

Feminist Challenge and Resistance: Ghanem's *Forbidden Love in the Land of Sheba As a Counter-narrative*

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ABSTRACT

Designating Qais Ghanem's fictional work as a Yemeni-Canadian novel, the current study examines the *Forbidden Love in the Land of Sheba* as a counter-narrative feminist novel. It highlights the author's feminist as well as social preoccupations of his homeland Yemen from the standpoint of an immigrant writer in Canada. The paper explores, from various perspectives, the challenging conditions with which the female characters are represented, contextualizing the fictional discourse within the cultural dialectic of narrative and counter-narrative on the one hand, and the feminist gender sensibility on the other. For this purpose, the outcomes have confirmed the counter-narrative nature of the novel which voices the feminist concerns of Yemeni women against multiple layers of oppression and their solid resistance. The study concludes that the novel is not only a feminist propaganda but a scheme of a resilient counter-narrative that carries the women voice in Yemen to the world.

Keywords: Ghanem; counter-narrative; feminist novel; Yemeni-Canadian novel; resistance

This paper attempts to offer a panoramic picture of condemnation of the hegemony in Yemen as well as in Arabic countries. Applying counter-narratives to analyse the text for the discussion of everyday life, such as those legalized stories circulated for definite political objectives to deploy community realization by prefiguring a countrywide established code of public social standards. For the purpose of reading and understanding any text critically, the illustration of cultural, political, religious matter is very much a matter of identifying the ways in which everyday lives are influenced by official and powerful people. One of the most remarkable characteristics of feminism is the development of their writing about themselves. Consequently, it can be

thought that the most imperative facet in women-writing is the emergence of counter-narrative that encounters, challenges, attacks and confronts the official narrative of supremacy.

Furthermore, counter-narratives begin in different related disciplines as well, such as women's studies (Romero and Stewart 1999), sociology (Plummer 1995), etc. They are defined as "little stories" of those individuals and groups whose knowledge and histories are marginalized, excluded, subjugated or forgotten in the telling of official narratives" (2). Bamberg and Molly Andrews, in *Considering Counter-Narratives: Narrating, Resisting, Making Sense* (2004), have developed the tents of counter-narratives and have outlined their expansion in an applied

manner. Typically, the stories of female which people tell and live offer resistance, either openly or indirectly to central masculine cultural narratives. For Thomas Maschio, counter-narrative is categorized by “an individual emotional tone and a simple and powerful logic.” “Anger, self-absorption and fear”, he argues, “are the emotional countersigns of this narrative”. This narrative delivers the readers important dimensions of the emotional scrutiny and displays ways of understanding the specific character in certain space. (91). The outline of counter-narrative is taken by feminists, sociologists and anthropologists to separate between the innovative and its branches, the crux and the genuineness of other cultures to be understood in a numerous coating of positioning. Frankly, it is evidently seen in the formation of individual stories around political situations which go against the social norms of conservative society bringing out the condition of deprived feminine who are not involved positively in typical official narrative and viewpoint. It could be said, refuting any form of writing is not a recent miracle but it develops a new explicit inspiring study in feminism, new historicism and postcolonial studies. On the other hand, Rebecca Jones, in her essay, “‘That’s very rude, I shouldn’t be telling you that’ Older women talking about sex”, deliberates the relationship between counter-narratives and contexts of production and consumption, focusing on the complexity that is involved in identifying counter-narratives as a matter of perspective, mainly multiple perspectives (172-177). Whereas Nelson Hypatia in his essay observes, “Sophie doesn’t: Families and counter stories of self-trust”, counter-

narratives can then be offered publicly “with the specific purpose of resisting and undermining [the] dominant story” (6).

Ghanem’s *The Forbidden Love in the Land of Shebais* a typical Yemen-Canadian novel that shows a deep anxiety with social injustice and discover the bond between love, marriage, exploitation, and culture. The writer draws his fictional story based on a real accident that takes place inside the Medical College at Sana’a University in 1999. The crime which was committed by corrupt decision-makers caused a tragic shock to women in particular and to the whole community in general. However, the trial was suddenly closed by the execution of one foreigner technician who was rendered as a scapegoat to hide the names of many corrupt politicians and statesmen who are involved in different crimes including prostitution, organ trading and weapons traffic. The writer refigures his country in the contemporary English Canadian literary mosaic to shed light on its negative aspects. It is observed through counter-narrative the female dilemma of this country and its traumatic history reviewing the theoretical literature of the feminist novel as a key term to incorporate the critics’ views about its definition and features within the critical analysis to support the main argument in respective contexts. Throughout his writing, He devotes his life to serve humanity and human rights and gender equality and to fight the corruption and to reform the feminist-political system of his home land.

The importance of the book’s title arises from recovering the historical and feminist position of the ancient kingdom in order to contrast the golden age of Sheba and its

cultural heritage with the present downfall. By choosing a title that marks a historical space of great civilization, the writer intends to compare the prosperity and goodness of the past female ruler with the corruption and dirty politics of male cliques at present. The forbidden love comes at the title of the novel to focus on the result of several prohibited relationships that lead to the ruin and constant war in the land of Sheba up to date. Historically, Sheba is the old and significant kingdom mentioned in many several religious books including Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the Quran that narrates the story of the ancient civilization of *Saba* or Sheba in South Arabia. Hence, the historical allusion in the title as well as text of the novel gives clue about how counter-narrative can fit, along with other feminist canons, with examining the female nature of the novel. By invoking the history of the ancient civilization, Ghanem presents his female text so that he can place his fictional setting and thematic ideas within their proper historical context. Taking this into account, the name “Sheba” throughout the novel symbolizes the great Arabic history and culture inherited from the geo-political state the current remains of which are located in the middle part of Yemen.

In fact, such politically thrilling entitlements in this novel are samples of political counter-narrative that resist and destabilize a dominant story. In this context, counter-narrative becomes a scheme of confrontation and rebelliousness by which disregarded groups and women can encounter those rudiments of the hegemonic story ratifying their subjugation. Home Bhabha’s notion of

“nation” as “narration” forefronts a big argument. Bhabha argues in *Nation and Narration*, “Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries — both actual and conceptual — disturb those ideological manoeuvres. . . {that} are given essentialist identities” (300). From the first page in his epigraph, Ghanem employs a resistant quotation to show the intention and scope of his novel “Gone are the days when we were dumb and did what we were told”. The crucial feminist idea of sexuality, Hana is complaining about her husband Gihad to her cousin, Dr. Farook: lack of love, affection and weakness and impotence of making love with her husband is revealed in detail in many situations explaining her “misery”, “depression” and “fear”(6). Hana is a representative voice of Yemen feminists who resist their early marriage of aged males, “when I was married off to him at the age of fifteen, he was almost thirty”, depicting the fact of her marriage life, “Love, Love! What love? He’s fifteen years older than I am” (8). In his age, she encounters the men habits in Yemen society along with her husband sexual relation and intercourse, arguing that “he can’t sleep because of that Qat . . . [the green leaves] he chews make him hornier and the smell of sweat all the time . . . surprisingly telling “all that sweat and stink would put off any women, in bed, and in talking about bed, you should hear snoring! Enough to prevent anyone from falling asleep” (11). The “snoring” of a “big weight” and “the thick nick” of “eighty Kilos” man is a plight of Hana and everywoman. Meanwhile Hana talked to Farook and started sobbing quietly, “I’m trapped in this marriage . . . I feel I’m in

real danger” (51). I am afraid of something big and dangerous. I’m living with organized crime and I’m not allowed to know what’s going on “(51) She speaks about Gihad’s violence of hitting her and she was having “blue marks”.In the same discourse, Hawwa, Hana’s Somali home maid was talking to Dr. Farook about Hana depression that cannot be hidden, she “was hearing her weeping in her room” (16). Later, she admits to Dr. Farook that she confronts him once and he treated her “very cruelly for weeks . . . that’s when the bruises began, and now it’s become routine. It’s as if he uses violence to preempt any nosy questions from me” (19).

Forbidden Love in the Land of Sheba can be considered as a counter-narrative in the logic that it encounters the way we know ourselves and produce a different meaning of the connection between here and there, inside and outside, history and nation, fictional and factual. In accordance with counter-narrative, the novelist affirms not only in this novel but also through all his three novels that Yemen has no place for honest, educated and expert people because the whole country is run by gangs and corrupted powerful lobby groups. His novels encompass a satire, an irony and a critique of the prevailing aspects of corruption during Saleh’s regime that was constructed on political and police gang and lobbyists.He muscularly criticises the intentional misinterpret/misuse of Islam to exploit feminine innocence and he questions the condition of political neglect of local and global women in Yemeni society of that period.Ghanem's such feminist thoughts are communicated by the heroine, Hana, who resists her husband's reluctance to share confidential matters

with her, “women don’t need to worry their pretty little heads with these things” (10). She was not able to see his weapons with her eyes, “Gihad might kill me” (48). She confirms that “Wives know everything about their husbands even their deepest secrets” while their husbands have no idea of their feeling, their longing for, whom they speak with on the phone, or whom they fantasize about (18). Moreover, Hana encounters even her religion when she answers Dr. Farook’s question on what she did when she is beaten by her husband, Gihad, “what can a Muslim wife do in this society” (19). She also resists the “Sharia Law”, Muslim law of inheritance that permits women to get less percentage than men and how much can she get from her husband billions without having children. For this reason, Gihad’s brother, Hameed, describes Hana as “a rebellious woman.”

In this novel, Ghanem frames the actions in a real panoramic feminist picture to shed lights on the death of many female medical students and the resistance of many others in the face of the aggressiveness and assassination and signifies the nonviolent resistance of Hana who ultimately fly to London with the ambition of love and freedom. Basically set, the choice of the theme, its treatment and the characters are inextricably bound up with feminist issues.The author’s example of contemporary Canadian feminist fiction provides a new space to reinforce the gender system of the country and maintains its cultural awareness. Various illustrative situations in this novel reflect the social, cultural and female related world of Yemen for questioning and discovering the self and reshaping its strong identity that rejects all types of

humiliation and exploitation. The violence, marginalization and suppression against women alongside with the exploitation of foreigner females' characters bring out the worst condition of internal and external torture and struggle of women. Alyama, the best assistant nurse of Dr. Farook is pregnant from her powerful sponsor, Gehad. While, Fatan, the Palestinian medical student is killed mysteriously in her Medical college at Sana'a University and the Iranian Shahnaz also has the same tragic end in the same college. After her disappearance, Fatan, the poor girl is accused of being a "loose girl – maybe a prostitute – and she and her Iranian girlfriend were on drugs" (75). Her death uncovers the fact "about a dozen medical students who have disappeared" (76). When Dr. Farook puts his medical statement in the court, they interrupted him, "[t]here's evidence that she was a loose woman who frequently went out at night without a male chaperone". Accusing Dr. Farook of having an illegal relationship with her, he defends "it's very disrespectful to speak of the dead in this manner, without any proof" (91). The crime of killing Fatan with many medical girl students involved "the abduction and rape of young Muslim women" (80) by "three doctors who were preparing operating room for harvesting internal organs from these women, for sale locally and abroad" (84). All, among many others, are victims due to the political corruption and feminist ignored rights.

As an Arab Canadian gender novelist, Ghanem is aware that literary values should reform the female identity and improve the cultural awareness. Based on such deep faith, the novel strongly

implements several factors such as female matters, social values, class and ethnic or race distinctions, personal prejudices to be gathered and reproduced. A series of organized action and inquiries confirm this work of fiction as a feminist novel. The most significant one is the heroine's confirmation of her sexual identity and freedom against the imposed religious, moral, and social taboos that she challenges unscrupulously. Following her own love, she attempts to seduce Dr. Farook. Hana excitedly and sensually fancy Dr. Farook, her cousin talking about herself and her willingness for making love with him confidently, "I'm just as good, may be even hotter" than English girls(20), declaring her injustice, "Your dear cousin doesn't make love to me. He just hops on and comes as quickly as possible. He doesn't kiss me anymore. There's no tenderness. There's no excitement. . . I dare him to make love to me on the stairs. He looked at me as if I was from outsider space and told me he wasn't in the mood . . . That's not what a Muslim woman does." She frankly tells Dr. Farook about her sexual need and desire ". . . a lot of need Especially from someone I love" (21) In the same discourse, Alayma, Dr. Farook medial assistant, blurted out to Dr. justifying her need to stop the work and leave to Bangalore, India, "I am pregnant", (28) "by your cousin, who is also my sponsor, and your landlord . . . a horny millionaire who can buy anyone and everyone" (28). Moreover, Alyama speaks about her sexual experience with Gihad, "He was horrible in bed, he would just jump on and come in seconds, the early sign of impotence . . . And with his huge belly, his thing... was buried" (30). Alyama uncovers her

experience in sexuality affirming Hana's words also of how men prefer to marry virgins because they "have nothing to compare their husbands' tool with . . . boys spend their lives worrying that theirs are smaller than their friends' and men spend their lives confirming it". This is how females challenge men in sexuality and in writing about sex affairs freely.

Discovering of the cultural and feminist attitudes and condemning the contemporary realities, the novel drives the readers' consideration to the effect of the immense powers' demolishing work on their own society. Considering counter-narrative and feminist approach, Ghanem builds his arguments in understanding of self-realization and developed thoughts that are two major pillars in the novelist's strategy. Therefore, the novel opens with the emergency case of Hana's attempting to commit suicide with sleeping pills, but Dr. Farook with his Indian nurse, manages to save her life. Retelling her stories and circumstances, she reveals the secret association of her husband and his brother Hamed in weapons traffic, gang rapes, and murder for organ harvesting from female medical students. Then, through this commencement, the writer traces the ups and downs of his community and its impact on history formation that enables the readers to observe the anxieties as well as critiques throughout the novel but with non-suggested remedy for this dictatorship. The writer always reminds and recalls the ancient history of the land of Sheba, "Perhaps they have very valuable pieces of art, or sculpture or ancient relics from the Queen of Sheba Empire (49)." leaving a sturdy impression, to convey his major notions to the readers

that efficient and intellectual educated people have no vacancy to work and construct their lost great history with such previous leadership of women.

Analysing the central incidence of the novel enhances the hypothesis of the feminist counter-narrative. Thematically speaking, the novelist uncovers how authority is full of corrupt cliques who seek their own interests even if that leads to the destruction of the female educational system and the whole nation. This is evidenced in the novel with the incident of exploiting medical college girl students by corrupt statesmen for sexuality purpose, raping and murdering them. Most of the victims' families choose to be silent on the disappearance of their girls to avoid the social disgrace. In Yemen, it is a big shame to inform the authority about the loss of their girls. "The father had no choice but to keep quiet in the end. He didn't want half of the population of Yemen to know that he was unable to avenge his honour" (67). Fatan's mother, being a Palestinian, is the one who searches about and discovers the murder of her daughter as one of many girl victims. Here, we come to know a horrible case against female in which organised crimes is committed by corrupt government: It is a "giant octopus of crime and corruption?" (97). They have the power and the ability to choose and change the prosecutor and the judge and modify the regulations and legislations of the country. As they have permitted the trial senior judge, Abdul-Hameed to take a long vocation for doing prostate surgery abroad, asking the new younger judge, Qadhi Omar Babili to look on the trial (107).

Obviously, the novel provides a new definition of politics based on the collective and personal experience related to the women in the society. To do this, the writer makes an attempt for transforming historical accounts by interrogating the formal political narrative of the dominant ruling group and giving way to the subaltern voice such as the resistance of Hana and the Indian nurse, Alyama, Fatan's mother among many others who face and resist the hegemony. This endeavour challenges the social and cultural boundaries, recreates religious fair norms for men and women, and shares the pain and suffering of half of the nation population marginalized by the controlling harsh government. The author unfolds the reality of the powerless and powerful people and how ineffective people strive to articulate themselves in the face of traditional conceptualization of accepting their real situation without uttering a word. For instance, the discussion between Gihad and Dr. Farook brings out the confrontation and resistance. Gihad advises his cousin to avoid interfering in the trial of those female medical college, "Compared to him, you're small fry" beside this "giant octopus of crime" (97). Dr. Farook faces his criminal cousin, Gihad, saying, "It is my business when you fuck my nurse and get her pregnant and then have to deport her before your half-Indian bastard is born" (99). Finally, he witnessed in the law court in favour of the victims' medical students despite his cousin's threatening.

The excellence of the novelist lies in his embodiment of Dr. Farook as a saviour with multiple significant purposes; to save his cousin, Hana, from that brutal and

criminal world, to inspect the dead body of one of the victimized students at the university hospital morgue, to testify at the trial of the suspected Kenyan morgue attendant, and to resist the tyrannical authority and police as well as his cousins, Gihad and Hamed who did their best to hinder his medical statement. Through such multiple heroic roles, Dr. Farook stands for the individual creative championship in an unbalanced battle against the powers of darkness. Dr. Farook brings out the sense of counter-narrative that leads to differentiate between here and there, east and west. In the west, "lots of women used to elope in Europe in the past. But eventually they reappeared in society. They were not found in hospital morgues, or in the rubbish dumps," like here in Yemen. Then he delivers his perspective preferring the western style and life, "the more I hear about how we treat women in this culture the more I am disgusting" (77).

The counter-narrative embodies Hana, the oppressed wife who is the feminist typical character, with her powerful, corrupt and aggressive husband Gihad that is drawn by the novelist to develop the plot through reversal in power relation. Countering the social and cultural customs, Hana admits that she is alone the big offender, "It's me, the Muslim woman who didn't remain chaste. Straight to hell I go" but "Gihad is not an offender, not at all. Otherwise half the men in the country would be offenders . . . It's considered normal" (63). On the other hand, Farook listens to a strong story of seduction of one medical college students who gets addicted to drugs by sniffing Jasmin. She is taken by a *dabbab* driver to one house to give her Jasmine. She takes the flowers and sniffs many

times till losing control then she is fucked by three thugs. Farook is amazed how this is happened in a conservative and religious country, “My hair is standing on end. That such a thing can happen in this Muslim country is just unbelievable. I don’t know what to say... but the description of one of those bastards seems to fit Gihad.” (69). The way of this arranged crimes is fact but it looks like fiction.

While Gihad is hospitalised in the intensive care unit with a massive brain hemorrhage, Hana and Farook indulge in the forbidden love and run away. Hana needs to escape from the “Land of Sheba” out of fear from Gihad’s recovery or Hameed, her husband’s brother, who is thinking of killing her to take all his brother's and partner's inheritance as she does not have the right to inherit without having children from her husband. In that patriarchal society, a vulnerable woman like Hana can only hope to do so with the help of a man like Farook. At the end of the novel, the novelist highlights the role of Hana to resist her society, save her life, take enough money from her first marriage without her husband acceptance and marry her favourite lover. The forbidden love of Hana who submits herself to and indulge in with Dr, Farook, her lover depicts her final attempt managing to seduce him whispering at the bed, “Take me, my darling, take me . . . Now I’m yours . . . I don’t feel depressed anymore, especially after you made love to me. I now know you love me” (62). On the one hand, there is a feeling of exceptional unimaginable love between Hana and her beloved Dr. Farook while there is the promising new public consciousness for the need to fight for the mislaid political

freedom of the nation on the other hand. The enforced marriage of Hana to her fat, “cruel, giant cousin” which leads her into depression is comparable with the usurpation of power and wealth that might come to its right person in the future. However, Hana, at the end of the novel, has got married to her true lover Dr. Farook and left with him abroad, whereas the country is still dying at the hand of local criminals with external weapons, politics and support.

In so doing, the charts of the novelistic concerns of detailed feminist issues and its targets create a profound understanding of the current family situation in Yemen and also reflects a critical level of scholarly inquiry by which the whole world identify what can be called Yemen-Canadian feminist fiction. It explores how the novelist has placed questions of commitment towards his society and the world and examines the feminist and artistic concepts for tackling historical-feminist events that have significantly enriched the awareness of people of their obligations and what beliefs are for. Correspondingly, in all ways this writer never exaggerates the crisis of his home country shedding lights on the economic, military, and religious cataclysm that have affected the historical and social and feminist facets. He seeks to differentiate between challenging fiction and political tendencies. The stress on the propaganda of the government and its insistence to deform the happening facts directed the writer to satirically and ironically show the real condition and its real story to confront the powers misleading discourse. Therefore, the dark image Ghanem depicts of Yemen gives many clues that the

negative effects on the unprivileged strata of society, especially on women and the powerless, by corrupt political regimes can produce horrible political-feminist facts. The western voice, Sherrill Wark comments on the novel cover, "Against a milieu of things incredible by the Western mind, the author takes us on a journey of intrigue, passion and danger. Death lurks in every corner, in every whisper, in every kiss." The Arabic diasporic voice, Tahani Shihab states "When you begin to read this novel, you will not stop for one moment, enticed by the versatility of the writer in crafting its plot with tact and skill. As a woman of Yemeni origin", she feels the factual sense in this novel (the back cover of the novel).

The feminist tones and themes of the novel are deep rooted in its concern with human endurance and dignity, economic welfare, and freedom. It is involved in discussing several aspects of Yemen culture, religion, and politics that drive people to be eager to move into a new political-feminist era with altered political situation recollecting the feminist success and prosperity. It is a feminist story limited to the manners and actions of the Yemeni politicians towards women. The writer, therefore, attempts to be conventional to select pieces of daily life stories of his native place and put them together with his gender concentration to reconstruct a national alternative history. The writer wants to be a protector of women, human rights and relationship. Thus, his novel includes a deep search for harmony and justice in an aggressive society and political cracks, hoping to re-establish faithfulness to human ties in this biased society where people are looking for practical ideas of justice and

freedom and women for the minimum empowerment.

The critical aim of a counter-narrative, thus, is not only to exchange one magnificent narrative with another, but the reader is made to recognize the authors' drawn image of his remote country. Ghanem puts more focus on intellectual and educated people who have travelled back from different European countries to Yemen to serve their own people but unfortunately, they put pressure upon them in different ways forcing them to prefer their educated-host land to their home land. Narrative and counter-narrative can be observed in the two different, Gihad and his brother Hameed, against their cousin, Dr. Farook. They are talking and misusing their religion by their evil work and wrong actions while Dr. Farook is doing reversely as human being who believes in and fights for women rights and freedom. They are practicing their religious norms uselessly and harming their nation in their wrong business while Dr. Farook is saving and treating the nation standing against corruption and saving Hana's life. Once Hameed said to Dr. "I just decided to follow my faith and be a good Muslim" (40). Ironically, the author throws lights on his banned and harming business and corruption in which his daily praying and going to mosque should be enough to stop him from this destructive business and trading even with wines and whiskey. Both are working to ruin their homeland while Dr. is devoted to the prosperity of his country. Likewise, this attempt draws many comparisons of how Ghanem's counter-narrative challenges the fictional events and characters with the socio-political relationships to highlight the ancient powerful Yemeni women

compared to their powerless present. This novel answers nearly all feminist questions and their need. It is not only a school of love and feminist practical theory for Yemen and Arab world but it is definitely a current reference for all the world. Feminist approach brings out the role of counter-narratives in exposing the humiliating depictions for women and common interest in writing in and talking about discrimination and inequality experienced by women. As a feminist writer, the novelist has to be persistently aware of the fundamental phase of the oppression of women in Yemen. It argues through counter-narrative how often feminists, cultural activist, religious norms, political organizations are interwoven within women's movements.

The concept of counter-narrative is observed as a denial of power and phallogocentric majority in Yemen. The characters encounter the social and cultural boundaries and adjust themselves to reformulate their new understanding of gender and identity. Counter-narrative, in this feminist sense, provides dissimilar formation of self and community. The novel drives and creates stories based on reality, approving the political instabilities to counter the authorized and official narratives. Like this, it also discloses a serious freedom for the female to express their dilemma and their endeavour to establish the appropriate suggestion for counter-narratives by brilliant and direct explanation of misuse/misinterpret of religion and the oppression and suppression against women. The counter-narrative, in the novel, is considered in the sense of a feminist, social and historical fiction in the main. It may or may not be a

combination of a perfect historical event and an exact autobiography or biography of the novelist, but it has a touch of reality. It deliberates from different angles the worst male clique that misuse their power and deal with the Yemeni government as a private property. The novelist aims at telling and retelling the historical events that have shaken the whole country emphasising on the mistreatment of female in every corner of life. He is keen to deconstruct the powerful people standard and to make his voice a representative of many female silent ones. Like his protagonist, Hana, he resists all types of fear, anxiety, oppression and aggressiveness that destroy her in representation to the all-female in society and lead to a constant tragedy.

The origin of Arab love and Female power remarks the historical, cultural and social ancient epoch that may not/cannot be originated anywhere in the world. The sense of sacrifice, ideal human relationship, love for nation and civilizations are some of the merits of Yemen heritage. Qais Ghanem neglects all these features when he writes for gender and female thematic concerns. Though, his account can be delivered as the author's impression of counter-history. To answer interrogations of critics who disparage his work that his novel is located in Yemen and not in Canada, Ghanem sustains that he speaks to people suffering in his community of the nearest real familiar stories. Here, counter-narrative offers an alternative understanding to the dominant historical narratives in both content and form. Ghanem endeavours to represent women, their oppression and their mistreatment in the patriarchal society

of Yemen. The urgency to emphasize a specific identity and recall the ancient female characters who were more powerful than male are the foremost concerns of the writer. The current novel is considered as counter-narrative because Ghanem provides a story different from the one that one usually hears or knows and suggests new literary sites through which we explore what Yemen is and who we are, providing a place where the alter-self can be discovered. As Robert Kroetsch puts it: “[W]e haven’t got an identity until somebody tells our story. The fiction makes us real” (*Creation* 63).

Certainly, this is not only a feminist propaganda novel but a venture of a counter-narrative to challenge and resist hegemony and official power as well that carries the ignored voice of Yemen women to the world—individuals, social systems, decision-making leaders and all human beings who claim to countersign human freedom. The author effectively is able to balance his obligations, interrogating varieties of his characters’ viewpoints obtainable in his superior tone, easy language and style. His commitment towards his nation is achieved without any adversary of craft. He embodies a persevering political conflict between the powerful government and ordinary people in response to the historical requirements and nationalist promises laying, in the process, the founding stones of what can be surely called a Yemeni-Canadian counter-narrative feminist fiction.

To conclude, this work tackles the significant feminist events in Yemen as an example of the Arab world to be a positive contribution to upraise the feminist realization of the Arab-Canadian and Arab-American communities and to

preserve the identity of their native homeland. The norms and notions of Yemen society classification relevant to this novel are mostly related to questions of hypocrisy and triple identity of citizens; with the scenario of dealing with female in political merger passing through normal political ruling parties that believe in inequality of social and cultural values among gender and human being. They assume that they have rights to misuse, rule and carry out whatever they wish for. No one can or have the right to question them. The growing concept of counter-narrative in analysing the text about Yemen-community is a type of a critique to attack elites who are the leaders and decision-makers. The novel is one approach that forwards his criticism on the stereotypes of and prejudices against Yemeni people confirming the central cultural context and reconstructing a different identity based on revised historical, political and sociological contexts. Therefore, the novel is “counter-narrative” for several reasons: it expresses female “Voices” which disturb the official discourse; it depicts a particular time of Yemen history including the gender differences; it disrupts the hegemonic form of history and realizes ancient trials from various perspectives and wider assessments, concentrating on a group or groups of female and male in contrasting sites and particular facet of their experience. Finally, *The Forbidden Love in the Land of Shebais* read as a novel of a self-regaining woman confirming the slogan, *Ana Auntha* (I am female).

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