Articulating the Subaltern:

The Image of the Female in Day of the Antelopes

by

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Abstract:

In her short story collection Day of the Antelopes, Fatima Hamad Al Mazrouei offers a rich and nuanced depiction of Emirati society through a series of compelling narratives centered around female characters navigating life in a patriarchal environment. Throughout most of the stories, Al Mazrouei places women at the forefront, challenging the long-standing tradition in Arabic literature that predominantly reserves leading roles for male characters. Within the framework of modern feminist criticism, this paper contends that Al Mazrouei endeavors to amplify the silenced voices of women and expose the harmful effects of patriarchal dominance, which has historically suppressed them. By analyzing selected stories from the collection, the paper highlights the author's critique of anti-female biases embedded in a male-centric culture. Overall, the study shows how women have suffered marginalization and victimization in societies marked by ignorance, superstition, and a deep-rooted belief in male superiority. Looking back at the historical status of women in the UAE, Al Mazrouei challenges traditional norms that seek to exclude and belittle women by stripping them of their fundamental rights. The paper also explores key socio-historical themes, elements of folklore, and feminist perspectives linked to local cultural heritage to underscore Al Mazrouei's stark portrayal of the injustices faced by women in Emirati society.

Keywords: feminism, patriarchy, supremacy, gender, masculinity, superstitions, ignorance, UAE society, modernity, heritage.

تُقدّم فاطمة حمد المزروعي تصويرًا غنيًا ودقيقًا في مجموعتها القصصية القصيرة "يوم الظباء"، للمجتمع الإماراتي من خلال سلسلة من السرديات الآسرة التي تتمحور حول شخصيات نسائية تخوض غمار الحياة في بيئة أبوية. في معظم القصص، تضع المزروعي المرأة في الصدارة، متحديةً بذلك التقليد الراسخ في الأدب العربي الذي يحصر الأدوار القيادية في الغالب للشخصيات الذكورية. في إطار النقد النسوي الحديث، تُجادل هذه الورقة البحثية بأن المزروعي تسعى إلى إبراز أصوات النساء المُكبوتة وكشف الآثار الضارة للهيمنة الأبوية التي قمعتهن تاريخيًا. من خلال تحليل قصص مختارة من المجموعة، تُسلط الورقة الضوء على نقد الكاتبة للتحيزات ضد المرأة المتأصلة في ثقافة ذكورية. بشكل عام، تُظهر الدراسة كيف عانت النساء من التهميش والظلم في مجتمعات تتسم بالجهل والخرافات عام، تُظهر الدراسة بتفوق الرجل. بالنظر إلى الوضع التاريخي للمرأة في الإمارات العربية المتحدة، تتحدى المزروعي الأعراف التقليدية التي تسعى إلى إقصاء المرأة والتقليل من شأنها بتجريدها من حقوقها المزروعي الأعراف الورقة موضوعات اجتماعية تاريخية رئيسية، وعناصر من التراث الشعبي، وجهات نظر نسوية مرتبطة بالتراث الثقافي المحلي، لتسليط الضوء على تصوير المزروعي الصارخ للظلم الذي تواجهه المرأة في المجتمع الإماراتي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية، النظام الأبوي، التفوق، النوع الاجتماعي، الذكورة، الخرافات، الجهل، مجتمع الإمارات العربية المتحدة، الحداثة، التراث.

Introduction

In one of her feminist studies, Adrienne Rich elaborates on "feminist criticism which implies continuous and conscious accountability to the lives of women" (Rich 1986: 88). Although operating within a different tradition, Rich's argument on feminist criticism is applicable to Al Mazrouei's Day of the Antelopes to great extent. Al Mazrouei's stories have attracted the attention of critics and scholars in the Arab world. Most of these critics deal with fictional dimensions in the stories, which reflect feminist aspects crucial to the community of women portrayed by Al Mazrouei. For instance, Saddik Gohar in his critical study of *Day of the Antelopes* emphasizes thematic motifs and character delineations integral to Al Mazrouei's feminist vision demonstrating that the story collection constitutes a new milestone in modernist storytelling. He illustrates how Day of the Antelopes is a breakthrough in Emirati literature in which the author navigates the cultural legacies and legends inherited throughout the ages utilizing modernist narrative patterns. According to Gohar, "the author incorporates literary dynamics and aesthetic techniques to monitor the narratives of the Emirati folklore deeply rooted in the heritage chronicles of the past. Furthermore, he points out that the stories of Day of the Antelopes negotiate urgent problems occupying the forefront of the Emirati societal landscape. The predominant motifs in the stories transcend local limitations and engage the UAE contemporary scene at a time when knowledge and culture are undergoing development tremendous and pivotal transformations" (Gohar 2017: 2)⁽¹⁾. In addition, Doris Hambuch offers a comparative analysis of Al Mazrouei's story "The

Couch" with "Barbie Q" by Sandra Cisneros. Focusing on the protagonists, she argues:

"The Couch", likewise, presents a female narrator who develops self-confidence, creative expression, and control over difficult decisions in the course of the plot. Once Al Mazrouei's narrator has selected a specific two-seater couch, she slowly begins to imagine this piece of furniture as a potential lover. This imaginary transformation is what drives her to defend her selection against a couple also interested in the same couch. The story ends with a very brief scene in which the woman enjoys the new purchase at her home. The fact that she refuses feelings of guilt caused by her desire affirms her individual agency as much as it encourages the power of her imagination" (Hambuch 2017: 3).

Besides "The Couch", Day of the Antelopes includes eight other stories exploring a multiplicity of socio-cultural motifs and reflecting several issues close to the hearts of female UAE citizens. Unlike the literary works of other local authors, all the protagonists in Al Mazrouei's fiction (except for one) represent female Emirati citizens, and the storylines all traverse themes integral to the Emirati society and its cultural history. Talking about contemporary cultural politics, Henry Giroux refers to "an age marked by a crisis of power, patriarchy, authority, identity, and ethics" (Giroux 1991: 2). Though writing in a different context and within the parameters of western traditions, Giroux's point partially echoes the socio-historical situation reflected in Al Mazrouei's fiction. Giroux's argument about the dilemma of "power, patriarchy, authority, identity and ethics" appears as a hidden agenda, an undercurrent infiltrating the narratives. In Day of the Antelopes, Al Mazrouei views a society in crisis, where women are victimized by a hegemonic patriarchy. It is a society in which the fate of the female population is determined by authoritarian power relations solely based on gender. The UAE society portrayed in Day of the Antelopes suffers from an identity crisis, which leaves its imprint on the psyche of women, who suffer from the shackles of entrenched traditions. It is a society torn between the primitive traditions of the past and the new values inherent in the globalized wave of modernization characterizing the UAE in the last decades.

As a whole, Al Mazrouei's stories reflect the transition of a nation from an archaic pre-oil society of the past to the modern scene, where the UAE occupies a prominent position on the world's stage. The stories attempt to capture the emergence of a nation from the status of a Bedouin community to a country embracing multicultural values, diversity, and tolerance in a globalized era. Al Mazrouei in her collection, *Day of the Antelopes*, places Arab feminism in the UAE squarely in line with canonized literary criticism. The author centralizes her fiction on the aspirations, dreams, and disappointments of female protagonists, who epitomize different categories of women from communities in the UAE.

Nancy Holmstrom defines socialist feminism as an attempt "to understand women's subordination in a coherent and systematic way that integrates class and sex, as well as other aspects of identity such as race/ethnicity or sexual orientation, with the aim of using this analysis to help liberate women" (Holmstrom 2003: 38). In a different context, Nawal ElSaadawi argues in "Women

and Islam", that "Arab women are still exposed to different forms of oppression (national, class, and sexual). The original cause of their triple oppression is the patriarchal class system which manifests itself internationally as world capitalism and imperialism and nationally as the feudal and capitalist classes of Third World countries" (ElSaadawi 1982:206). In Arab societies, women have been routinely subjected to outdated beliefs and superstitions, and the historical domination of patriarchal systems in the Arab world deprived women of their rights to an education and resulted in considerable numbers of women became illiterate, lapsing into a state of enforced ignorance. In her stories, Al Mazrouei explores the noxious motifs of domestic superstitions by blending them with folklore elements intrinsic to Emirati women's communities in the pre-oil era. In a story entitled "The Coarse Voice", a female narrator from a new generation is horror-stricken by the overwhelming atmosphere of fear engendered by her awe-inspiring grandmother, who practices a kind of local sorcery:

"My heart was beating in a barbaric way like African drums. When the voice of my grandmother grew coarse, the sound of their drums and songs reached a hysteric pitch. The voice of my grandmother was transformed into a male voice. Her voice was possessed by a rude man, who introduced himself to the female folks as he was shaking their hands. My stomach quivered as a result of this painful transformation, and I was on the verge of vomiting as I listened to the man's rough voice. My whole body felt like a giant drum from the beating of my heart as the human voices sounded like they were descending into the abyss of a secret sea. Nothing remained in the room except for the coarse male voice and the groans of the sick woman whose body appeared to be turned into palm leaves" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 30).

In the story, the author tells us that "My grandmother recited her magic spells and incantations over the woman in an attempt to exorcise the genie from her body. She pretended to give orders to the genie to depart and release the woman's body. I closed my eyes, and the world became black then red. The color changed repeatedly like the faces of the people of Thamud. Then the colors became black again, and I saw a road unfolding ahead of me. The road seemed to be long and desolate and human skeletons danced in front of my eyes. My feet were slipping as if I was walking on algae or rocks covered with seaweed. Just then, all the tall-necked bottles of magic were opened and the woman and I simultaneously screamed. When I opened my eyes, I saw nothing except black balls spinning in quarries, which turned in circles in the room and embraced by the spectacle of women murmuring the albasmala words: 'In the name of God the most merciful, the most beneficent'. After the departure of the women, my calmness returned in a few seconds. My grandmother was still there in the room, and I wondered whether the man with the vulgar voice had departed" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 30)⁽²⁾.

The female narrator in the story comments on the spread of superstitious beliefs in the past, especially in isolated UAE towns. The grandmother uses her alleged powers of exorcism to treat one of the sick ladies in the domestic community. In this environment, all diseases are attributed to supernatural sources and, therefore, magic is looked upon as the only way to heal a person. There was no understanding of or belief in conventional medicine or science. The atmosphere of fear leading to panic in

the presence of the genie reflects the impact of inherited traditions upon the collective consciousness of these illiterate women. In fact, the author aims, between the lines, to show that these practices are a direct result of depriving women of education in the UAE in the past prior to the foundation of the state.

In The Hidden Face of Eve, ElSaadawi talks about the victimization of women in the Arab world. She demonstrates how "a system has been built up which aims at destroying the ability of women to see the exploitation to which they are subjected" (ElSaadawi 1980: 5). In Arab communities "the male ego grows in proportion to the number of his female conquests, and his oppression in his relations are a source of pride and occasion for boasting" (ElSaadawi 1980: 6). For example, in a story titled "Um Sangour", the incidents of the plot surrounding the childless Mariam and her husband, Issa, focuses on Mariam's desperate desire to bear children. According to the medical tests, Mariam should have no problem in becoming pregnant, which means the fault lies with her husband. When Mariam tells Issa about the medical reports, he becomes angry and abuses her physically, grabbing her by the hair and threatening to kill her. The conflict between Mariam and Issa over the failure to produce a child assumes a broader sense as it intersects with questions of masculinity and sexual potency. According to Sandra Gilman, one of the problems of a man living in a patriarchal society "becomes his sexuality and its control and it is this which is transformed into the need to control the sexuality of the other, the other as sexualized female" (Gilman 1986: 256). In a different context, Evelyne Accad, in her discussion of issues of female sexuality demonstrates that in case "women do not begin to see the necessity of dealing with issues of sexuality, more women will feel isolated, rejected, and misunderstood, even within a group leading the same struggle. More will feel pushed to leave for other places, in the hope of finding better acceptance and tolerance" (Accad 2005: 9).

After the violent attack by Issa, in desperation Mariam seeks help from a local female magician, Um Sanqour, in the hope of Mariam is forced to comply with the conceiving a son. commands of, the evil sorceress, who tells her that she is haunted by an evil genie who prevents her from becoming pregnant. Thus, she has to fulfill the desires of the genie in order for him to let her become pregnant. Within the same context, ElSaadawi in The Hidden Face of Eve shows that both tradition and religion are used against women as "instruments of fear, oppression and exploitation". According to ElSaadawi, tradition and religion are "the reasons for the low status of women" in the Arab world (ElSaadawi 1980: 41). The narrative of "Um Sangour" graphically captures the turmoil and agony of the protagonist, victimized by her husband, a product of the local patriarchal society, and again by the magician, Um Sanqour, the personification of the dark world of superstitions, who dominates the narrative:

"Um Sanqour sat on a large cushion decorated with many colors. She had hung the horns of various animals around the room along with a mummified ox and male goats. The consultation room (*majlis*) was heavy with the odors of incense and perfumes. Um Sanqour put on glasses although she was wearing the *alburqa*. The huge glasses and the veil made Um Sanqour's appearance very disturbing. Her eyes seemed to grow larger as

she advised Mariam: "Oh Mariam ...we will not be able to know what the genie wants unless we perform the Zar ritual. Afterwards, the genie will tell me what you must do, and upon satisfying his desire, you will be released from his spell and you will become pregnant. You will give birth to twelve male children⁽³⁾" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 60). "Later, Um Sanqour brought a piece of oud and threw it in the censer as she said: Darling, you are requested to bring to me a one-eyed red male goat that is an orphan. You must also bring trays of censers containing oud and frankincense. You must also provide rose water and nuts. On the way home, Mariam laughed hysterically saying: how can I find a male goat which is one-eyed, red, and orphan? Halima angrily responded by saying: Come on Mariam ...what are you saying? Do you want the genie to make your life more miserable? Please forgive us our words." (Al Mazrouei 2010: 60).

In the same vein, the story called "The Abducted Moon" bears some resemblance to the tale of "Um Sanqour" as it touches upon the supremacy of folklore and mythology over science among illiterate women prevented from gaining an education in premodern Emirati society. The focus is on a young girl, Mira, who has just been initiated into the adult world. An eclipse of the moon is happening and Mira is torn between the folklore explanation of the eclipse given by the local women of her community and the scientific reasons for the phenomenon as explained by her schoolteacher: "Mira came close to her mother and pulled at her dress to get her attention. The child repeated her question several times as if she were chewing on something that did not taste good. Her mother scolded her in a rough way and pulled her dress away from the child's hand. 'Shut up, Mira!',

she told her daughter. 'The moon was kidnapped by a cloud because it failed to pay its debts.' But Mira then asked, 'Why didn't the moon pay his debts so that he would not be kidnapped?' In anger, the mother rushed outside among the other women and handed her mortar to an old woman" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 34).

The narrator proceeds: "Mira also went outside and looked around. Then she sat down at the edge of the square. She was trembling in fear of the women's actions, and the child looked like a discarded palm frond left alone to die. The warm breeze caressed her in silence as she sat clutching the edges of her dress. Frightened and abandoned, Mira watched the assembled women whose eyes saw nothing except the moon. The noise of the beating mortars mounted louder and louder appearing as a tornado of sound gradually reaching up into the sky as the voices of the women pleaded with the cloud to set the moon free. In a strange contrast, the sky of Abu Dhabi was clear and cloudless, while behind the houses, one could hear the sound of the *Mu'addin* calling for prayers to end the moon's eclipse" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 35).

This story is a perfect example of the impact of irrational inherited traditions upon the uneducated women of the UAE in the pre-oil era. During the lunar eclipse, all the women gathered in a crowd carrying the mortars brought from their kitchens and began beating them on pans to make a deafening noise, while appealing to the cloud to release the moon from its bondage. The folk traditions were mingled with religious misinterpretation and together they shaped the people's understanding of the eclipse. While the women were pounding their mortars calling for the

release of the moon from captivity, the Mu'addin of the mosque was calling for moon eclipse prayers. The paradox between the attitudes of Mira and her mother toward the lunar eclipse illustrates the generational gap between the two ways of thinking, one endorsing superstition and the other believing in science.

The author's blending of folklore elements with themes from modern Emirati fiction and the graphic depiction of the cultural differences and generational gaps between the pre-and post-oil societies frames the stories within a socio-historic context of a male-dominated Emirati society and exposes the harm from the perpetuation of inherited superstitions and obsolete values. The thematic motifs, symbolism, and narrative mechanisms utilized in the stories shed light on the denigration of women in a patriarchal society. One hopes for more enlightened attitudes in the gradual shift toward modernization in the post-oil era.

The stories of Al Mazrouei not only reflect the impact of superstitious traditions on illiterate women in traditional Emirati society, but also present the challenge of dealing with controversial feminist and gender issues. In this connection, Sherifa Zuhur pointed out that "women's transition (in the Arab world) from the harem to corporate and governmental offices" led to "serious literature dealing with gender issues" (Zuhur 2010: 68). Moreover, the feminist critic, Toril Moi, categorized feminist literature as a construct, which "takes a discernible antipatriarchal and anti-sexist position" in defense of "marginalized" women "by the ruling social/linguistic order" (Moi 1986: 220). In the stories of Al Mazrouei, women are viewed as what Antonio Gramsci calls "the community's non-elite or subordinate social group" (cited in Landry and Mclean 1996: 203). For example, the events of the story entitled "M...Mariam" take place in a traditional UAE society in Al Ain city. The story explores the daily suffering and pains of an Emirati widow who struggles to earn a living and feed her young children. She does not tell her elder daughter about the nature of her job as a street vendor who sells vegetables in the Al Ain city souq. Instead, she tells her that she is a businesswoman who shares with other women a small shop near the Mazyad Souq. Through a third-person narrator, the author introduces her female protagonist to readers.

"Mariam is a widow struggling to raise her children alone. She is gripped by the idea of starting a small business and wants to open a shop because the limited assistance she receives from the Ministry of Social Affairs no longer satisfies the needs of her family. The scanty monthly salary hardly covers her living costs for a few days. Hours of sitting on the hard pavement of the souq has hurt her back, and the mocking of the village women oppresses her soul though she tries to ignore them. She is desperate to escape from this quagmire, this trap of working as a peddler" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 79). The narrator then tells us: "In the past, this job was her utmost ambition, but now she can no longer stand to be imprisoned in a tiny spot on the pavement of the souq. Haunted by the image of her children who are growing up poor, Mariam gives all her attention to hammering out a way to open a small shop in the market. Her son, Hamoud, who is running from store to store selling green lemons, will return to his second-grade class in elementary school at the end of the holiday, leaving her alone in the soug. Her daughter Reem who got a job in the municipality was not aware of Mariam's work as a peddler in the city's souq" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 79). Through

this third-person narration, the author reveals the unendingly painful experiences of the widow.

Some years back, Mariam had lied to her daughter claiming that she worked with a rich woman in a small shop near the Mazyad souq. She justified this little lie as a way to avoid embarrassment when her daughter asked her for the name of her mother's job because her employer required it. 'Businesswoman' was the title Mariam told her daughter to give as her job because she did not want her daughter to be ashamed of her working as a peddler. Hamoud is the only person who is in on the secret. When he becomes angry, he confronts his mother with threats to reveal the truth. To contain his anger and lessen his fury, she sometimes buys him a toy on condition that he remains silent about her work as a peddler.

Discussing the status of women in contemporary societies, Rosemary Hennessy refers to "two interlocking and mutually dependent systems of oppression -patriarchy and capitalism" (Hennessy 2008: 57). In the stories of Al Mazrouei, the female protagonists suffer from "the pressures of patriarchy, marriage and social customs that assail them" (Fonchingong 2006: 136); but, the themes of female oppression and patriarchal hegemony may also be emphasized for aesthetic purposes. For example, in her story "The Scene", the narrator relates the secrets of a relationship between a man and his wife. The narrator is portrayed as the bed in their master bedroom and this non-human object is humanized in order to acquaint the reader with the truth about the relations between husband and wife in a closed society. In fact, "The Scene" focuses on the selfishness of the husband who wants to satisfy his sexual desire careless of the psychological mood of his wife who has just been informed of the death of an intimate friend. Gayatri Spivak obviously illustrates that "the man retains legal property rights over the product of a woman's body" (Spivak 1988: 80).

In a related context, Virginia Woolf stated that while a women writer could monopolize a literary work "from cover to cover" in society, she could also be "the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger". In reality, a woman "could hardly read" (Woolf 1957: 33). In the same line of thinking, the feminist critic, Hélène Cixous states that "the repression of women has been perpetuated over and over, more or less unconsciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction" (Cixous 2001:2043). In "The Scene", the male character ignored the pain and the tearful pleas of the female protagonist and almost raped her in an animalistic manner lacking emotions and human compassion. The bed which is personified as witness and narrator introduces the details of the story:

"I am an original wooden bed. My wood was cut off from a genuine tree. I am not a hollow bed, made of cheap sawdust. I am located in the middle of the wall in front of the room's door. Upon me the husband falls asleep in a calm manner. His chest goes up and down with the regular sounds of his snoring. Next to the husband, his wife is lying on her right side with her back turned toward him. How shall I start the story? I will start from the moment they entered their bedroom. Tonight, they went to their bed a little bit late. As usual, she sleeps on her right side. She prefers not to sleep on her back to avoid putting pressure on the memory center at the back of her head, and also does not

sleep on her left side in order not to harm her heart. I may be a little too much interested in such details. I heard her whispering to her husband who smiled without making any comment. For a long time, her body tossed and turned from side to side like a fish caught in a net. Though her weight was not a heavy burden upon me, she drove me crazy tonight. At this point, I asked myself: Did she fight with her husband before they went to bed or was it just a little dispute that he resolved in his usual callous manner? If there was a real battle between them, he would not fall asleep, leaving her lying awake. Her feelings of helplessness and the sound of her muffled sobs gave an indication of something serious. I do not know what" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 65).

Along the same lines of torment and oppression, in "The Laughter of the Rooster", the Emirati author criticizes the domineering policies advocated by a patriarchal society that seeks to marginalize women at home and in the workplace. The character of the oppressive manager who attempts to impose his power upon his female employees is a personification of the inherited traditions that drew society backward to the pre-oil era. The author elaborates on several feminist motifs particularly the encounter between a new generation of educated female employees and a dictatorial male who still lives in the past. The story is narrated from the perspective of the protagonist, a female office worker: "Whenever I heard his laughter, I struggled to get bizarre ideas out of my mind, but the sound of his giggle penetrated my head. I stopped reading the paper in my hand and raised my eyes trying to look at him while concealing my astonishment under the veneer of a suppressed smile. I contemplated the brown face of my boss, which looked like a pear fruit. His small eyes were embedded in the folds of his large face while his long nose comfortably extended until it reached his thick upper lip, which rested quietly upon the lower lip" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 39).

In discussing this issue of long-standing patriarchy, Nabila Jaber maintains that "there are two modes of patriarchy: private patriarchy that is enacted in the authority of men over women in family and public patriarchy as manifested through the state and increasingly the religious establishment, particularly Islam" (Jaber 2001:101). Undeniably, patriarchy, in the Emirati local society, is affiliated with what Jacques Derrida named "violence of the letter, a violence of difference, of classification, and of the system of appellations" (Derrida 1976:110). This is shown clearly in the following passage from "The Laughter of the Rooster": "The uqqal was set tightly upon a head with a clear face. When the boss found something inexpressibly funny, the force of his echoing laughter caused his head to shake violently and even his chair to rock to and fro. The boss was unconcerned with the consequences of his gigantic laughter and his entire body would shake until his uggal fell off. To me, his amazing laughter reminded me of the crowing of a rooster. Yes, that was it, I am sure. I could not stop myself from thinking of the boss as a crowing rooster, and I sometimes had to hide my smile behind my papers. But, I did not dare to tell anyone about my feelings. I was afraid of what they might do if I said that our boss was a laughing rooster" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 39).

Continuing with these animal motifs as representative of Arab male attitudes towards women employees, in her story "The Gazelle and the Crocodile", the author confronts the issue of corruption in public sector companies and other institutions in the

UAE. The corrupt manager who wastes the resources of the company is embodied as a crocodile devouring a young female employee who offers to reduce the waste by streamlining the financial accounts of the company. The story ends on a very pessimistic note with the failure of the young woman to overcome the powerful forces of evil and corruption in the company. The third-person narrator speaks of the most crucial moments in the story: "After examining the documents, she became sure of the proliferation of local administrative corruption and financial violations in the company, and summoned the accounting manager to her office. He unabashedly revealed to her all the shady dealings and bribery that she had suspected. As he was collecting the documents, he tried to scare her in a disguised way. He made a whistling sound as he waved his hand in the air warning her: 'the ex-manager flew away because of this issue'. She swallowed hard and never talked with him again" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 74). Later, the female narrator depicts her feelings by analogy: "Wading a few inches into the water, the gazelle was horrified by the appearance of the menacing head of a crocodile approaching her. The attack of the crocodile caused a huge splash as waves of spray and mud were flung into the air. The crocodile's deadly assault destroyed the peacefulness of the lake. In her fright at the unexpected shock and the disturbing sight, the gazelle was paralyzed and unable to escape" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 74).

The prominent critic, Harold Bloom in *Anxiety of Influence* refers to women writers as "Milton's daughters" relating "the story that all literary women would tell if they could speak their speechless woe" (cited in Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 89). In "The Gazelle and the Crocodile", the author uncovers the evil and corruption of some of the leading figures at the top of public and private companies and institutions who misuse their authority. In this context, the author says the unsaid about a world of bribery and financial corruption. In the previous story, the accounting manager clearly tells the protagonist, who wanted to reveal the scandals of the senior management, that she has three options: remain silent and keep things going as usual, submit her resignation, or expose the corruption and suffer consequences--she will 'fly away' like the ex-manager. Before leaving her office, he repeated to her: These are your only options unless your feminine intelligence can invent a different solution. She did not give a damn for his sarcastic comments and quietly continued studying a fine art portrait hanging on the wall as he left" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 74).

Al Mazrouei delves more deeply into the psychological effects of women's treatment in a story entitled "The Couch", where she again uses an everyday object to dramatize the conflict between two women over the possession of a man. The central symbol is a couch, which both women desire to possess: "The other woman stepped forward toward them, while the wife was standing next to her husband, who was still sitting on the couch. He was inquiring about the possibility of adding the couch to the list of the other furniture items he had already purchased. All the furniture including the couch were to be shipped to his house. The woman approached them burning with feelings of rage. Her hatred for the wife was manifest as she stood between her and the salesman like a lioness defending her den. In a smothered voice, she said: 'Excuse me. I selected this piece before you, and I am in the process of purchasing it. I want to know more details about the couch'. With her stern voice and harsh looks, she seemed like

the trunk of a tree hardened under the scorching sun of the desert. The man turned his eyes towards his wife and apologized to the other woman. He was murmuring unintelligible words as if he were chewing a piece of nut. He took hold of his wife's hand and pulled her away from the angry woman, who handed the receipt to the seller as evidence of purchasing the couch. She sat down upon the couch where the man had been and imagined herself at home lying on the couch, but the smell of the man's cologne had captivated her senses. Her feelings were overwhelmed by the odor replete with vigor and manhood, and the aura of the scent transported her to a remote destination as she closed her eyes. In her ecstatic vision, she explored the space around her. As she dwelt deeply in meditation and fantasy, she envisioned the eyes of the angry wife. She pushed her away sharply, dismissing her from the imagined room" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 56).

In The Hidden Face of Eve, ElSaadawi openly refers to the sexual harassment of female children in the Arab world. According to her, the psychological consequences of these painful experiences "remain hidden, stored up in the secret recesses of the female child's self since she dares not tell anyone of what has happened to her" (ElSaadawi 1980: 14). In a story called "The Rift", Al Mazrouei discusses the theme of child abuse and its consequent trauma. The events reflect the major psychological structure of the female child protagonist in the story. Ostensibly, the incidents of the story are narrated by a child who was raped by her grandfather when she was younger. The incident had a devastating impact on her psyche. Al Mazrouei employs symbols and narrative devices to provide a vision of the distorted morality of this masculine society. The connection between the child victim and the victimizer, her grandfather, is dramatized through animal imagery with the man symbolized as a wolf and the child as a lamb. The author also uses the Freudian concept of dreams which is aesthetically articulated in the text in an elaborate manner: "When the child looked in the mirror, she caught sight of another child who was a little older than her. She felt sad. For several nights she envisioned the wolf stalking the lambs, hunting and killing them. Is that another lamb devoured by the wolf, she wondered? In other dreams, she watched the wolf tracking her across the entire district. She clearly saw her grandfather in the image of the wolf, but when she told others what was happening, nobody would believe her. Even her voice was smothered inside her and she was unable to scream" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 25).

The narrator proceeds: "Wherever she turned to escape from the wolf, she would find him waiting in another corner in an attempt to ambush her. When she tried to flee far away from the wolf, he intercepted her, blocking all access of escape. Failing to find a hiding place, she fell prey to dizziness and felt certain that her death was quickly approaching. At this crucial moment, she caught a glimpse of a pool. She plunged herself into the water regardless of not knowing how to swim. She was about to be drowned but she woke up from the dream bathed in sweat" (Al Mazrouei 2010: 25). Symbolically, the child was reliving the cruel memory of being raped by her grandfather. The water imagery at the end of the story suggests the possibility of catharsis for the child, but her dreams are still haunted by the awful event.

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to investigate unexplored areas of academic research in the area of Emirati feminist literature by unearthing relevant motifs in the short fiction of Al Mazrouei. The paper primarily investigates Day of the Antelopes as a representation of modern UAE literature, which addresses gender issues and provides a panoramic image of the struggle of the local women's community to obtain equal rights in a maledominated culture. Within this critical parameter, the paper considers issues of male dominance, patriarchal politics, and male-female relationships in light of contemporary feminist theories to centralize the author's vision of a society in crisis. The hidden agenda of Day of the Antelopes is an unspoken narrative about an emerging nation, which achieved miracles of progress at various levels. However, this society still has a long way to go to ensure gender equality and equal rights to women. The paper aims to open new horizons in the area of feminist studies of Emirati literature since the emergence of a substantial number of creative works by local UAE writers has prompted the establishment of a parallel critical project to highlight distinguished publications, particularly in fiction and short stories.

References:

- (1) The citations from *Nahar Aldhebba bayn el Turath wa el Mythologia* in this paper are my translation.
- (2) All citations from the short stories are extracted from Al Mazrouei, Fatima. *Nahar Aldhebba*, 2010.
- (3) There is no English-authorized published translation of *Day of the Antelopes*. For more details about the translation of the collection, see the appendix at the end of the paper. The citations from *Day of the Antelopes* in this paper are my translations.

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