides to marry and move to Sharif's old house to live with his mom Zeinab and his father Al Baroudi.

Anna challenged the difficulties that she will face from her family in Britain and assimilated to the Egyptian culture, by learning Arabic, and becoming a nationalist translator. She joined the anti-colonialists in London. Anna and Sharif have later a daughter, Nur al Hayah, after ten years from their marriage, Sharif took his retirement to have a private life, however, he died and Anna took her daughter to England.

What creates the particularity of this story is that Soueif starts from the present time to narrate about the main story that happened in the past, the first lines talk about Isabel Parkman who found in her house in New York city, a trunk full of old diaries of her English grandmother Anna Witenbourne in Egypt. After that she mentions this event to an old Egyptian musician whom she met in a musical party, whose name is Omar Al Gamaraoui, this later suggest her to send the journals to his sister Amal in Cairo to investigate about them.

Isabel could not resist the charm of Omar El Gamaraoui and she fall in love with him, in addition to that she becomes a friend of his sister Amal who help her discover Egypt history. Omar is so involved in Palestinian politics, then family issues appear to disturb their relationship. Later, Isabel found panels weaved by her grandmother Anna. And the story finishes by discovering those Anna memories.(The Map of Love Summary & Study Guide 01).

3-The female position in the Map Of Love

The uniqueness of the story and the hybrid language where Arabic is disguised in English expressions, besides the combination of two time periods, all these factors offered an undeniable success of The Map of Love all over the world, its popularity made the editors publish the version into twenty-one various languages.

The political stance of Ahdef Soueif appears in many lines of her love novel “The Map Of Love” where the major themes are politics and love, depicted in the story events, when she

mentions Anna solidarity with Egypt case , in other words Anna was defending Easterners identity and existence, she assimilated easily into the Egyptian culture and learnt Arabic language too; here Ahdef Soueif demonstrates an example of non-racist European person who tries to understand what is really behind the political events, and she stands with equality in rights and freedom, it is Ahdef position against colonialism which is clear in her political international activities.

Anna was autonomous in learning Arabic language to be a part of her new environment, through this protagonist Soueif presents woman in a positive image, she is intellectual, smart and independent. In other words, Anna is an example of wise woman who manages her family and social life with excellence.

In the other side, Soueif shows an example of the Arab woman portrayed in the character of Layla EL Baroudi and Amal El Ghermaoui, it's a manner to defend an image of Arab woman as a decision maker and solidarity presenter. Soueif depicts many hardships faced by woman in general, wherever she is living she has many obstacles to defeat. Although Soueif presents woman equal to man in her story, she reveals the patriarchal society's impact on woman's life. For instance, when she narrates every detail in her travel to Egypt to her father in law, another example is when she dresses in man's outfit just to walk freely in the touristic sites, which shows how man can be free and secured in the Eastern society wherever he goes.

Moreover, reading the Map of Love claims at the end that women found their identity as independent and autonomous, it is a self-discovery of the self by woman, when Anna decides to marry again with an Egyptian man and challenges with her inner power her British environment.

The reader of The map of Love feels that Soueif is suggesting to make a unity in order to live in harmony with the hybrid culture, she is reflecting her ideas as an Egyptian who lives in

London, in order to support the peace between the eastern and western world. This was explicit in the successful marriage of Anna and Sharif Pacha El Baroudi.

Soueif in her novel succeeded to introduce a positive image about woman, which made her story unique and successful. It is the combination of modernity and originality in Arab woman's life.

It can be deduced that new shape of feminism is demonstrated in this novel, where criticizing society is no more the major theme, yet looking for a progressed successful life is what is desired by the writer's perspectives. Man, and woman are just companions in the life journey, they struggle together its hardships and challenges. That's why Ahdef Soueif is considered as a world writer, she joins many diversities in her writing and she supports peace and love in the world.

4- Between equality and woman empowerment

Through the reading of the Map of Love, the reader may notice that Soueif presents woman and man equal to each other, they unify their efforts to succeed their lives together. For example, when Anna tries her best to help her husband Edward in his sickness, Soueif narrates: "So Anna has taken to placing folded muslin napkins under the cups. She knows he will not drink his tea, but he accepts his cup from her hand and suffers her to sit with him — no, suffers her to sit in the same room, for she cannot be said to be truly with him. She cannot, for instance, guess what thoughts are at this moment in his mind. Except that they are not thoughts of a happy — or even comfortable — nature. He sits upright in the big chair, his grey woollen dressing gown belted neatly at the waist, his hair combed back, his moustache hiding his upper lip, the lower lip drawn. His eyes fix upon some object behind her left shoulder, then move to the shrouded window, then down to the floor. They never meet her own. A muscle works, from time to time, in the clean-shaven jaw. He is waiting for this

formality of tea-drinking to be over so that she may leave him” (Soueif 28), furthermore, Anna prays god: ”Dear God, dear sweet Lord Jesus, I pray constantly for my husband’s mind and for his soul. He is grown weaker and cannot or will not leave his room.” (Soueif 31), “Sweet Mary, Mother of God, I pray for my husband’s soul as I pray for the souls of all the men who were joined in that terrible event” (Soueif 31) Anna was sharing pain with her husband, as a symbol of true loyalty “I have failed him. I am constantly and repeatedly failing him. If I could but find the key to the locked door of his mind, I could sweep out all the tenors that lurk there. And he would be well again ”(Soueif 30)

Anna’s sense of responsibility was pushing her to feel guilty about not being able to help her husband, she says: “For shame, for shame, Anna. To be weeping for yourself now, at such a time. All your thoughts should be bent on him, devoted to him. He is in need of rest, and he cannot find it”(Soueif 28)

later on, she puts hand in hand with Sharif to succeed their difficult marriage. Anna sacrifices for the sake of her love, Sharif also always support her acts and they live a happy marriage for ten years after.

Moreover, Soueif depicts woman as the loyal partner who stands with his half till the end, through the character of Layla, who supports her husband to overcome all his troubles. This good image of woman is the major theme discussed in the story.

In other side, in this novel female body is represented as powerful rather than weak, she claims that it is a mean to achieve objectives, man tries his best to gain the access to woman’s body. For instance, Sharif Pacha decides to marry an English lady foreign from his country and culture just to win her heart and live gazing to her beautiful eyes. Sharif flirts with Anna as they start revealing their attraction and admiration feelings: “No.’ He shakes his head. ‘No. You know, really, the first time I thought you were beautiful?’ ‘Yes?’ ‘When I came into the

courtyard and you were on your knees on the ground, wrapped in my old dressing gown, holding Ahmad to you. When you lifted your head and looked at me with the sun on your face, I saw your eyes, your amazing violet eyes, and then your face and neck flushed with colour and you looked down and hid yourself in the child and all I could see was your hair. I thought, She is beautiful. Truly beautiful.” (Soueif 104)

Soueif in this novel doesn't seek to rebel against man dominance or authority, she rather shows how the unity of man and woman can lead to a happy successful life, where they collaborate to preserve the stability of their marriage and the long life of their love. They stand together in front of hard moments everyone doing his duties and preserving his identity in the same time, mainly for woman, it is a new example of modern woman, where independence is equilibrated by loyalty and family support.

5-the feeling of otherness

The first thing that comes to mind is that a love story between an Egyptian and an English lady is full of obstacles, especially in the period where war was between the two countries; despite all the hardships that stand in the way of this couple, Anna plays a major role in trying to understand Sharif and his culture; she knew that Arabic was the solution to not feel strange anymore from Sharif's environment. That's why she started learning to speak in Arabic in order to delete that space between her and her new family. In that way she succeeded to incorporate in the Egyptian culture and she becomes a part of it."The New Women" 'Well done!' cries layla, clapping her hands. 'See how well she is Learning Mama?' 'She is quick, the name of prophet guard her.(Soueif 374)

In order to overcome the notion of otherness, she experienced in the beginning, however Sharif was using the French language as a way to communicate with Anna and avoid being the other in the relation, since they both speak French fluently. Anna first asked Sherif if

language does not cause problem: 'Does it trouble you,' she asks, 'that we have to speak in French?' 'I like French.' 'But does it trouble you that you cannot speak to me in Arabic?' 'No. It makes foreigners of us both. It's good that I should have to come some way to meet you.' He catches the hand playing around his mouth and puts the tips of the fingers to his lips. (Soueif 106) . Anna comments: "there is a problem of language. I have conducted my friendship in French, but I am now resolved to really learn Arabic." (Soueif 160); She did huge efforts in the seek to learn Arabic language and to talk it fluently, she used it as a means to join the Egyptian society and break that otherness situation. Anna efforts to assimilate in Egyptian culture added more appreciation from Sharif to her, she tells him once: "I am now resolved to really learn Arabic, and will hope to impress you, soon, by signing myself off in that language as your most dutiful and loving" (Soueif 107)

Anna succeeded in her marriage because she was a comprehensive woman who supports her husband and his family rules, she got acquainted with the new life style so fast, and became so loved and appreciated among the new Egyptian environment. (The search for Identity in Ahdef Soueif's The Map Of Love. Zakaria Almahasees).

6- relationship between female portrayal and hybridity

In the Map of Love, writer describes a love story that know no borders and no limitations, in which lovers come from odd cultures and various backgrounds, yet they fall strongly in love for each other. Here Ahdef Soueif assumes that Love does not recognize the impossible, and when the feelings are true nothing will matter, even difference in origins, countries, culture and religion too.

This novel builds the path to tolerance and coalition between cultures, it can be described as a channel between the West and the East. Since culture includes traditions, costumes, language and religion, the love stories in this book confront all the non-similar points and

show how love's power creates assimilation in the culture of one's partner, for example Anna after meeting her love Sharif, she introduced herself in the Egyptian culture easily through learning Arabic language, wearing traditional clothes and loving Egypt history. Both Anna and Sharif cooperate to understand each other, and succeed their marriage, Sharif told her "our ways are so different. Let's be patient with one another" (Soueif 353)

Furthermore, Anna's decedent Isabel loved Omar no matter what diverge her from him. The reader can grasp that Soueif is inviting the world to be peaceful and tolerate with differences. It is a call for love unity in all the world, which is absolutely related to her official political stance regarding international conflicts and events." It is like going to the beginning. Six thousand years of recorded history" (Soueif 19).

The mixture between the past time and the present, via narrating two love stories that resemble in circumstances, is a sign from Soueif that before one century or in actual time, love is always the same accord that challenge distance or hardships to live. Woman can defeat the role of the other, by imposing her personality. ((The search for Identity in Ahdef Soueif's The Map Of Love. Zakaria Almahasees 36)

7-The new model of modern woman

We have three major women characters in The Map of Love: one is writing her diaries who is Anna Witenbourne, the second is narrating, Layla Al Baroudi and the third one is reading, Amal Al Gamaraoui, sister of Omar Al Gamaraoui, this combination tries to show different women with different characteristics, yet they share the same attitude toward woman's identity, they know how to be strong and powerful without losing their femininity in style or behaviour. (The search for Identity in Ahdef Soueif's The Map Of Love. Zakaria Almahasees 39)

Anna appeared in a role of a well-positioned woman in both Egyptian and English societies, she took a critical decision in her life that rose a big debate in England, she was sure of her choice to marry a foreign man to her culture and country which was explicit in Lord Cromer interview. He declared that he thinks Anna is making a wrong decision and she is not overwhelmed of the consequences from marrying Sharif." Lady Anna,' he said 'do you realize what you are doing?'(Soueif 321).

In the other side, Anna imposed her position towards the Egyptian case, she was brave in trying to correct the wrong view of Westerners about Easterners, through her writing to Sir Charles and Lord Cromer. Before she went to Egypt, she had a negative image about Arab culture, then after doing many visits with Sharif El Baroudi she changed her mind and determined to defend the image of Egypt to Westerners. As she wrote to sir Charles: " I do confess, I found the company and conversation mostly pleasing and quite contrary to the prevailing view of life of the harem being one of indolence and torpor"(Soueif 237).

Additionally, Anna declared in one of her letters, once arrived to Cairo: "Dear Sir Charles, It is now a week that we have been in Grand Cairo and I have met with the greatest consideration and kindness from everybody here" (Soueif 51)

Moreover, she tries to help woman fight and struggle for their rights, she found that society oppresses woman's existence, she says "In England, society displays itself in public, so the stranger, even with no entrance to it knows it is there. Here, I have come to see, society exists behind closed doors—but it is no less society for that"(Soueif 160).

Anna is a model of an independent woman, she chose her life decisions according to her values and attitudes, the clear example is her marriage to man foreign to her country and her culture, in addition to be a Muslim and she was Cristian, however she determines to marry him after falling in love, and stands in front of her society refusal by working hard to succeed

her marriage. Anna encourages women to be educated, Sharif supports her too, she helps Egyptian women to have access to education and to their different rights. (Soueif Issue I)

Conclusion

Ahdef Soueif in the Map of Love presents a new model of modern woman who recognizes her identity and her real role in society. In other words, woman in this novel develops self-awareness, she is strong, educated and autonomous member of community. Yet, she preserves her originality and traditions.

Unlike the example portrayed by Ahlem Mostghanemi in The Black Suits You well, where woman is trying to impose herself in an oppressive environment, Soueif demonstrates another example where woman is cooperating with man equally to face life challenges.

General conclusion

Arab feminine literature has witnessed a real innovation with modern female writers. New feminist writers generation changed some classical views of the Arab woman as being oppressive and inferior member of society. Through producing stories in which woman is the major character reacting to various life events; Mainly to her social environment.

Arab woman category experienced new life standards, woman is asked now to study hard and to work outside home to collaborate with man in succeeding life hardships, thus woman's reaction to patriarchal societies changed to be independent from its handicaps. Woman can now probably impose her identity. in other words, modern woman tries to perform her feminine identity with a new successful social role.

As an attempt to study gender issues, this dissertation draws a link between woman's situation in Arab modern society and her portrayal in Arab modern literary works, two modern novels are discussed in this research thesis: "The Black Suits You Well" (2012) for the Algerian author Ahlem Mosteghanemi and "The Map Of Love" (1999) for the Egyptian writer Ahdef Soueif. The two stories are written from a different feminist perspective, due to the writers non-similar backgrounds, their different occupations and their unlike aims. Mosteghanemi presented woman as rebellious to her patriarchal society but weak in front of her love. The end of the story gives the reader the example of the brave confident woman who defeats her pain, and decides to never give up to sadness or sorrow.

In the other side, Soueif demonstrates a new woman model, cooperative with her partner and aware of her identity. Woman in the second novel is performing femininity in a modern manner, she is powerful but not opposing to man. Love is what joins both man and woman to overcome their differences, in addition to support each other equally.

Analysing and comparing the two different novels evokes an overview of the reflection of woman In Arab literary contemporary fictional works. Modern woman is presented as independent and self-aware, she is performing new feminine behaviour, which joins woman empowerment and independence with an extreme feminine touch.

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