Representations of Parents-Children Relations in Arabic Fiction in Diaspora

Nosaibah Waleed Awajan[*]

Mahmoud Flaieh Al-Shraa

Yousef Mohammed Awad

Abstract

Diasporic Arab writers substantially differ in how they represent sociopolitical issues of contemporary Arab cultures in their literary works. Because the family is the core unit of Arab societies and cultures, this study explores fictional representations of one of the main relations within the Arab family. Specifically, this study examines how Arab women writers in diaspora depict parents-children relations in their novels. The study is based on thematic and analytic readings of six novels and two collections of short stories written by diasporic Arab women writers who live in the West and who write in English. Despite the common features that diasporic Arab novels share, the study aims at identifying the differences in representing parents-children relations in the selected novels. Particularly, the study shows that Naomi Shihab Nye, Diana Abu-Jaber, Leila Aboulela and Mohja Kahf represent parents-children relations within the Arab family favorably, while Ahdaf Soueif and Fadia Faqir represent parents-children relations within the Arab family unfavorably.

● قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، الجامعة الأردنية.

Representations of Parents-Children Relations in Arabic Fiction in Diaspora
Nosaibah W. A, Mahmoud F. Al-Shraa,Yousef M. A.

تصوير العلاقات الأسرية عند كتاب المهجر

نسيبة وليد عوجان

محمود فليح الشرعة

يوسف محمد عوض

ملخص

اختلف كتاب المهجر العرب من خلال أعمالهم الأدبية في تصوير الأسرة العربية التي تعتبر من أهم مقومات المجتمعات العربية والثقافة العربية بشكل عام. من هنا تبرز أهمية هذه الدراسة في عرض طريقة تقديم أحد أهم العلاقات الأسرية وهي علاقة الأهل بأبنائهم في أعمال ست نساء من كتاب المهجر والمقيمات في الغرب، وتعتمد الدراسة على تحليل تسع روايات ومجموعتين قصصيتين من أعمال الروائيات العربيات المقيمات في المهجر واللواتي يكتبن باللغة الإنجليزية. وبينت الدراسة أن الكاتبات نعومي شهاب ناي وديانا أبو جابر وليلى أبو العلى ومهجة كهف صورن علاقة الأهل بأبنائهم في الأسرة العربية بصورة إيجابية. وأما الكاتبين أهداف سويف وفاديا الفقير فقد قدمتا صورة غير واقعية لعلاقة الأهل بأبنائهم في الأسرة العربية.

Introduction:

A number of comprehensive and lengthy critical studies on the works of Arab writers in diaspora have been published over the past ten years which have covered a wide array of themes, issues and questions that mainly revolve around Arab diasporic experiences. Overall, some studies like these of Al-Maleh (2009) and Salhi & Netton (2006) investigate Arabic literature in diaspora within a general framework of diasporic studies. Other studies like that of Abdelrazek (2007) focus only on the works of Arab American women writers. On the other hand, Nash (2007) explores the works of Arab writers in Britain only. Awad (2012) examines how the geopolitical differences between Arab American and Arab British women writers have influenced the themes explored by each set of writers. In addition, Hassan (2011) analyses the works of Arab writers in diaspora within the context of immigration and cross-cultural mobility. Fadda-Conrey (2014) looks at the transnational links that underlie Arab American literature and Salaita (2011) critically scrutinizes and analyses modern Arab American fiction. Most recently, Bosch-Vilarrubias (2016) has examined how Arab American women writers represent Arab masculinities after 9/11.

As the above survey shows, critics have not explored nor delineated representational patterns of specific aspects of Arab cultures across the works of Arab writers in diaspora, whether in the US or in Britain, and have focused instead on investigating several geopolitical markers in these literary texts. This tendency has resulted in overlooking some themes, social issues and relevant representational questions that may be investigated to understand the sociopolitical undertones of these texts and how they intertwine with forces of globalization and diasporic experiences.

Hence, this study will delineate representational patterns and trends that can be detected in the works of a number of Arab women writers in diaspora. Specifically, the study highlights favorable and unfavorable representations of parents-children relations within the Arab family as emblematic and indicative of a broader trend by Arab writers in diaspora to represent Arab societies and cultures. For this purpose, the study is based on thematic and analytic readings of six novels and two collections of short stories written by diasporic Arab women writers who live in Britain and in the USA and who write in English. It contends that diasporic Arab women writers have represented ties within the Arab family, such as husband-wife, brother-sister and parents-children relations, differently. This study explores

the ways in which Nye (b. 1952-), Abu-Jaber (b. 1960-), Soueif (b. 1950-), Faqir (b. 1956-), Kahf (1967-) and Aboulela (b. 1964-) have represented parents-children relations within the Arab family in Habibi (1997), Crescent (2003), Aisha (1983), Sandpiper (1996), My Name is Salma (2007), Willow Trees Don't Weep (2014), The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf (2006) and Minaret (2004), respectively.

But that is not to say that the representations that will be discussed and scrutinized here are impervious: there is always a possibility for overlap, indeterminacy and precariousness in representing these familial relations in the writings of the mentioned diasporic Arab women writers. At the same time, while the study acknowledges the fact that an author's attitudes, thoughts and beliefs change over the course of his/her professional career, one may still identify a general cultural representational trend that also recurs in the oeuvre of a specific writer or even in the works of a group of writers. The study argues that Nye and Aboulela, Kahf, Abu-Jaber (1997) have represented the parents-children relations within the Arab family favorably, while Soueif and Faqir (2002), as the analysis will show, have portrayed parents-children relations within the Arab family unfavorably.

Themes, challenges and cultural representations in Arabic literature in diaspora.

There is a large corpus of literary works produced by Arab British and Arab American writers who write in English. Gana (2008) states that the rise of Arabic fiction produced in English could be located and relocated between the heritage of British colonialism and the dominance of American imperialism. The main locations of Arab authors who use English as a tool for writing are naturally the USA, Canada, Australia, and Britain. The concepts of "migration, indigeneity, and belonging" are questioned among Arab immigrants in these host countries as "a source of national anguish, dilemmas, disenchantments and one of the main engines of coercive and discriminatory policies" (p.13). Most critics agree that the first diasporic Arab novel is an Arab American novel written by Rihani (1876-1940) in 1911 and entitled The Book of Khalid (Gana, 2008). Hassan (2011) states that Rihani's novel "lays the crossroads of cultural translation and Orientalism" (p. 29), while Al-Maleh (2009) insists that Rihani and other

writers such as Gibran (1883-1931) were the first diasporic Arab writers to mediate between the East and the West (Al-Maleh, 2009).

The novel, in fact, "provides[s] ample inspiration for the post-modern Arab novel in English" and has set the stage for the diasporic Arab novels that followed it (Al-Maleh, 2009, p. 14). Although the first Arabs who migrated to the USA in the last century have introduced their culture and history to the host country in English, diasporic Arabic literature had only gained importance after the events of 9/11 (Al-Maleh, 2009). To borrow Salaita's words (2005), after 9/11 "Arab Americans evolved from invisible to glaringly conspicuous" (p. 149). People in the West began to ask who the Arabs and Muslims are. The prejudice against Muslims and Arabs was amplified in the aftermath of 9/11 (Gana, 2008). This has motivated Arab and Muslim authors to write back and defy stereotypical images that have been intensively disseminated and circulated in popular cultural productions. Fiction produced in English before and after 9/11 contributed to educating Euro-Americans about Arabs and Muslims (Gana, 2008). This brought recognition to such literature because people needed to know about Arab-Islamic cultures. Books have also become available for readers in bookshops in the West as publishers were buoyed by growing market demands. Simultaneously, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of Western universities which started to offer more courses on Arab and Muslim cultures (Al-Maleh, 2009; Gana, 2008).

Although 9/11 is a watershed in contemporary world history as it has subsequently influenced East-West political and cultural relations, it is naïve to ignore the long history of Western misrepresentation of Arab-Islamic cultures and communities. In his seminal book, Orientalism, Said (1978) studies the cultural representations which he considers the basis of Orientalism - how Westerners see the Orient. According to Said (1978), Orientalism is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1978, p. 13). Said's argument has generated a huge amount of critiques by various academics and thinkers. For instance, Hassan (2011) argues that Orientalism has a big influence on immigrant Arab writers and on the discourse, they employ as translators of culture. Hassan (2011) maintains that diasporic Arab writers who write in English and who "live in a country with a powerful tradition of Orientalist scholarship that serves imperial interests in the Arab world, could not ignore orientalism in their writing" (Said, 1978, p. 4).

According to Al-Maleh (2009), the themes which diasporic Arab writers follow are related to "psychological and social alienation, home, abroad", exile and return, hybridity, identity, double consciousness and the quest for authentic self-representation in relation to their own experiences (Al-Maleh, 2009). They also tackle political issues concerning their home countries (Al-Maleh, 2009). Arabic literature in diaspora, according to Al-Maleh, could be characterized as "mostly female, feminist, diasporic in awareness, and political in character" (Al-Maleh, 2009, p.16). In their writings, these authors, to use the words of Bhabha (1994), concurrently blend "a sense of home" with "a space to which they belong" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 23). They are challenging their new culture and their new language to balance their lives in a point where "disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other" (Pratt, 1992, p. 6). These writers reach a point where a clash of cultures occurs. They try to handle both cultures in order to maintain a kind of equilibrium in both cultures, trying to cope with their new Western cultures and at the same time appreciate their own Arabic culture (Al Maleh, 2009). Awad (2012) states that Arab writers in diaspora "straddle two cultures" and "[t]hey skillfully blend their Arab cultural heritage in their writings" (p. 12). In this way, these authors adopt a position that promotes a common ground that bridges the gaps between cultures (Awad, 2012).

Diasporic Arab authors write, inter alia, about the Arab-Western encounter. They highlight the intersectionality of religion, identities, social classes, and ideologies in their works. They also challenge the images in which women are consistently and stereotypically depicted as weak and submissive creatures who are entirely controlled male-oriented Arab and Muslim societies. At the same time, Salhi (2006) states that Arab women's writings are of paramount interest to Western readers due to the long history of "the Arab woman" and how she is portrayed in Western discourse (p. 4). Overall, they form a bridge between two cultures (Salhi, 2006). They are in a position which Soueif names the "Mezzaterra" and describes as "a ground valued precisely for being a meeting – point for many cultures and traditions" (Soueif, 2004, p. 8). In short, it is a place where cultures meet and affect each other. Seen from this perspective, diasporic Arab women writers try to create a bridge between cultures and to leave the door open between them for constructive dialogues (Soueif, 2004).

Taking into consideration the sociopolitical, historical and cultural conditions and circumstances that frame the works of Arab women writers in diaspora, this study focuses on how these authors represent the Arab family, which is the nucleus of Arab societies and cultures, in their works. To use the words of Joseph (1994), the Arab family is the center of culture in the Middle East. Here, one may highlight three kinds of relations that exist within the Arab family. These relations are the husband-wife, brother-sister, and parents-children relations. According to Joseph (1994), little attention is paid to the male-female relationships within the Arab family. Most studies which were conducted on the Arab family, Joseph maintains, are about "cultural ideals of patriarchy, patrilineality, patrilocality, and patrilineal endogamy and also on the Arab family life (p. 230). This study investigates parents-children relations within the Arab family in the works of six diasporic Arab women writers. The study is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the representation of parents-children relations within the Arab family in a generally unfavorable way and the second section examines the representation of parents-children relations within the Arab family in a generally favorable way. The study shows how Soueif's Aisha and Sandpiper and Faqir's My Name is Salma and Willow Trees Don't Weep represent parents-children relations within the Arab family unfavorably. On the other hand, the study also shows how Abu-Jaber's Crescent, Nye's Habibi, Aboulela's Minaret, and Kahf's The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf represent parents-children relations within the Arab family favorably. It goes without saying that this dichotomous division of favorable and unfavorable is neither waterproof nor clear-cut, but it reflects a trend by these authors to represent the mentioned relations within the Arab family in the ways outlined above.

To objectively and accurately delineate these relationships, this study will draw on the works of a number of sociologists and anthropologists to evaluate Arab women writers' literary representations of parents-children relations within the Arab family. In this context, a number of sociologists have examined the dynamics of the Arab family in general over the past decades. For example, Moghissi (2005) highlights the importance of the family as being the "basic socioeconomic unit" in the Arab society (p. 148). Like Moghissi (2005), Barakat (1993) states that the family is the creator and the basic unit in the traditional as well as the contemporary Arab society in the three patterns of living: bedouin, rural, and urban. Barakat insists that the Arab family has recently faced many changes in its structure (Barakat,

1993). In addition, Faour (1989) declares that the life of an individual is influenced mostly by his/her own family. The influence of the family is greater than any other institution on its individuals (Faour, 1989). While this study upholds these novelists' aesthetic attempts, it also investigates and analyses the thematic representations in an attempt to explain the different ways Arab women writers follow vis-à-vis the representation of the parents-children relations. In other words, although this study demonstrates how some Arab women writers in diaspora diffract and detract Arab cultures, one should bear in mind that this paper investigates fictional representations that do not necessarily reflect reality.

Unfavorable representations of parents-children relations

This section shows how Soueif and Faqir represent parents-children relations within the Arab family in an unfavorable way. The fictional works which are going to be analyzed and discussed in the current section are Soueif's Aisha and Sandpiper and Faqir's My Name is Salma and Willow Trees Don't Weep. Overall, Soueif and Faqir depict parents-children relations within Arab families as static and unaffected by historical changes. Both authors represent parents-children relations within the Arab family as being based on male dominance, oppression and manipulation. In the fictional worlds that Soueif and Faqir create, the Arab daughter is represented as a toy, which is prevented from her basic rights. She is a creature which only performs what she is asked to do.

Soueif and Faqir represent disparagingly parents-children relations. The relation of parents and children is supposed to be based on love, respect and kindness because this is the nature of fatherhood and motherhood. In this context, Abudi (2011) states that the mother-daughter relationship is the strongest relationship within a family and it is the "cornerstone" of the Arab family (Abudi, 2011, p. 83). She adds that the daughter is an extension of her mother. Her self-esteem is developed through her mother's and they have so many things in common. They have the same "interests, concerns, hopes, fears, joys and sorrow" (Abudi, 2011, p. 83). According to Abudi, a daughter's only source of love is her mother. Mothers love and support their children. Mothers are supposed to be the source of love and support to their children.

Parents-children relations in the Arab family are represented in a different way by Soueif and Faqir. Specifically, sons and daughters within an Arab family, as presented by Soueif and Faqir, are dominated and manipulated by their parents. Children are passive and have no voice and sometimes they are abandoned by their parents for no convincing reasons. Arab fathers are presented as if they have no responsibility towards their children and wives. Both writers, Soueif and Faqir, represent the Arab father as the traditional father figure who only existed in the past in the Arab family. The traditional father is described by many sociologists, to start with, Barakat (1993) states that the father in the traditional Arab family is the one who was responsible and who had authority on the members of the family and manipulates them, expecting only obedience without questioning (Barakat, 1993). Moghissi (2005) also comments on the same point; she states that the father in the traditional Arab family is the one who is responsible and holds authority. The father is the one who gives instructions and expects obedience without questioning (Moghissi, 2005). Moghissi declares that as patriarchal traditional period is going into a changing process, fathers are loosening their hands from the family and its life by sharing their authority and responsibility with other members of the family and still maintaining its structure (Moghissi, 2005).

Yet, it is this traditional father figure that attracts the attention of Soueif and Faqir and fires up their imaginations. Both novelists present this traditional father as a fully-fledged figure in their works despite the fact that this figure is ebbing and even vanishing in contemporary Arab societies as Barakat (1993) and Moghissi (2005) show. From the description of the traditional Arab father by Barakat (1993) and Moghissi (2005), it could be noticed that Soueif and Faqir represent the Arab father in an unrealistic way. They do not give the real image of Arab fatherhood. Both present an archaic and extinct image of a father figure who no longer exists in contemporary Arab societies.

The first unfavorable parents-children relation represented by Soueif is that of Aisha and her parents in Aisha. Soueif presents Aisha as a neglected girl by her parents because they prioritize their careers over their only child. Aisha does not tell her parents that she is miserable at school so that they will not consider her a failure and she is afraid to upset them. She says, "I could not admit failure or disappoint them by telling them I was miserable at school" (Soueif, 1983, p. 34). When her parents know about her, her father

becomes displeased and her mother tells Aisha that her father will not talk to her or give her any money. They do not try to know what bothers her nor find out the problems she faces in school. Aisha's mother, according to D'Alessandro (2007), does not talk to her daughter as a mother should do. On the contrary, Aisha's mother just conveys her husband's orders to her daughter. She only blames her and tells her what her father will do (D'Alessandro, 2007). Aisha's parents are presented by Soueif as irresponsible parents who only care about their careers. They neglect the fact that they are in a foreign country which would be new to their daughter with its new environment, people and language. Instead of knowing what troubles and disturbs Aisha, her parents start to blame her for not putting more effort into her studies.

To complicate things further, Aisha's parents are both highly-educated, but still do not respect their daughter's privacy. They open a letter sent to her by Christopher whom she meets on the plane. Soueif (1983) shows how Aisha's mother and father are both highly-educated, but they still behave with their child in a strictly traditional and reactionary way. They blame her for giving Christopher her address. Then they force her to go out with the Vicar's children and after that with David (Soueif, 1983). They try to stand against her instead of listening to what she has to say about the problems facing her in a new country. D'Alessandro (2007) also adds that Aisha's parents give themselves the right to manipulate their daughter's life and control it (D'Alessandro, 2007). In a study on how Arab parents in diaspora rear their children, Majeed and El-Baqiry (2016) argue that when Arab families leave their homeland to the West for any reason, their children would start to face certain troubles. Parents in such cases should start to develop their children's social skills and language. These skills will improve the child's character and his/her self-esteem which would help them interact with the new society (Majeed & El-Baqiry, p. 20). They also state that Arab parents in diaspora should understand the needs of their children at each stage of their development. Their needs could be psychological, emotional and social. In Soueif's fictional world, Aisha's parents are not supportive as parents should be especially when the family relocates to a new country. Soueif represents Arab parents as unsupportive and selfish, and hence, the parents-children relationship she portrays is tense and uneasy. Shihada (2010) states that only traditional parents were the ones who decide for their

sons and daughters in traditional Egyptian societies and in Arab societies in general (Shihada, 2010). The image which Shihada gives about traditional Arab parents is the same unfavorable image which Soueif represents.

Another example of an unfavorable representation of parents-children relations that Soueif depicts in her fiction is the relation between Zeina and her family. On her wedding day, Zeina forgets that she is a bride and starts playing with her girlfriends. She is getting married without being aware of what she is doing or what is happening to her. She is forced to marry her cousin at a young age. Soueif represents a negative relation between a child and her parents within an Egyptian family. She is forced to wed and is violently manipulated as a toy by her family. Instead of having parents to support and protect her, she is hurt and harmed by them.

The same case is found in Soueif's presentation of Faten in Sandpiper. According to Nash (2002), Soueif's story shows how Western intrusion into Egyptian society has unsettled "the patriarchally ordered family consisting of the man and the two women in his charge" (p. 29). Soueif (1996) tries to show how Arab mothers and fathers are always on their sons' side against their daughters. Faten's mother is good to her daughter but she had her daughter to do everything for her brother. When Faten's cousin proposes to her, Faten's mother does not consult Faten nor take her opinion, she is only eager to know her son's thoughts. She tells her son, "Whatever you say, my son. You're the man in this house" (Soueif, 1996, p. 84). When Salah, Faten's brother, tells her first that Faten is still young, she tells him that marriage is a protection for girls. Soueif presents a naïve mother, who does not care about her daughter's opinion. She does not even notice how Salah is obsessed with his sister's body. Her only concern is her son and how all his needs are provided for by his sister. Soueif depicts an unfavorable image of Arab parents who deal with their sons and daughters unequally. They prefer males over females.

On the same point, Hamed (2012) states that it is stereotypically well-known that females within traditional Arab families are dealt unequally with males (Hamed, 2012). Soueif represents a negative image of parents-children relations. Soueif still continues to disseminate the stereotypical images known about the Arab family. As Nash succinctly puts it, "Soueif's women characters [. . .] move in isolation, between the boundaries of these inimical discourses, implicitly questioning traditional stereotyping of women's role at the same time as negotiating their own way around

contemporary Western norms" (Nash, 2002, p. 28). By depicting a stereotypical and disparaging image of a male-centered Arab family, Soueif presents the patriarchal family as the norm rather than the exception in Arab societies, and hence, she gives an unrealistic and unsympathetic representation of parents-children relations in Arab cultures.

Similarly, Faqir to a large extent misrepresents parents-children relations in her novels, My Name is Salma and Willow Trees Don't Weep. To start with My Name is Salma, Faqir represents a very negative image of a passive, submissive and unresisting Arab mother who does not even try to save her daughter from being killed. Another point is that Salma is the one who does everything inside and outside her house. She is asked to clean the horses and feed the sheep and goats which are supposed to be a man's job. When Salma's mother knows about her daughter's illicit pregnancy, she tells her that her brother will shoot her between the eyes. She says, "You smeared our name with tar, your brother will shoot you between the eyes" (Faqir, 2007, p. 33). Realizing the helplessness of her mother, Salma goes to her teacher, Miss Nailah. Instead of being protected by her parents in such a situation, Naila takes Salma to the police to put her in a cell for protection (Faqir, 2007). Like, Faten's mother, who has no opinion on her daughter's marriage, Salma's mother could not stop her husband and son from killing her daughter. Although the two situations are different, since the latter is more serious and severe, the two mothers could be considered as passive and helpless. Faqir shows a negative representation of the Arab mother in the way she shows how Salma's mother only cares about what people would think rather than about Salma's safety and future. The role of Salma's mother resembles the role of the traditional mother whose role in the Arab family, according to Shihada (2010), was to raise her daughters according to the "values and structures of the society" (Shihada, 2010, p. 158). Faqir represents Arab mothers as restricted to their values and traditions and would only want to raise her children according to the Arab values, mores and traditions.

While Salma is in prison, she remembers how her mother and father have never stopped her brother Mahmoud from beating her. She remembers that whenever Mahmoud hits her, her mother would calm her down and say that it is ok and alright (Faqir, 2007). Salma's father says that he would

never raise his head high as long as Salma is still alive after what she has done (Faqir, 2007). Salma could not be protected by her own parents. Her own mother is presented as a mother who does not even try to protect her daughter from her violent and irrational brother. Faqir highlights the fact that Salma is ironically kept in prison to be protected from her own family. In other words, parents who are supposed to protect their children are in Faqir's novel coldblooded murderers who have no qualms about killing their only daughter for getting pregnant outside wedlock.

Faqir presents another example of a passive, careless and irresponsible parent in Willow Trees Don't Weep. Faqir's protagonist, Najwa, grows up in a fatherless house. As the novel opens, the reader is informed that Najwa's father, Omar Rahman, has abandoned his family for Jihad in Afghanistan. Faqir shows an image of Arabs as naïve people who follow certain paths without full awareness and understanding, leaving everything behind them even their families. She shows Arab fathers as men who create families and then abandon them for unknown reasons. Najwa's father walks out on them when Najwa was only three (Faqir, 2013). Zeinab, Najwa's grandmother asks Najwa to go and look for her father after the death of her mother, Raneem (Faqir, 2013). Najwa says that she has to find her father because when her grandmother dies she cannot live alone. People will not accept that. If it would have been for her, she would not want to find him. She considers him nothing "not even a memory" (Faqir, 2013, p. 23). What Omar did makes Najwa even question whether her parents, particularly her father, even wanted her and if they did want to see her (Faqir, 2013). Faqir presents a negative and cold father-daughter relation represented by Najwa's relation with her father. She presents an Arab father who abandons his daughter and a daughter who, in response, does not care about him. She does not try to find him out of love, but to have someone to live with after her grandmother dies. As Aladylah (2015) succinctly puts it, Najwa, ironically finds relief and a sense of peacefulness in a Western city away from her father and mother.

Omar abandons his second daughter in Afghanistan and leaves his wife Gulnar and his daughter Amani (Faqir, 2013). He admits that the second abandonment was easier because there was a reason which is that he goes to London as a nurse with Abu Hafs (Faqir, 2013). Najwa wishes that her father was killed because he deserves it and she even blames her father for all what she goes through in London alone. Najwa says:

I was gripped by anger with this father who was supposed to protect me, provide for me, make sure that I was warm and well fed, but brought me nothing but grief. His departure had eaten at my mother slowly until she developed cancer and died, putting an extra burden on my grandmother's shoulders so that instead of enjoying her old age, she had to take care of us and the house, and it had deprived me of any chance of happiness. I could have been married to our neighbor's son by now. (Faqir, 2013, p. 181)

To rub salt into the wound, Najwa's father refuses to see her another time because she accuses him of causing her mother's death. Even when Najwa knows that her father is ill in prison, she is delighted and pleased (Faqir, 2013). Faqir presents Najwa as a heartless daughter who feels unemotional and dispassionate when she sees her father after all those years.

Faqir's unfavorable representation of a parent-child relation is not confined to the way she depicts Omar-Najwa vulnerable relation. In fact, this cold and unsympathetic relation is echoed by the Zeinab-Raneem relationship. For instance, Raneem does not give her mother any money to go to Mecca, which is her mother's dream, simply because Raneem hates religion (Faqir, 2013). In this sense, unfavorable representations of parents-children relations shape the novel's structure and draw an ugly picture of a disintegrating Arab family.

Favorable representations of parents-children relations

The above unfavorable representations are counterbalanced by more nuanced and realistic representations of parents-children relations in the works of a number of diasporic Arab women novelists. This section shows how Abu-Jaber, Nye, Aboulela, and Kahf have represent parents-children relations within the Arab family in a favorable way in their novels Crescent, Habibi, Minaret and The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf, respectively. These writers show that parents-children relations within the Arab family are quite healthy and flawless and they try to negate the stereotypical assumptions about the relations between Arab children and their parents in the West. In this context, Moghissi (2005) argues that adults began to seek education and careers away from their homes which triggered some changes to the traditional relationships and roles within the Arab family. She also adds that

the relationships among the members of one family or one society are increasingly developing. These changes led to the "democratization of husband-wife and father-children relationships," and hence these relationships have become more flexible (Moghissi, 2005, p. 150).

As Bosch-Vilarrubias (2008) shows in her study on the representation of fatherhood in a number of Arab American novels, "there is a wide array of fatherhoods proposed by Arab American writers" (p. 111). Bosch-Vilarrubias suggests that the fathers that appear in the texts she examines "move within the range of ideas that exist between extreme traditionalism and extreme liberalism" (p. 111). According to Bosch-Vilarrubias (2008), some fathers who are depicted in these novels are very traditional, although their behavior is mostly justified by means of their status as immigrants or their uneasiness towards raising a daughter. Other fathers, Bosch-Vilarrubias maintains, are more ambivalent "because they really move from tradition to openness" (p. 111). Nonetheless, Bosch-Vilarrubias (2008) points out that in these literary texts one frequently encounters fathers who "are at the more liberal end of the range, those who are able to take up what has been called 'the new father' [. . .] inscribing no gender restrictions to their daughters and being caring and nurturing to them" (p. 111). Bosch-Vilarrubias (2008) concludes that all of these fathers are "possible and existing models of Arab fatherhood" and that the novels she investigates "advocate the possibility for new Arab fatherhoods to emerge" (p. 111).

What Bosch-Vilarrubias (2008) suggests in her article is that Arab fathers are varied and diverse. One cannot claim that there is a monolithic traditional Arab father. In a way, Bosch-Vilarrubias's argument (2008) undermines how Soueif and Faqir present Arab parents in their novels. In particular, Bosch-Vilarrubias (2008) indicates that the parent-child relationship in the Arab family is dynamic, changing and, overall, healthy. In addition, Salaita (2007) declares that major Arab American women writers represent their Arabic cultures favorably such as Abu-Jaber, Nye, and Halaby (Salaita, 2007). Sarnou (2015) states that diasporic Arab women writers try to subvert the stereotypes which are associated with Arabs in the West (Sarnou, 2015, p. 76). One of the major stereotypes and images, which Abu-Jaber, Nye, Kahf and Aboulela try to negate, is the negative image of the Arab family. Unlike Soueif and Faqir, who represent parents-children relations in an unfavorable way, these authors represent parents-children relations within the Arab family in a favorable and more realistic way.

Sidani (2005), states that Arab societies have been in a situation of confusion and indeterminacy because of the new socioeconomic and political transformations they are facing due to their exposure to other societies in a rapidly changing world. Arabs are trying to find a new "identity" among the developing world, an identity which will not dislocate them from their origins and at the same time would make them fit in the new world order (Sidani, 2005, p. 498). In addition, Moghissi (2005) and Barakat (1993) state that the Arab family has recently undergone a process of adjustment, and hence, it has shifted from the traditional Arab family structure (Moghissi, 2005; Barakat, 1993). Moghissi (2005) also adds that Arab families have been influenced by "urbanization, industrialization, education, and exposure to the developed world" (Moghissi, 2005, p. 155). Relationships within the Arab family have also changed and now they valorize values such as individualism, independence and privacy (Moghissi, 2005).

To use the words of Hamed (2012) again, many stereotypes and images are widely disseminated and circulated about how individuals live within an Arab family (Hamed, 2012). The nature of the relations between male and females is so crucial in the Arab family which is why they have been scrutinized, misunderstood and even misrepresented (Hamed, 2012). Such relations are based on the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunneh. These teachings are differently interpreted in countries according to their socio-political and cultural conditions, but still they are interpreted in the domain of Qur'an and Sunneh. According to Hamed (2012), this shows how family relations in the Arab culture are principally regulated and sanctioned by religious teachings (Hamed, 2012).

The first diasporic Arab female writer who will be discussed in this section is Abu-Jaber. Abu-Jaber paints a good image of the Arab family in her work in general and in her novel, Crescent. For instance, Al-Joulan (2010) states that Abu-Jaber draws a positive and progressive image of marriage and children in her work by creating "dialogues within and across cultures" (Al-Joulan, 2010, p. 73). The role of the father and mother is very important in the life of their children. Peteet (1994) comments on the importance of fatherhood and states that the meaning of fatherhood is most related to Arab masculinity, which is something crucial in the Arab world

(Peteet, 1994). She adds that the father in the Arab family is an important figure whose aim is to protect his family (Peteet, 1994). A father, for being a "faculty of understanding", has to be rational, wise, productive, judicious and understanding to be an Arab ideal (Peteet, 1994, p. 35). Moghissi also adds that the role of the father in the modern Arab family is different from the traditional father's role. She adds that Arab fathers now share their authority and responsibility with other members of the family (Moghissi, 2005). On the importance of motherhood, Said-Foqahaa (2011) states that women play an authoritative role behind the authority of men. This role is maintained by their presence at their houses. The role of women is achieved in socially educating the generation of girls and boys. An Arab woman is able to construct a home with a "suitable environment" (Said-Foqahaa, 2011, p. 239). In this case, women are able to participate in the decision-making process (Said-Foqahaa, 2011). On parents-children relations within the Arab family, a study conducted by Stocker and Ali (2014) on Emirati parents shows that parents are satisfied in their relations with their children and they consider themselves to be involved and attached to their children (Stocker & Ali, 2014). In many ways, Abu-Jaber's favorable representation of parents-children relations within the Arab family reflects the findings of Stocker and Ali's study (2014).

In Crescent, Abu-Jaber (2004) presents the relationship between Sirine and her American mother, Sandy, in a positive way. The narrator informs the reader in an approving tone that Sirine's mother used to sit with her daughter and tell her little secrets about food (Abu-Jaber, 2004). According to Abudi (2011), mother and daughter within the Arab family are so close and naturally share knowledge about each other which is "derived from their like biology and psychology" (Abudi, 2011, p. 83). They naturally have things in common and also share the same "interests, concerns, hopes, fears, joys and sorrows" (Abudi, 2011, p. 83). Mothers are the only source of real love and support to their daughters (Abudi, 2011). Similarly, in Abu-Jaber's novel, Han, Sirine's Iraqi lover, is so attached to his mother. He nostalgically reminiscences on how he used to sit with his mother near the stove as she tells stories about cooking (Abu-Jaber, 2004). Overall, in Crescent, parents-children relations are positive and faultless.

Likewise, in Habibi, Dr. Abboud loves his two children; he keeps calling them precious (Nye, 1997). Dr. Abboud and his wife discuss many issues and topics with their two children such as the reason why Jews and Arabs

are always fighting. Mrs. Abboud cares a lot about her children's safety and how they have to be always safe. Both parents do some research about the school of Liyana and Rafik (Nye, 1997). Dr. Abboud always says the word Habibi to his children as he greets them and whenever he addresses them. Even when he is away from home, they can hear it and feel it. Their mother also calls them precious. She is always there for them. Their food is always fresh and their clothes are always clean and tidy (Nye, 1997). These positive parents-children relations reflect that of Dr. Abboud with his mother. The relation between Sitti and Dr. Abboud, her son, has always been so strong and full of passion. Dr. Abboud wants his kids and wife to see and know Sitti who likes telling stories Liyana and Rafik (Nye, 1997).

Parents-children relations that are represented by Abu-Jaber and Nye are unlike parents-children relations which are represented by Soueif and Faqir who represent passive and irresponsible mothers and fathers. They also represent children who are in a state of loss. In a study on Arab American families, Ajami, Rasmi and Abudabbeh (2015) explore the Arab American parents-children relations in the USA. They state that the relationship between parents and children could be considered as strong. The Arab American parents are emotionally attached to their children and are considered communicative with their children (Ajami el at, 2015). The favorable representation of Abu-Jaber and Nye of Arab American parents-children relations resembles the image of the ideal parents which Ajami, Rasmi and Abudabbeh (2015) describe.

Two more Arab women writers in diaspora represent parents-children relations quite positively and constructively. Aboulela and Kahf depict parents-children relations in a favorable way in their literary works. In Minaret, Aboulela (2005) depicts the relations between Najwa and her parents as positive and fruitful. Najwa says that her mother and father love her and are always generous to her. She says that she gets whatever she wishes and wants (Aboulela, 2005). Najwa describes the beauty and the glamour of her mother and wishes she looks and speaks like her. Najwa is also emotionally attached to her father, she feels that she is safe when she hugs and holds him (Aboulela, 2005). Najwa is presented as a grateful child who stays with her mother in the hospital in London till she dies; she does not abandon her mother nor neglect her (Aboulela, 2005). Another parents-

children relation, which is favorably represented in the novel, is that between Dr. Zeinab and her daughter and son. Dr. Zeinab comes to London regularly from Cairo to check on her son, Tamer and her daughter, Lamya (Aboulela, 2005). Tamer leaves Najwa and does not marry her for the sake of his mother. Generally, in Minaret, Aboulela presents parents-children relations as healthy, strong and, more crucially, flawless.

Similarly, Kahf (2006) portrays a favorable relationship between parents and children in her novel The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf. In the novel, Wajdy and Ebtehaj on the one hand, and their children, Khadra and Eyad, on the other hand, enjoy a healthy and strong relationship. Despite moments of disputes and disagreements, overall parents-children relations in Kahf's novel are exemplary and faultless. For instance, Ebtehaj takes care of her children carefully and always tries to keep them clean and pure (Kahf, 2006). Although Khadra's parents disagree with her decision to abort, they do not sever their ties with her; on the contrary, they stay in contact with her and offer her physical and psychological support. Their unwavering support helps Khadra reach a sense of equilibrium and "harmony [. . .] created by sensibly mixing the two components of her identity" as she superbly "combine[s] different elements of her cultural heritage [which] adds a touch of depth and serenity to Khadra's personality" (Ulayyan and Awad, 2015-2016, p. 33). The parents that Aboulela and Kahf represent starkly differ from the ones that appear in the works of Soueif and Faqir as the former enjoy healthy and flawless relationships with their children while the latter marginalize and oppress their children.

Conclusion:

As the above analysis shows, the six diasporic Arab women writers offer different views on parents-children relations within the Arab family. In particular, a careful examination of the works of these six diasporic Arab women writers point to two trends or patterns in representing parents-children relations. The first trend, which is visible in the works of Soueif and Faqir, is to represent parents-children relations unfavorably, unsympathetically and, even, extremely negatively. In contrast, the works of Abu-Jaber, Nye, Aboulela and Kahf depict parents-children relations in a favorable and flawless way. Soueif and Faqir represent Arab parents in an unrealistic way. They do not give the real image of the Arab parents. They still hold on to the traditional image of Arab parents who manipulate and

dominate the lives of their children. They present traditional Arab parents as the norm rather than the exception in their literary works. They represent a very negative image of passive, submissive, unresisting, uncaring, and irresponsible Arab parents. By the same token, the children both authors present are cold and, even, ungrateful. One may convincingly argue that both novelists misrepresent parents-children relations in the fictional worlds they create.

On the other hand, Abu-Jaber, Nye, Aboulela and Kahf represent parents-children relations within the Arab family in a favorable way. The image of Arab parents which is represented by these four novelists is unlike the image of Arab parents which is represented by Soueif and Faqir who represent passive and irresponsible parents. Abu-Jaber, Nye, Aboulela and Kahf give a positive image of Arab parents. They portray them as rational, wise, caring and responsible. They also depict the relationship between parents and children as warm and healthy. Overall, these authors offer a more nuanced picture of parents-children relations that counterpoises, and even debunks, parents-children relations represented by Soueif and Faqir.

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