

Arabic Black Slave Narrative

Studies in the Emerging Phenomenon of a New Literary Form

A Thesis Submitted to the University of Dublin, Trinity College, for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies

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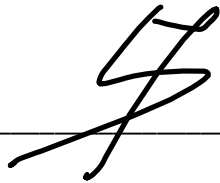
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Summary

This dissertation aims to investigate the emerging cultural phenomenon of novels about slavery in the Arab world and proposes a methodological framework for studying this topic. It focuses on a sample of six novels published between 1993 and 2016 from various countries, including Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Authored by diverse voices, these works showcase the richness of contemporary Arabic literature.

The methodological framework centres around four main topics: (1) Authors and their messages, (2) Themes and perspectives, (3) Re-presentations, and (4) Ideologies. The research seeks to answer a primary question regarding how scholars should study Arabic slave narratives, accompanied by secondary questions specific to each topic. This dual-level inquiry aims to provide a comprehensive and effective approach to understanding this literary phenomenon.

By exploring these narratives, the research intends to define the phenomenon within Arabic literature and analyse its emergence, evolution, themes, and underlying messages. The significance of these contemporary novels lies in their ability to challenge prevailing historical narratives, reclaim agency for marginalised voices, and facilitate a deeper understanding of race, identity, and historical memory in the Arab world and beyond. Ultimately, this research, therefore, not only aims to identify and explore the features of contemporary black slave narratives but also to underscore their significance in understanding the historical and ongoing implications of slavery and its legacy in the Arab world.

WARNING

This work contains original text quotes that are extremely racist and offensive, and it may make you feel uncomfortable.

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Abbreviation:

DW Stands for “Deutsche Welle”, a German public service media organisation.

IPAF Stands for “The International Prize for Arabic Fiction.”

MCD Stands for “Monte Carlo Doualiya- Radio network.”

NGO Stands for “Non-Governmental Organisation.”

Notes on Translation and Transliteration

Unless otherwise specified, the translations of book titles, articles and quotations from Arabic texts cited in this current research including the six selected novels are mine. The transliteration system used herein is the one used by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES)* with diacritical marks. All transliteration, therefore, reflects the literary Arabic form and pronunciation, e.g., Mecca rather than Makkah, Qur'an rather than Koran, and Quraysh rather than Quraish. The names of the authors of Arabic language work are spelled according to standard *Fusha* pronunciation, not according to the most common spelling or dialectal spoken pronunciation; in cases where ambiguity may arise, the common spelling is provided in parentheses upon first mention following *Fusha* transliteration. Author names are followed by the year of their death or lifespan, except in cases when such dates are unknown. The initial "a-l" common to many Arabic names, which constitutes part of the name, is not discounted when those names are listed alphabetically under Works Cited and in the Index.

Finally, this research is based on the translation of the Qur'an from Arabic into English by Talal, Itani. (2015). *The Quran: Arabic, English*. Dallas, Texas: ClearQuran. Due to the fact that Qur'an translators in general could sometimes adopt their ideology of religion to manipulate and give a different intention to the source text, I will only report on it when the word is significantly distorted from its original meaning, particularly from the translation technique perspective. The Qur'anic reference has been included in the parenthesis within the text. Qur'an (49:13) stands for Qur'anic Chapter 49, Verse 13.

Arabic Transliteration Table

I J M E S TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM

Consonants

Arabic	English	Arabic	English	Arabic	English	Arabic	English
ء	'	د	d	ض	ḍ	ك	k
ب	b	ذ	dh	ط	ṭ	ل	l
ت	t	ر	r	ظ	ẓ	م	m
ث	th	ز	z	ع	'	ن	n
ج	j	س	s	غ	gh	ه	h
ح	ḥ	ش	sh	ف	f	و	w
خ	kh	ص	ṣ	ق	q	ي	y

Vowels

Long	Short	Doubled	Diphthongs
أ a	ا a	ي iyy	و Aw
و u	و u	و uww	ي ay
ي i	ي i		

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Introduction:

My initial interest in the topic of slavery and its historical context in the Arab world, particularly in Libya, began in 2006 when I began a research project aimed at writing a historical novel in Arabic. This work, published in 2012 by Dar El Fergiani in Tripoli¹, under the title *الخديعة*/*al-Khadiea* (Deception), focuses on the military conflict that occurred from 1801 to 1804 between the Karamanli state in Libya—then known as “Tarabulus al-Gharb” or Tripolitania—led by Yusuf Pasha Karamanli, and the United States under President Thomas Jefferson.

One character who captured my attention in this narrative was a well-educated and proactive diplomat named Hassuna d’Ghi`es². According to Ian Coller, during his tenure as ambassador in London in the summer of 1822, he published a pamphlet advocating for the abolition of the slave trade in Libya (Coller, 2015:534). This pamphlet, Coller continues, written in English from a French original translated by Dr. Kelly, was titled *A Letter addressed to James Scarlett on the abolition of the slave trade* and was published in limited numbers (Ibid:534). The impetus for Hassuna d’Ghi`es’ pamphlet, dated May 12, 1822, stemmed from his participation in the 16th general meeting of the African Society, held on May 10, 1822, at the Freemasons' Hall in London. At this meeting, one of the resolutions proposed to the British government was to declare the slave trade a form of illegal piracy, a recommendation included in the 16th report issued by the African Society (Haddad, 2018:10-11).

The most significant aspect of this pamphlet was the author’s resolute opposition to the slave trade in Africa, particularly in Libya, while also recognising the challenges associated with combating and abolishing it due to the complexities of the prevailing socio-economic conditions. His conclusion emphasised the need for mobilising European nations to exert pressure on the North African rulers, in conjunction with increasing trade with these countries to enhance economic prosperity. He also advocated for opening negotiation channels with pirates, offering them lucrative incentives to abandon piracy and conquest (Coller, 2015: 537-42).

¹ See: Haddad, Salah. (2012). *الخديعة*, al-Khadiea (Deception). Tripoli: Dar El Fergiani.

² Hassuna d’Ghi`es (1788, Tripoli - 1836, Istanbul) was a Libyan politician and intellectual who received his early education in Libya. Subsequently, he was sent to France by his father, where he expanded his knowledge. From 1821 to 1823, he served as the ambassador to London, during which time he became a student and friend of the philosopher Jeremy Bentham, collaborating with him on several writing projects. He returned to Libya in 1826 and took on the role of Minister of Foreign Affairs. Later, he left Tripoli again for Europe and eventually settled in Istanbul, where he became the editor of the French version of the Ottoman state’s official newspaper, “Le Moniteur Ottoman,” on June 16, 1836. He passed away shortly thereafter (Haddad, 2018:1-34).

Given that this literary and intellectual achievement by a Libyan Muslim thinker is quite rare in both subject matter and conceptual depth, my interest was piqued. It prompted me to pursue a serious study of the history of slavery in Libya and the Arab region, especially in light of this emerging voice from my homeland advocating for the abolition of the trade. This curiosity ultimately led me to delve deeper into this research. Just as I found the work of the Libyan intellectual deeply intriguing, I was equally captivated by the emergence of Arabic novels addressing the topic of slavery at the beginning of the 21st century. These novels present the subject in a new literary form that had not been previously explored.

Research Aim:

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the emerging cultural phenomenon of novels about slavery in the Arabic world, proposing a methodological template for how this phenomenon can be studied. The dissertation relies on a sample of six novels, from which it generates analytical methods which have the scope for wider application. These six novels originally published between 1993 and 2016, which span multiple countries: Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Authored by writers of diverse genders, ethnicities, and geographical backgrounds, these works illustrate the vibrant diversity of contemporary Arabic literature. The novels featured in this study, listed in order of their original publication years, are as follows:

- (1) Ali, Idris. (1993). *Dongola: A Novel of Nubia* (Arabic original title: رواية نوبية / رواية نوبية: دنقلة/*Dongola: Riwaya Nubiya*). Cairo: International Company for Printing and Publishing.
- (2) Trāwri, Maḥmūd. (2002). *Maymūna*. (Arabic original title: ميمونة/*Maymūna*). Damascus, Dar al-Mada.
- (3) al-Muqri, Ali. (2008). *Black Taste, Black Odour* (Arabic original title: طعم أسود رائحة / طعم أسود رائحة: سوداء/*Ta'am Aswād, Ra'eha Swada*). Beirut: Dar Al-Saqi.
- (4) al-Da'as, Sa'dā'. (2010). *Because I Am Black* (Arabic original title: لأنني أسود / Li-annī aswād). Kuwait: Advice Art Production.
- (5) al-Bassam, Khaled. (2016). *The Price of Salt* (Arabic original title: ثمن الملح / Thaman al-Milḥ). Bahrain: Jadawel for publishing, translation, and distribution.
- (6) Bin Shatwan, Najwa. (2016). *The Slave Pens* (Arabic original title: زرايب العبيد / Zarayib al-Abeed). Beirut: Dar al-Saqi.

The methodological template centres on investigating four primary topics, each guided by specific questions. By delving into these topics, the research can provide insights that address both the main and secondary thesis inquiries. This approach will enable us to define the contemporary phenomenon within Arabic literature, as well as to analyse the contexts of its emergence and evolution, along with its sources, characteristics, themes, re-presentations³, and underlying messages. Ultimately, I hope to formulate a definition that encapsulates the essence of these literary works. The four central topics of focus are: (1) Authors and their messages, (2) Themes and perspectives, (3) Re-presentations, and (4) Ideologies.

Research Question:

The research question encompasses two levels: the primary level asks: how should scholars study the emerging phenomenon of Arabic slave narratives? The secondary level comprises a series of guiding questions tailored to each of the four topics we will explore in our presentation of the research methodology. By addressing the questions at both levels, the research can deliver an effective methodological approach to studying this phenomenon based on the response to the primary central question, which can also be applied to similar works in the future. Concurrently, the questions at the secondary level will yield insights from the selected samples, enabling us to define the phenomenon and identify its features, characteristics, sources, themes, re-presentations, underlying messages, and points of distinction.

Previous Research:

In 2004, a significant study on the re-presentation of black individuals in medieval Arabic literature was published. Nader Kazim's book, *Surat al-Sood fi al-Mutakhail al-Arabi al-Wasiet*, (The Image of Black People in Medieval Arabic Imagination), critically analyses poetic and prose works from the Middle Ages, focusing on the re-presentation of slaves and slavery within these texts. Kazim argued that the portrayal of black slaves in Arabic discourse has remained largely unchanged since its origins in the seventh century AD. His work highlights that this discursive

³ The hyphen in the term “re-presentation” emphasises the distinction between two different meanings of “presentation.” The prefix “re-” suggests a process of reconstruction. By using the hyphen, it underscores that the act of presenting is being revisited, imbuing it with a new or altered meaning. Further details on this topic can be found in Chapter 3.

framework appears to follow rigid conventions that have persisted through the ages, from the medieval period to contemporary expressions (Kazim, 2004: 167-170).

One key insight from Kazem's analysis is the notable absence of narratives about black slaves from this period, whether authored by the former slaves themselves or by empathetic individuals documenting their experiences with slavery—similar to the narratives that emerged in the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries. My research corroborates this finding, exposing a significant lack of Arabic narratives about slaves and black individuals that reflect their perspectives. Consultation with various scholars in this domain has confirmed that the Arab and Islamic literary landscape does not contain any such genre as detailed in chapter 1.

Nevertheless, an important literary form has emerged in recent years, particularly around the turn of the century, which I have termed as the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative”. This compelling genre confronts both historical and contemporary issues of slavery, black identity, oppression, and resilience, providing a vital platform for expressing the nuanced experiences of marginalised voices. As the global landscape becomes more interconnected, these narratives not only seek to recover historical memories but also engage with pressing social and political issues. They thus serve as crucial contributions to the broader discourse surrounding race, identity, and power dynamics in contemporary society.

This phenomenon is relatively recent, and critical scholarship is just beginning to engage with it. This dissertation addresses this emerging cultural trend by proposing themes and methodologies through which it can be explored.

Slavery and Blackness:

The relationship between slavery and blackness in the Arab context is marked by a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and social dynamics. Rooted in centuries of practices—including the trans-Saharan and Arab slave trades—blackness has become inextricably linked to concepts of slavery and enslavement. According to Lange, 2007:429–445, Lewis, 1992:54-61, and Kazim, 2004:49-160, in numerous Arab societies, the historical legacy of slavery has reinforced racial hierarchies that cast black individuals as symbols of inferiority and oppression. Over time, these associations have become deeply entrenched, fostering a societal perception wherein blackness is often equated with slavery.

As we will see in chapters 2, 3 and 4, this overlap is evident not only in historical texts but also in contemporary narratives, where black identities are frequently shaped by the legacies of

slavery, exploitation, and marginalisation. In this regard, the re-presentation of blackness within Arabic literature often reflects broader societal attitudes and historical injustices, revealing how these narratives interweave the individual experiences of black characters with collective memories of oppression.

In examining contemporary Arabic narratives, particularly those that fall under the umbrella of black slave narratives, it becomes essential to critically analyse how notions of race and identity are constructed. These narratives serve not just as stories of personal experience but also as reflections of collective histories that influence societal perceptions of black individuals as descendants of slaves—even long after the formal abolition of slavery in the last century.

Methodology and Selection of Texts:

To explore the emerging phenomenon of the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative” and to address the primary research question outlined above, along with the secondary questions that will be detailed in the section titled “A Brief Overview of the Contents of the Study,” a structured methodological framework has been established.

This framework includes a set of guiding questions tailored for the novels' chapters, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of the selected texts. The formulation of these questions was derived from a reflective process that involved critical reading and engagement with the texts, alongside an extensive review of the existing literature related to slavery in both the Western and Arab contexts.

The guiding questions were designed with particular characteristics to enhance the depth and rigor of the analysis: (1) Clear and Specific: Each question is framed in a way that is logical and unambiguous, allowing for straightforward interpretation and focused discussion. This clarity ensures that the analysis remains on track and relevant to the emerging themes within the narratives. (2) Discussion-prompting: The questions are designed to be open to discussion and interpretation. This characteristic allows for a rich exploration of the texts, encouraging consideration of multiple perspectives and interpretations of the narratives and their implications. (3) Complex: The selected questions necessitate critical analysis of various ideas and sources, enabling a deeper exploration of the themes present in the narratives. They are structured to elicit nuanced discussions, thus avoiding simplistic 'yes' or 'no' responses. This complexity reflects the intricate dynamics of race, identity, and history that the narratives embody.

The methodological approach employed in this research to analyse narrative texts related to slavery, class structures, and re-presentations of race and colour primarily draws from Marxist critical literary theories. This framework is informed by the insights of several prominent Western critics, such as Stuart Hall, Terry Eagleton, and others. Drawing on Lois Tyson (2006:53-444), I contend that these theories provide valuable perspectives, which include:

1. **Examining Class and Economic Structures:** Marxist theory emphasises the importance of analysing class relations and economic systems. By applying this lens to narratives about slavery, the research hopes to explore how economic interests shape the institution of slavery, investigate class distinctions, and understand the interactions between various social classes.
2. **Critique of Ideology:** A fundamental aim of Marxism is to uncover the ideologies that underpin societal structures. Analysing narratives through this lens, the research analysis hopes to facilitate the identification of how literature reflects, reinforces, or challenges dominant ideologies related to race, class, and power.
3. **Deconstructing Power Dynamics:** Marxist theory encourages a critical exploration of power relations within texts. In the context of slavery narratives, this involves examining the dynamics between the enslaved individuals and their oppressors, as well as how these relationships are influenced by broader economic and political contexts.
4. **Understanding Historical Context:** By situating literary works within the framework of historical materialism, Marxist analysis allows for a deeper comprehension of how economic conditions and class struggles inform themes and characteristics within slave literature.
5. **Highlighting the Voices of the Oppressed:** Marxist theory advocates for the re-presentation of marginalised voices, emphasising the importance of including the perspectives and experiences of the oppressed in literary discourse.

This multi-faceted approach thus establishes a comprehensive framework for analysing narratives related to slavery, allowing for a richer understanding of the complex interplay between race, class, and power.

In summary, this dissertation will argue that employing Marxist critical literary theory to analyse narratives related to slavery, class, race and colour yields significant insights into the socio-economic and ideological forces at work, enhancing our understanding of literature as both a reflection of and a response to societal structures. By utilising the guiding framework questions

alongside Marxist critical theory, I will be able to systematically identify the key features of contemporary black slave narratives in terms of authorship, message, theme, re-presentation, and ideology.

Regarding the selection of the six texts analysed in this research, specific criteria were utilised to ensure their distinction and relevance. These criteria, which are elaborated upon in Chapter One, encompass a range of general and specific characteristics that warranted their inclusion. Key factors influencing the selection included subject matter, authorial perspective, writing style, literary background, personal experience, popularity, and literary accolades.

A Brief Overview of the Study's Contents:

This study explores the intricate landscape of the emerging Arabic narrative concerning black slaves, structuring the examination into four chapters.

The first chapter, titled “Authors, Sources, and Message,” investigates the reasons behind the historical scarcity of this genre within the Arab literary scene until the early 21st century. It draws on diverse scholarly sources to discuss the various factors contributing to this absence of slave narratives in the Arab region. This chapter also delves into the backgrounds of contemporary authors who are now contributing to this genre, exploring their motivations as well as the historical and cultural influences that shape their work. Additionally, the chapter looks into the powerful messages inherent in their narratives and examines the reasons for the increasing interest in slavery among contemporary Arab writers. This inquiry aims to determine whether the emergence of this genre reflects a long-standing literary tradition or if it is a new development. Ultimately, the chapter seeks to illuminate the unique perspectives these authors bring to discussions of slavery and racial identity in the Arab world.

To uncover the complexities of this evolving phenomenon—particularly concerning the authors, their influences, and their messages—the chapter is guided by a series of framework questions: (1) Who is the Author, (2) What Particularly Qualifies the Author to Deal with Slavery, (3) Why Has the Author Chosen to Re-present Slavery, (4) What Motivates the Author to Thematised Slavery, (5) Which Perspectives Does the Author Use, and (6) What is the Author’s Attitude to Racism and Discrimination.

In Chapter 2, titled “Themes in the Six Literary Works,” we analyse the distinctive features and recurring themes found in new black slave narratives within their historical contexts. This chapter examines a range of themes, including memory and trauma, resistance and empowerment, and

the ways these narratives reflect ongoing struggles against systemic oppression while celebrating cultural heritage and identity. The selected narratives span from the era of the slave trade through the late 20th century, a period during which slavery experienced various phases, including legalisation and eventual prohibition. By situating these texts within multiple contexts—colonial, traditional, and postcolonial—this chapter seeks to illuminate both the similarities and differences in the portrayal of slavery and its enduring effects on societies across different timelines.

The comparative analysis conducted in this chapter will reveal significant shifts over time, particularly the transition from societal acceptance of slavery to a critical examination of its legacy. This exploration will provide insights into how contemporary authors use their narratives to navigate the complex historical landscape.

To facilitate the examination of these varying temporal and spatial contexts, the chapter relies on a series of framework questions: (1) What is the Historical Context of the Work?, (2) What Socio-Historical Factors Shape the Work?, (3) How Does Slavery/Blackness Shape the Narrative?, (4) How (if at all) is Slavery Conceptualised in the Work?, (5) What Are the Works' Implicit and Explicit Messages about Equality, Freedom, and Justice?, (6) Which Narrative Perspectives Are Employed?

In Chapter 3, titled “The Re-presentation of Characters,” the focus shifts to the portrayal of individuals and communities within the selected narratives, particularly concerning the re-presentation of the “Other.” This chapter critically examines how characters are constructed and the implications of these re-presentations for understanding the complexities of identity and racial dynamics in Arab contexts.

By analysing character portrayal, the chapter investigates how these narratives challenge or reinforce existing stereotypes. It emphasises the significance of providing accurate and nuanced re-presentations that resonate with readers and deepen their understanding of Black lived experiences in the Arab world. This research’s exploration also entails a critical examination of the author’s linguistic and cultural choices and how these choices inform perceptions and challenge stereotypes.

The chapter will compare re-presentations of black and white characters to uncover underlying power dynamics related to race and colour. By exploring how different characters interact within

the narrative framework, it assesses how these re-presentations influence the experiences of Black individuals within the communities depicted in the novels.

To facilitate this analysis, the chapter is guided by a set of framing questions: (1) Do Black Characters/Community Get Re-presented as Majority or Minority, (2) Do Black Characters Play Central Figures or Supporting Roles, (3) How They Measure Up to 'Standards of Beauty', (4) To What Extent is the Black Community Re-represented in Terms of Quality of Life, (5) Are Black People Re-presented as Engaged in Struggles for Justice, Freedom, and Equality in Society, (6) How are Characters Implicitly or Explicitly Affected by Their Race/Colour.

In Chapter 4, titled "Ideology and Slavery," we engage with the ideological frameworks that underpin the selected narratives. This analysis investigates how these works interrogate traditional narratives of slavery while exploring the complex intersections of race, class, and cultural identity. By doing so, I hope to show that investigations of this type can gain a more nuanced understanding of the specific ideological messages that authors convey regarding slavery and its enduring implications. A close examination of how these authors construct and articulate their views on slavery allows for deeper insights into their broader worldviews and how these perspectives inform their narratives. This chapter not only critiques existing narratives but also highlights the ways in which contemporary Arab authors bring their unique cultural and ideological contexts to their explorations of slavery and its legacies.

In order to dissect the ideologies that inform the contemporary discourse on slavery and racism within these narratives, the chapter utilises a series of framework questions. These questions serve as a guide for our analysis and facilitate a deeper exploration of the authors' intentions and the societal implications of their works. To this end, the analysis in this chapter centres around the following framework questions: (1) Which Ideologies About Slavery Are Present in the Work, (2) Which Ideological Narrative Does the Story Embrace about Slavery, (3) What's Their Origin, (4) Does the Work Seek to Explain 'and/or' Justify Slavery in the Arab World, (5) If Yes, What Frames of Reference Are Utilised, (6) Which Ones Do the Characters Sympathise With, (7) What Reference (If Any) Is There to Emancipation and Abolition, and in What Context, (8) If So, Does the Work Differentiate Between Emancipation/Manumission and Abolition.

Following Chapter 4, the thesis summarises the main discussions from the previous chapters, highlighting the key findings and drawing a conclusion.

This examination emphasises the significance of the emerging phenomenon of Arabic contemporary novels centered on Black slaves and their descendants as an essential literary form. These narratives not only challenge dominant historical accounts but also reclaim agency for marginalised voices, fostering a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics of race, identity, and historical memory within the Arab world and beyond.

CHAPTER ONE

The Authors, the Sources, and the Message

1. Theoretical Introduction: The Historical Context of the Authors

To fully grasp the complexities surrounding “Authors, Sources, and Message” in the context of slavery in contemporary Arabic novel, it is essential to delve into the author's identity, inspirations, sources, motivations, perspectives, and intended message. Therefore, this chapter's inquiry seeks to uncover the author's background, qualifications, motivations, views, and attitudes toward slavery and its lingering impact on Arab societies. Furthermore, it seeks to identify the sources that inspired the author to write about slavery and decipher the message they intend to convey to their readers.

As authors rarely create their work in isolation from historical, social, or cultural context⁴, it is essential to examine the factors that influenced the emergence of what I term the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative” as a new literary genre. Investigating the reasons behind the growing interest in slavery among contemporary Arab writers in the 21st century will provide insight into why this genre was relatively rare in the past and whether it has developed as part of a long-standing narrative tradition. It is crucial here to recognise that authors write from the vantage point of their own times, even when their works address historical events that occurred long before their lives. Consequently, the beliefs, values, and experiences of a particular era can greatly influence an author's expression. By comprehending the historical context surrounding the authors, readers can more effectively grasp the intentions and messages that the author seeks to convey. Hence, these factors may shed more light on the messages these authors aim to convey to their readers. By examining these aspects, we can gain a deeper understanding of the author's perspective and approach to addressing these sensitive topics, ultimately uncovering the underlying message of their work.

This chapter also delves into the complex issues surrounding originality and authorship in contemporary narratives about slavery, considering the variety of perspectives from both white and black authors. In particular, this chapter examines the political significance of white or Afro-Arab writers choosing to write about slavery, and how this historical act reflects the social conditions of postmodern Arab life and culture. By examining these complexities, this chapter identifies the distinctive characteristics that set them apart and their significant contributions to

⁴ See: Attridge, D. (2015) *The Work of Literature*. (First Edition). Oxford University Press. PP. 180-188.

the literary landscape. Additionally, it gives the definition of the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative” based on these defining characteristics.

Overall, this chapter posits that a variety of factors contributed to the emergence of this new phenomenon in Arabic literature, allowing writers to engage with the sensitive subject of slavery. It highlights that, when examining the complex circumstances surrounding the authors, their sources, and their messages, there appears to be a shared urgency among these writers to create works that address the absence of authentic slave narratives. Their goal is to restore the humanity of enslaved and Black individuals by (re)imagining their subjectivity and recounting their painful experiences, which continue to reverberate in society today. The overarching message conveyed by these writers is that although enslaved individuals and Black people may not have owned their bodies and their skin colours, they were still able to assert some degree of agency in shaping the narratives of their lives, even if those narratives did not reflect their ideal existence.

To unravel the complexities of this new phenomenon, particularly those pertaining to the author, their sources, and their message, I have formulated the following questions as a framework. This will help us examine the author’s background, sources, motives, perspectives, and overall message.

1.1 The Chapter’s Questions:

The questions of this chapter are as follows:

1.1.1 Who is the Author?

The first question to consider is the background of the author. Understanding an author's background, experiences, and cultural influences can provide insight into their perspective on slavery and its re-presentation in their work. Cultural, racial, and personal factors may influence the author's understanding of these themes, thereby shaping their message.

1.1.2 What Particularly Qualifies the Author to Deal with Slavery?

Examining the author's qualifications helps assess their expertise and authority on the topic of slavery. Education, research, personal experiences, or a combination of factors may contribute to the author's understanding of these complex issues. Their qualifications provide credibility to their interpretation and re-presentation of slavery and blackness within their work.

1.1.3 Why Has the Author Chosen to Re-present Slavery?

Understanding the author's motivation is key to comprehending their purpose and message. Authors may choose to explore slavery to shed light on historical injustices, challenge societal narratives, explore personal or collective identity, or provoke critical discussions. The reasons behind their choice can unveil their intentions and aspirations for their work.

1.1.4 What Motivates the Author to Thematisé Slavery?

It is vital to explore the underlying motivations driving the author to thematisé slavery. This could involve seeking justice, promoting social change, raising awareness, personal connections to historical events, or even just picking a topic that they think will interest people. By examining their motivations, we can better understand the depth of their commitment and passion for addressing these issues.

1.1.5 Which Perspectives Does the Author Use?

Authors may choose to explore the theme of slavery from multiple perspectives. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the subject. By presenting diverse viewpoints, the author may aim to provide a comprehensive portrayal of the experiences, struggles, and resilience of individuals impacted by slavery and blackness.

1.1.6 What is the Author's Attitude to Racism and Discrimination?

Understanding the author's attitude towards racism and discrimination is crucial in comprehending their message. Does the author condemn racism and discrimination explicitly? Do they highlight the systemic, historical, or contemporary aspects of these issues?

Examining the author's stance on these matters illuminates their position within societal debates and contributes to understanding their message.

1.2 The Chapter's Structure:

This chapter provides the foundation for a comprehensive analysis of the author's work and the messages it conveys. To achieve this, the following topics will be explored: (a) The emerging phenomenon of the "Arabic Black Slave Narrative" in the 21st century, (b) Factors contributing to the relative scarcity of Arabic slave narratives in the past compared to their Western counterparts, (c) An overview of the 15 Arabic neo-slave narratives published in the first two decades of the 21st century.

The chapter will be structured as follows: Firstly, we will examine the reasons behind the emergence of this phenomenon at the turn of the 21st century, highlighting its rarity in the past and its comparison to Western slave narratives. Next, we will provide an overview of the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative” scene by presenting a list of 15 novels published in chronological order, accompanied by brief descriptions to illustrate the growing interest in this type of narrative.

The list then will be narrowed to six novels that will be subject to in-depth analysis. We will provide a brief overview of each novel, its author, and its message before exploring its general and specific narrative characteristics. By synthesising these findings, we will define the emerging phenomenon of the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative”, including their nature, forms, domains, sources, and messages. Finally, we will summarise the chapter's key findings.

1.3 The Emerging Phenomenon of the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative” at the Turn of 21st Century

To understand the emerging phenomenon of the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative”, one of the key questions to consider is: Why did such narrative begin to appear in the late 20th century and reach their peak during the first two decades of the 21st century?

Analysing the underlying reasons and motivations behind the increasing interest of contemporary Arab writers in slavery can shed light on the complex issues surrounding the author's background, qualifications, motivations, perspectives, and attitudes towards slavery and its lingering impact on Arab societies. However, before examining these motivations, it is essential to investigate the numerous factors that have historically hindered the emergence of this genre. This section addresses these issues as a preliminary step toward exploring the various influences and contexts that have contributed to the rise and growing interest in this literature in recent times, particularly among the six authors being studied here.

Despite the scarcity of works addressing slavery in contemporary Arab literary contexts, where discussions about anti-blackness, racism, and the legacies of slavery are largely absent⁵, glimpses

⁵ Two pioneering and influential Arabic novels that addressed the lasting impact of slavery in the latter half of the 20th century, setting the stage for the growth of this theme in contemporary Arabic literature are as follows: The first novel, published in 1961, is “*Barq al-Layl*”, a historical novel written by Tunisian author al-Bachir Kharif. The story revolves around the protagonist, *Barq al-Layl*, a black African young man kidnapped from his family in the African jungle and sold as a slave in Tunisia. This novel provides an early example of how Arabic literature tackled the theme of slavery and its enduring legacy. The second novel, published in 1966, is “*Mawsim al-Hiġra ilā ash-Shamāl*” which reads in English as “Season of Migration to the North” by Sudanese author al-Tayyib Saleh (also known as Tayeb Salih). This work is a seminal example of Arabic literature that explores the complexities of identity, migration, and the human experience.

of re-presentations of black identity began emerging at the turn of first two decades of the 21st century. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in what can be called “Arabic Black Slave Narrative” authored by individuals from diverse backgrounds including authors of black African descent. These literary works delve into the intricate and often overlooked history and legacy of slavery in the Arab world, shining a spotlight on the experiences of enslaved or freed black individuals and providing new perspectives on a subject that has been historically neglected or marginalised in mainstream discourse.

For example, the following scholars: (Gordon, 1992:13-17, Lewis, 1992:11-15, Davis, 2006:11, Wright, 2007: xiv, 22-23, Walz & Cuno, 2010:1 & Gakunzi, 2018:40-42), agree that while the transatlantic slave trade is well-documented and widely recognised particularly in literature⁶, the history of slavery in the Arab world, including the East African and trans-Saharan slave trade, has received comparatively less attention.

Written nearly a decade after independence from British colonial rule, the novel offers a nuanced portrayal of the struggles and triumphs of individuals navigating the intersection of cultural heritage and national identity. Both novels serve as important precursors to the growing trend of Arabic Novel that would later pave the way for future authors to explore themes of slavery, blackness, and identity in the 21st century (al-Bhairi, 2019:71-73).

⁶ For example, in literature, there were numerous “slave narratives” published during the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly in the United States. While it is difficult to provide an exact number, some historians (Olney, 1984:1) estimate that “over six thousand” existed already, and around 100 or more “slave narratives” were published during this period (Schmidt, 1997: 457–58). Some of the most famous and widely read “slave narratives” include “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave” (1845), which sold in America alone about “5,000 copies in four months and 11,000 copies in two years.” (Gould, 2007:24) These narratives provided first-hand accounts of the experiences of former slaves, revealing the harsh realities of slavery, and serving as powerful tools in the abolitionist movement (Ibid:16-21).

1.3.1 Factors that Contributed to the Relative Scarcity of “Arabic Slave Narrative” in Arab Societies Before 21st Century

The relative scarcity⁷ of any form of “Arabic slave narratives” within Arab societies, in contrast to the prominence of American literary narratives such as “Slave Narratives⁸” and “Neo-Slave Narratives⁹” can be attributed to a variety of factors. Building on the expertise of leading scholars in the field of slavery studies, including (Badawī, 1988:3-17, Gordon, 1992:9-17, Lewis, 1992: iv, Toledano, 1998:135 & 2002:57-74, Hunwick, 1999: 2-4, Prah, 2005:2, Clarence-Smith, 2006: 1-6, McNeese, 2008:7-29, Marfo, 2009:1213-1222, Jankowsky, 2010:43, Walz & Cuno 2010:1-5, El Hamel, 2013:13-14, Joseph, 2015:27-28, Cronin, 2016: 953-977, Gakunzi, 2018:40-42, Brown, 2019: 147-195, Ltifi, 2020:124-5, Bouzan, 2021:68-70 & Khannous, 2022: vii), we can distil the key factors into the following summary:

1. Historical Documentation: Slave narratives rely on the existence of “first-hand accounts¹⁰” written or recorded by enslaved individuals. In the context of American slavery, there was a long

⁷ As far as I am aware, there are currently no official statistics available for “Arabic Slave Narrative” that have been directly penned by former slaves and published in the Arab world. The only instance I have been able to find is a 15-page autobiography written in Arabic by Omar Bin Said in 1831, where he recounts his experiences as an enslaved person in the United States. Omar, a Muslim man who was captured in Senegal, Africa, was taken to Charleston, South Carolina, where he lived as a slave (Osman, G., & Forbes, C. F., 2004: 331–343). However, in his article *The Authenticity of Arabic Slave Narratives*, Abdulhafeth Ali Khrisat highlights the existence of additional narratives written in Arabic by Muslims in 19th-century America. One such example is Prince *Abdul Rahaman*, who penned accounts in both Arabic and English, but faced significant barriers to publication due to linguistic and ideological obstacles. Specifically, white editors, often with abolitionist agendas, sought to manipulate these narratives for propaganda purposes, hindering their widespread dissemination (Khrisat, 2005:73-96) In terms of contemporary Arabic narratives, written by authors who are often descendants of enslaved Africans or deeply engaged in the legacy of slavery, their numbers are limited. According to researcher Osama al-Behairi, the availability of such narratives is sparse (al-Behairi, 2019:71-75).

⁸ “Slave Narratives” are a literary genre that records the experience of slavery from the perspective of a person who survived slavery. According to Sue Peabody, slave narrative is “the autobiographical story of particular slaves, told in the first person, often (but not always) with the assistance of a more educated scribe who was dedicated to the abolitionist movement.” (Peabody, 2022:167) This genre has primarily emerged in response to the abolitionist movement to end the Atlantic slave trade in North America at least since the 18th century.

⁹ “Neo-Slave Narratives”, according to Dubey, is “a term coined by Bernard Bell and defined as modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom.” (Dubey, 2010:332) This term primarily refers to the literary genre of contemporary narratives of slavery that emerged in the Western world, particularly in the United States of America, after World War II, “in response to historical amnesia about slavery.” (Ibid:333) These narratives are written by authors who are often descendants of enslaved Africans or individuals deeply engaged with the legacy of slavery (Rushdy, 1999: 3-7, Dubey, 2010:332-33 and Anim-Addo, J., & Lima, M. H, 2017: 3-13).

¹⁰ “First-person accounts” is a personal narrative directly from someone who experienced or witnessed slavery, while a second-person account is a narrative presented as if the storyteller were addressing or speaking directly to enslaved individuals, allowing for empathy and engagement with the subject matter. See (Joseph-Vilain, 2022:155-176).

tradition of preserving slave narratives, often with the help of abolitionists and sympathetic writers¹¹. By contrast, the documentation and preservation of slave narratives written in Arabic or otherwise in Arab-Islamic societies may have been less comprehensive or systematically conducted, which could explain one possible reason for their absence. Autobiographical accounts of enslaved individuals during the Ottoman era, for instance, are scarce, according to Toledano and Altaieb. Toledano notes that while slaves are mentioned in Ottoman texts, they primarily appear in government and court records where their statements were recorded by state officials, distancing them from authentic, personal narratives. As a result, Ottoman slaves were often “contained” and “represented” by their masters or other non-slave members of society (Toledano, 2002, 59).

Similarly, in her thesis¹² on the history of slavery in Libya during Ottoman rule, Altaieb highlights the primary sources she utilised, which include records from the Islamic courts in Tripoli and Ghadames, the cities most prominent in the caravan trade. Specifically, she relied on the Sharia Court Records, which are housed at the National Centre for Archives and Historical Studies in Tripoli and its branch in Ghadames. The collection comprises around 3,820 handwritten records, written primarily in Maghreb Arabic script with a few entries in Ottoman Turkish, spanning from 1741 to 1911 across the entire country. While these documents address a range of topics such as marriage, divorce, enslavement, manumission, inheritance, property, and trade, they lack personal accounts or biographies from enslaved or freed individuals (Altaieb, 2015:53).

Additionally, although Altaieb gathered more sources for her research, including interviews with 14 slave owners from various regions of Libya, she notes that she was unable to obtain a single interview with the descendants of slaves. According to her, “Collecting oral material on slavery is extremely difficult, because of the stigma attached to such a sensitive subject.” (Ibid:57) Furthermore, even attempting to conduct interviews with descendants of slave masters was also challenging to her due to the same reason - the topic of race remains a sensitive and

¹¹ See for example: (1) Olney, J. (1984). “I Was Born”: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature. *Callaloo*, 20, 46–73. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2930678>, (2) Barrett, L. (1995). African-American Slave Narratives: Literacy, the Body, Authority. *American Literary History*, 7(3), 415–442. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/489846>, and (3) Sekora, J. (1987). Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative. *Callaloo*, 32, 482–515. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2930465>.

¹² Titled “The Social and Economic History of Slavery in Libya (1800- 1950”, this unpublished thesis was submitted to the University of Manchester in 2015 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities, specifically within the Faculty of Arts, Languages, and Cultures.

embarrassing issue for both the enslaved and the slave masters, making it difficult to engage in open and honest conversations about this painful aspect of Libya's past (Ibid:58).

Toledano argues that this does not only apply to the Ottoman period, but,

As of now, we do not possess first-hand, direct accounts by Ottoman slaves, nor by slaves in other Muslim societies. No diaries compiled by slaves have been found; no slave family histories or the like have come to light (Ibid:59)

From his end, Richard Jankowsky highlights a similar lack of re-presentation among African diasporas in North Africa, particularly in Tunisia. He observes that unlike the African diaspora in the Americas, the descendants of slaves and other sub-Saharan populations in Tunisia did not produce a significant group of scholars, writers, or public figures who incorporated African culture and historical narratives into the national heritage (Jankowsky, 2010:43).

The absence of the literary genre that captures the first-hand experience of slavery was not restricted to Arabic prose narratives alone. The portrayal of the suffering of slavery experience by Black poets¹³ in Arabic poetry, which had been prevalent from pre-Islamic times until the Abbasid era in the 8th century, has also vanished. Lewis suggests that the vanishing of this tradition occurred because Arab poets of African or mixed African descent became so assimilated into society that they no longer identified as black or distinct (Lewis, 1985:96). On the other hand, researcher Abdo Badawī proposes that the waning presence of black poets in Arabic poetry can be attributed to several factors. These include: (a) A lack of interest from authorities and the general public, (b) Limited ability to navigate the royal courts and establish connections with ruling elites, (c) Disinclination to compose poetry that praises the ruling class, which could bring them recognition and fame, (d) A lack of interest in flirting with women due to the societal stigma associated with their skin colour, and (e) Deficiencies in their mastery of Arabic language, including pronunciation and poetic form, which hindered their ability to improve their recitation skills such as Abu al-Attā al-Sindī who did not have required skills. This is particularly important in Arabic poetry, where recitation is often crucial for captivating audiences (Badawī, 1988:4-6).

2. Cultural Factors: The cultural norms and traditions within Arab societies might have influenced the recording and dissemination of slave narratives. Oral traditions and communal storytelling

¹³ The earliest black poets in the Arab literary tradition were referred to as *Aghribat al-Arab* “the Crows of the Arabs”. This nickname was attributed to a collective of black poets whose African origin was evident through their skin colour, drawing comparisons to the “crow”, a bird associated with darkness and omens among the Arabs (Lewis, 1985:88 & Badawī, 1988:21).

have historically played a significant role in transmitting history and knowledge (Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008:7). This reliance on oral tradition may have meant fewer written narratives, making it harder to trace and document individual slave experiences. For instance, the percentage of literacy among the Muslim population of the Ottoman Empire was approximately 2 percent in the early 19th century, increasing to around 15 percent by the end of the century (Quataert, 2005: 169). It is widely understood that lower literacy rates often lead to a greater dependence on oral transmission of information. Nevertheless, despite the increased availability of writing in this 21st century, there are still significant barriers to preserving and sharing the oral stories of enslaved individuals. In this context, researcher Michael Ferguson notes that one major obstacle is the pervasive climate of fear among black African people in modern Turkey who identify as Turkish citizens. This fear stems from the stigma and shame associated with publicly acknowledging their past, which diverges from the dominant historical narrative. Specifically, speaking out about their enslaved descendant experiences is often seen as a source of embarrassment and fear by many people of African descent in Izmir (Ferguson, 2014: 215).

In addition to the above-mentioned challenges the researcher Altaleb faced in obtaining oral histories from former slaves or their descendants, Libyan novelist Najwa Bin Shatwan encountered a similar challenge when she sought to uncover oral histories to inform her historical novel of black slaves in early 20th-century Benghazi, Libya. In her efforts to gather information, she spoke with elderly residents who had lived through those times. However, despite her attempts to engage with them, none were willing to openly discuss their painful experiences (Viene, 2017).

3. Language and Literacy: The majority of slave narratives from American slavery were written in English, making them more widely accessible. The development of a strong literary tradition in the USA, along with the presence of printing presses and publishing houses, also played a role in the higher number of slave narratives produced in the country. Yet as mentioned earlier even when slave narratives were widely published in 19th-century America, they were subject to the scrutiny of editors, who were predominantly white and often served political agendas. Sekora argues in his essay *Black Letter, White Envelope*, “the slave narrative is born into a world of literary confinement—designed by otherness, plainness, facticity, and dictated forms.” (Sekora, 1987:488)

In light of Sekora and Khrisat's arguments (which were mentioned earlier), despite the potential for most former enslaved individuals in America to express themselves in English language, a rich

literary tradition can become stagnant and ineffective if it is stifled by censorship imposed by those in power who claim to be liberators. This is because the ability to publish and share stories is crucial for their preservation and dissemination, and without it, these narratives risk being lost forever, threatening the very existence of the literary tradition.

In contrast, the Arab slave trade encompassed a vast region with diverse cultures and languages, making it challenging to document and preserve individual accounts. Although some black writers¹⁴ may have mastered Arabic during the early and medieval Islamic eras, as Badawī notes, the chroniclers of Arabic literature often neglected to include most of black writers, considering them “newcomers” to Arab civilisation (Badawī, 1988:3). Exceptions aside¹⁵, black writers across different periods of Arab history (particularly late periods) either deliberately avoided drawing attention to themselves or were overlooked, leading to their erasure from the literary landscape. As mentioned earlier, Abdo Badawī suggests that this marginalisation persisted because black writers were relegated to the fringes of society, lacking the social standing to challenge their exclusion. According to Badawī, “They lived primarily on the edge of society rather than among the people, and they lacked the social foundation within society to face marginalisation.” (ibid.: 5)

This phenomenon of literary suppression can be extended to other historical periods, particularly during the Ottoman Empire's rule over the Arab world from the 16th to the early 20th century. Specifically, enslaved black Africans who were forcibly brought to foreign lands, or were non-Muslims, or lacked proficiency in Arabic, were likely to have their narratives silenced or erased. The Ottoman Empire, for instance, frequently suppressed stories that diverged from its idealised notion of the Ottoman citizen, regardless of the language in which they were told (Durugönül, 2003: 281-294; Ferguson, 2014: 22-26; Ayşegül, 2020: 56-61). This censorship could have had a profound impact on the literary traditions of marginalised groups, potentially leading

¹⁴ During this period, some black writers who gained prominence were poets who frequently highlighted their blackness and slavery in their poems, as a way to define their identity as a vital part of society. One such example is Suḥaym (d. 660), whose name means “black” in Arabic, and was referred to as one of the “crows of the Arabs”. As a Nubian African poet living in pre- and early Islamic times, Suḥaym's works reflected his experiences with social relations, discrimination, and persecution, which he faced until his death. Due to his enslavement, black skin colour, and rebellion poetry, he occupied the lowest social positions in Arab society (Lewis, 1992:28-9 & Badawī, 1988: 89).

¹⁵ One of these exceptions to the silence on black experiences in medieval Arab history is the Muslim author Abu 'Uthman al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 869), who was of African origin and lived in the 9th century. While not a traditional slave narrative, al-Jāḥiẓ wrote a book in Arabic with political undertones, titled *Kitāb Fakhr al-Sūdān 'ālā al-Bīdān* or “The Superiority of Blacks over Whites”, which was published during the reign of the Abbasid authorities in Baghdad. In this work, al-Jāḥiẓ argues that black Africans should be honoured due to their unique and distinctive traits, which set them apart from other races (Ingram, 2015:6-54).

to a loss of cultural heritage and historical memory. For example, Turkish researcher Esma Durugönül notes that during the Ottoman and Republican eras,

Africans have been considered as Turks/Muslims. As a consequence, Afro-Turks are virtually statistically non-existent in the official demographic records of the Ottoman and Republican eras of Turkish history. Little wonder, therefore, that Afro-Turks are absent from state reference sources such as yearbooks, indexes, and statistics (Durugönül, 2003:289)

In fact, the only way to gather information about the descendants of enslaved Africans in Turkey, particularly those living in Antalya, she observes, is through on-site observations or interviews conducted in the villages where they reside. This scarcity of scholarly work on the subject is a major obstacle to understanding the past and current situation of this marginalised group in Turkey (Ibid:290).

Moreover, access to oral archives about African Turks seems to be similarly restricted. According to researcher Michael Ferguson, despite promises to make the results of the Turkish Historical Society's oral history project about minority Turkish black people available to the public, it remains difficult to access these archived interviews (Ferguson, 2014: 209). This lack of transparency and limited access to historical records perpetuates the erasure of African Turks from Turkey's collective memory.

Given the lack of presence of Africans in official Turkish records, it is logical to conclude that narratives about slavery are unlikely to be readily available. Moreover, even if such narratives did exist, their dissemination would have been hindered by the ban on printing in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century, which limited the widespread availability of books among the general public (Rubin, 2017: 105). This further reinforces the notion that regulatory authorities had a significant impact on what was deemed publishable and what was not. As a result, it is likely that stories about slavery were suppressed due to their perceived undesirability and lack of importance by those in power.

As previously mentioned, this phenomenon extends beyond language barriers and cultural differences, as seen in the American case. Toledano notes that power dynamics and social structures also played a significant role in Ottoman society in determining the ability of enslaved individuals to share and disseminate their stories (Toledano, 2002: 58). This highlights that the scarcity of narratives about slavery in Turkey is not solely a result of linguistic or cultural barriers,

but also a consequence of the powerful elite's control over what information is disseminated and what is silenced.

As a result of the historical lack of documentation and recognition, Turks of African descent had to wait until 2005 to publish a biography in Turkish. Mustafa Olpak's book¹⁶, *Kenya-Gerit-Istanbul: Köle Kıyısından İnsan Biyografileri* (Kenya-Crete-Istanbul: Human Biographies from the Slave Coast) (Ayşegül, 2020:46), is a significant milestone, as it tells the story of his family's journey from slavery in Africa to their integration into modern Turkey in the 20th century. According to Ferguson, Olpak's book sparked a new debate about the history of people of African descent in modern Turkey (Ferguson, 2014:13). With the support of international organizations such as UNESCO and the European Union, Olpak founded the African Culture and Solidarity Association (ACSA), which is currently headquartered in Izmir. Since 2005, Olpak has emerged as an unofficial leader of the Afro-Turkish community, working tirelessly to raise their profile and discuss the history of slavery in Turkey openly for the first time (ibid.: 13).

4. Historical Context: The transatlantic slave trade and the subsequent enslavement of Africans in America constituted a distinct and highly organised system that lasted for centuries, involving millions of people¹⁷. The scale and intensity of American slavery, combined with the subsequent abolitionist movements and debates, contributed to the proliferation of narratives about this specific episode in history. In comparison, the historical context of slavery in Arab societies varied across time and geographic regions, making it challenging to create a cohesive narrative

¹⁶ Mustafa Olpak (1953-2016) was a renowned Afro-Turkish writer and activist, born in Ayvalik, a town on the Aegean coast. As a third-generation descendant of enslaved Africans in Ottoman Turkey, Mustafa's life was deeply marked by his family's complex history. The youngest of five children, Mustafa's early life was shaped by his parents, Kamali and Mehmet. After completing primary school, he worked in a lathe workshop before becoming involved in the labour movement. Mustafa's personal life was also marked by significant events. In the late 1970s, Mustafa was arrested and briefly imprisoned during the 1980 coup. After his release, he found work as a marble labourer. What sets Mustafa apart from others with similar experiences is his remarkable journey as a writer. In the 1990s, he began to record his stories and those of his grandparents, delving into his family's history to understand and share their experiences. His research uncovered the shocking truth about his ancestors' forced removal from Kenya and their transportation through Crete to the Ottoman capital. The book mentioned above opens with a poignant phrase that reflects Mustafa's determination to explore his heritage: "The first generation lives, the second reacts, the third [re]searches." (Ayşegül, 2020:56–61, Toledano, 2007:51, Ferguson & Ayşegül, 2017:157-9, and Willoughby, 2021:1-11).

¹⁷ See for example: Rawley, J. A., & Behrendt, S. D. (2005). *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A history* (Rev.). University of Nebraska Press.

as diverse experiences of slavery existed. This notion is supported by the book *Race and Slavery in the Middle East* which highlights the disparity in the historical experience of slavery between America and Arab societies. The authors underscore that over a tenth of the U.S. population comprises descendants of enslaved Africans, and slavery played a pivotal role in dividing the nation, ultimately leading to a civil war. While slavery was a prevalent aspect of past Middle Eastern societies, its historical context differed significantly. Additionally, the construction of concepts akin to “racism” varied in America due to these historical distinctions (Walz & Cuno, 2010:1). Therefore, when David Gakunzi compares Western and Eastern forms and scale of slavery, he suggests that “the issue of the Eastern and Trans-Saharan slave trade organised by the Arabs remains unknown.” (Gakunzi, 2018:40)

5. Socio-Political Factors: The historical circumstances surrounding the abolition of slavery in the United States, combined with the legacy of racial segregation and ongoing struggle for civil rights, created a fertile ground for intense literary narratives about slavery (Smith, 2007:190). In contrast, the abolition of slavery in many Arab societies often occurred within larger, complex historical processes, such as decolonisation or modern nation-building, which may have shifted the focus away from narratives specifically centred around slavery. In this context, John Hunwick identifies key internal and external factors, such as political tensions between Middle Eastern countries and the sub-Saharan region in Africa. Hence, Arab regimes and their intellectual circles largely chose to ignore the issue of slavery to maintain diplomatic, cultural, and religious ties between the Arab world and contemporary African nations, where slaves had previously originated from. The colonial and Orientalist narrative as an external factor that portrays “Africa” and the “Middle East” as distinct and separate entities also plays a significant role in shaping these dynamics (Hunwick, 1999: 2-4).

6- Limited Public Discourse: In some Arab societies and settings, discussions about slavery may not be as prevalent or openly addressed compared to other topics. This can be influenced by factors such as historical sensitivities surrounding race and colour, cultural norms, and a desire to focus on more positive aspects of heritage. Bernard Lewis attributes the lack of discussion on slavery and its history in the Arab world to the “extreme sensitivity of the subject.” (Lewis, 1992: iv & Altaieb, 2015:57-58) Another expert on slavery in the Ottoman Empire points to prevailing political and academic attitudes in Arab society, as well as strict restrictions on Western researchers, as reasons for the limited discourse, described as a “deafening silence.” (Toledano, 1998: 135)

While sporadic works by individual researchers have been published in Arabic such as Badawī (1988) and Kazim (2004), there has yet to be a sustained research programme accompanied by ongoing discourse in this area, unlike in other regions such as the Americas, Africa, and Europe where discourse on slavery and the slave trade has evolved (Fay, 2019:3). Similarly, Suad Joseph highlights the limited attention given to the topics of race and racism in Middle Eastern anthropology. This lack of focus may be attributed, in her opinion, to the underdeveloped nature of discussions on race in public discourse within the region (Joseph, 2015:27). Moreover, Joseph notes that even highly educated scholars and activists in the Middle East often “deny that race, racialization, and race politics are social issue in their own countries. The operant terminology and conceptualization of difference is almost frozen in religious and ethnic terms.” (Ibid:27-8)

Additionally, although it is important to note that attitudes and perspectives can vary across different Arab countries and within different communities, Arab societies often place a strong emphasis on collective identity, familial and tribal ties, and shared cultural heritage. As a result, discussions about race and colour can challenge these notions by highlighting internal diversity and potential divisions within society, which some Arab writers and researchers may find uncomfortable. Abdul Rahman Alebrahim¹⁸, an independent researcher in modern Gulf history, opines, as reported by DW (Deutsche Welle), that recent laws enacted under the guise of national unity have inadvertently become factors that could exacerbate social divisions. These laws, such as the press, printing, and publishing regulations in Bahrain (2002) and Kuwait (2011), have significantly hindered people, particularly local historians, from openly discussing sensitive issues deemed socially taboo. Even when academics address the topic within the framework of social justice and equality, it is met with disapproval (Ghaedi, 2022).

While the broader topic of slavery may not be a highly sensitive subject, researchers often encounter challenges when examining the specific details and lingering effects of this painful period. In Kuwait, for instance, the rules of the game are clear: mentioning the names of freed slaves and their descendants is strictly prohibited by law, as testified in the above article. According to Hishām al-‘Awadī, a Kuwaiti academic and professor of history and political science at the American University of Kuwait, cultural taboos in Kuwaiti society pose a significant hurdle to discussing the history of slavery. al-‘Awadī observes that in an effort to foster social cohesion, many black and ethnic minority individuals in the Gulf states choose to suppress their cultural

¹⁸ See: Ghaedi, Monir. (2022). How are Gulf countries dealing with slavery?, 02/08/2022. Link accessed on 20/02/2024: <https://www.dw.com/en/how-are-gulf-countries-coming-to-terms-with-their-history-of-slavery/a-60686264>

and ethnic identity, instead prioritising their Kuwaiti nationality in public settings. “It has something to do with the way we explain our national identities here in the Gulf” he explained to DW. “We mainly emphasize homogeneity between our people, on the things we have in common” However, he lamented, “We do not celebrate our heterogeneity in our daily discourse.” (Ibid).

Academic researcher Touria Khannous maintains that discussions about race are often avoided in the public sphere due to the unequal power dynamics involved and the strong emotional reactions they provoke, which can limit rational discourse (Khannous, 2022: vii). Indeed, it can sometimes be seen as sensitive due to fears of stirring tensions, perpetuating discrimination, or exposing deep-seated prejudices. In this context, Jonathan Brown, in his book *Slavery and Islam* points out another factor contributing to the sensitivity surrounding discussions about slavery in the Arab world. He notes that there is a general aversion to talking about slavery among both Muslims and non-Muslims, with some, including many in academic circles, feeling that addressing or studying the moral implications of slavery is unnecessary. Brown suggests that the discomfort arises from the disruption of a fragile social consensus on a challenging and divisive topic, rather than from addressing settled issues. The dilemma of slavery and its moral complexities, whether for Muslims or Americans, remains just below the surface, resurfacing repeatedly (Brown, 2019:18).

From his end, the author of *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam*, Chouki El Hamel expresses his surprise at the prevalent what he called “culture of silence” surrounding discussions about slavery, racism, and gender issues in North Africa and more specifically in Morocco (El Hamel, 2013:13-14). The editor of the collection *Reflections on Arab-led Slavery of Africans*, Kwesi Prah, also acknowledges the prolonged duration of approximately 1400 years in which the subject of slavery in the Arab-speaking world “continues to be treated in a hush-hush fashion.” (Prah, 2005:2)

Furthermore, following the abolition of slavery in many Arab countries during the 20th century, discussions around slavery have also become a source of shame, particularly for families or tribes that were previously involved in the slave trade. For instance, the decision made by Libyan novelist Najwa Bin Shatwan to use her own surname for a character in her fictional novel serves as compelling evidence. Ltifi notes,

The author’s choice of Muhammad’s surname, Bin Shatwan, remains equally curious as it is the novelist’s own surname. Why Did Najwa Bin Shatwan burden herself with such

a responsibility vis-à-vis her characters? When asked about this choice, she said that she did not want to ‘clash with people’s real-life sensitivities’ by invoking another Libyan family’s last name (Ltifi, 2020:124-5)

7- The Moral Problem of Slavery and Its Implications: The perception of slavery as morally wrong has not been consistent throughout history. It was not until the early 18th century that large groups in the Western world began to collectively view slavery as morally reprehensible, largely due to the actions of “The Abolitionist Movement¹⁹” and the exposure of the terrifying conditions under which enslaved Africans were transported and exploited (Matthews, 1967:163-82). This shift in public opinion was influenced by a combination of social, economic, political, and moral factors, along with advancements in technology such as the availability of photographs. The rise of “enlightenment²⁰” ideals such as human rights, equality, and individual freedom was one of the major factors which contributed to a significant shift in public opinion. According to McNeese, “Enlightened Europeans ...came to believe that the laws of nature demanded a natural equality among humans, a principle that defined institutional slavery. The Enlightenment encouraged abolitionism.” (McNeese, 2008:29)

Nevertheless, an important inquiry surfaces regarding why the intellectual and theological schools of major religions, such as Islam and Christianity refrained from denouncing slavery until as late as the 19th century, spurred by “the abolitionist movement” in the Western world (Brown,

¹⁹ “The abolitionist movement” was a social and political movement that aimed to abolish the practice of slavery and the slave trade. It gained momentum in the Western world during the 18th and 19th centuries and was characterised by the work of activists and organisations who campaigned against the widespread practice of slavery. The abolitionist movement played a significant role in bringing about the end of the transatlantic slave trade and the eventual abolition of slavery in many countries (McNeese, 2008:7-29).

²⁰ Enlightenment thinkers in Europe, despite their varied viewpoints, converged on four core principles that laid the groundwork for the movement's profound impact on modern society, shaping the foundation for human rights, equality, and individual freedom. These core assumptions were: (1) The existence of absolute truth: That there are objective truths that exist independently of individual perspectives and are universally applicable. (2) The pursuit of knowledge: The notion that it is possible to acquire objective knowledge about these truths through observation, investigation, and reasoning. (3) The primacy of reason: The conviction that reason is the most effective means of achieving and justifying knowledge, as it allows for the application of logic and critical thinking to understand the world. (4) The potential for progress: The idea that by acting rationally in response to this acquired knowledge, individuals can increase their chances of achieving their goals and improving their circumstances. The first three principles drew inspiration from the scientific method's success in uncovering empirical truths. In contrast, the fourth principle was influenced by technological advancements, which demonstrated the power of human innovation and problem-solving capabilities. By harnessing reason and the knowledge it provides, Enlightenment thinkers believed that individuals could use their cognitive abilities to shape their own destinies (Chisick, 2005: 1-56 & Robertson, 2015:1-14).

2019:6). This has been a difficult challenge for contemporary societies, particularly for those who look to the religion for guidance or who see it as a source of divine authority. In his book *Islam and Slavery*, American Muslim scholar Jonathan Brown refers to the challenges slavery poses as “The Slavery Conundrum”²¹ The use of the term “Conundrum” underscores the challenges and contradictions involved in comprehensively grappling with the lasting effects of slavery on both Islamic and American histories (Brown, 2019:147-150).

On an intellectual level, in the 19th century, secularists in the West tackled the moral question surrounding religion by adopting a “historicism” to the New and Old Testament, which led them to view the Bible as a human document rather than a divinely inspired text (Brettler et al., 2012:1 & Peters, 2011:xix). Ringer argues that “historicism” challenges the idea of historical transcendence and truth by grounding religion in history. This perspective reveals that religious dogma and traditions are not timeless truths but rather products of specific historical contexts, emphasising their contingent and contextual nature (Ringer, 2020:18). Historicist secular scholars from the 19th century onward utilised this perspective to interpret religious practices, rituals, and even the institution of slavery in ancient societies as human creations rather than divine mandates (Peters, 2011:30). This view simplifies the moral complexities surrounding slavery by framing it as a historical and social construct within the broader context of religion as a product of human culture.

However, Islamic societies, where the Qur’an is revered by the majority as the literal word of God²², face a challenge in justifying the permissibility of slavery during the time of Muhammad,

²¹ “The Slavery Conundrum” presents a challenging dilemma where three conflicting beliefs cannot be logically reconciled. The first axiom asserts that slavery is inherently morally wrong, regardless of circumstances, as it is an evil in itself, not dependent on outcomes or conditions. The second axiom simply states that slavery is slavery, with no distinction between “good” or “bad” forms of the institution. Finally, the third axiom acknowledges the moral authority of history over the present, recognizing that figures from the past, despite their imperfections, can offer valuable insights and guidance. This conundrum arises from the difficulty of simultaneously upholding these three axioms, each of which presents a different perspective on the ethical implications of slavery. Brown suggests that “the Slavery Conundrum” arises from the challenge of reconciling three conflicting axioms simultaneously. The dilemma stems from the inherent contradiction among these axioms, as it is impossible to deny or affirm all of them cohesively. If slavery, defined as a severe moral wrongdoing, is considered intrinsic and abhorrent, then those who supported or engaged in it are culpable of a serious moral transgression and are unsuitable for providing moral or legal guidance in the present day (Brown, 2019:147-195).

²² In his work titled in Arabic: “لماذا يخشى المسلمون النقد التاريخي؟”, (Why Do Muslims Fear ‘historicism’?), Tunisian scholar Faouzi Bedoui delves into the challenges hindering the acceptance of ‘historicism’ within Arab-Islamic culture, particularly when applied to religious texts. He offers solutions to overcome this issue to ensure the relevance of the Qur’anic text in the 21st century. See: Bedoui, Faouzi. (2015). “لماذا يخشى المسلمون النقد التاريخي؟” (Why do Muslims Fear ‘historicism’?). Annals of the Tunisian University, Manouba University, Tunisia. PP. 9-35.

as the Qur'an does not explicitly condemn slavery as morally wrong (Lewis, 1992:5 & Gordon, 1992:19-21). While some scholars²³, such as Chouki El Hamel, Bernard K. Freamon, including Jonathan Brown, acknowledge that the Qur'an recognises the pre-Islamic institution of slavery and the social hierarchy separating slaves from non-slaves, they also believe that the Qur'an acknowledges the humanity of slaves and their desire for freedom from racism and discrimination. According to this perspective, the Qur'an's provisions regarding slavery are viewed as liberating, as they encourage the liberation of slaves as an act of charity and atonement for past wrongdoings (El Hamel, 2013:18, 42, 46-51, Freamon, 2019:122-3 & Brown, 2019:84).

Yet, the central question²⁴ is not whether slaves should be treated well or not, but rather what constitutes absolute evil or fundamental moral wrong. In ethics, moral wrongness can take two forms: intrinsic or consequential. Intrinsic errors are those that are wrong in and of themselves, regardless of context or outcome. For instance, murder and genocide are fundamentally morally wrong. On the other hand, consequential errors occur when an action leads to negative outcomes but may be justified if the intended outcome is positive. According to Brown, slavery is fundamentally morally wrong because it is based on three flawed premises: first, the idea that all human beings are equal is undermined by the institution of slavery; second, slavery is a form of domination and tyranny that deprives individuals of their right to choose their actions and beliefs; and third, it treats human beings as commodities rather than as beings with inherent dignity and value. These flaws make slavery a grave moral wrong that cannot be justified under any circumstances (Brown, 2019:159-160).

Therefore, to understand what makes something morally "substantial" we must consider both intrinsic and consequential errors. By recognising these two types of moral wrongs, we can better comprehend why slavery is considered a fundamental moral wrong rather than a consequential or teleological one.

²³ See also: (1) Mansur, Ali, 1971. 'al-Shari'ah al-Islamiyah wa-al-qanun al-Duwali al-'amm' (Islamic Sharia and Public International Law), Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Cairo, PP 55-6. (2) Tirmanini, Abd al-Salam, 1978. 'al-Riq: Madhihe wa Hadhireehe' (Slavery: Past and Present), Alem al-Ma'arifa, Kuwait, PP 32-33.

²⁴ It is important to note that there are two distinct ways to view or approach religion, as previously discussed on pages 44 and 45. The first perspective is historicist, which examines religion within its historical context, much like other social and cultural phenomena, and interprets it accordingly. The second perspective is faith-based, viewing religion as a sacred revelation from God, distinct from historical analysis, and interpreting it from that standpoint. Each approach deserves respect and appreciation, yet there are differences.

While the debate surrounding the legalisation of slavery and the establishment of regulations to improve the lives of slaves is a distinct issue, Brown's analysis of prominent religious traditions like Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism suggests that the absence of explicit divine condemnations of the moral wrongness of slavery in these beliefs implies that they either condoned, tolerated, or accepted the institution (Brown, 2019:161).

As mentioned earlier, while the secular West has, to some extent, successfully viewed slavery as a human institution by applying the principles of historicism to their religious texts, failing to apply these same principles to the Qur'anic text makes it challenging, in my view, to distinguish between what is religious and what is historical. This perceived failure can be seen as an affront to God by those who attribute the legislation of slavery to Him, as it contradicts even the Islamic understanding of God as all-knowing, omniscient, and just (Qur'an, 16:90).

The lack of explicit condemnation of slavery as a moral evil in Islamic texts raises significant questions about how devout Muslims who believe in the divine origin of the Qur'an can reconcile this absence with their religious beliefs. In this context, Clarence-Smith suggests that the stance of these individuals "springs from a contradictory desire to condemn slavery and spare Islam." (Clarence-Smith, 2006:1)

This issue is particularly sensitive, given the history of persecution, censorship²⁵, and even murder faced by individuals who have criticised religion in the Arab world (Abudi, 2011:143; al-Behairi, 2019:22-4). As a result, some Arab writers may opt not to address this topic at all, fearing potential conflict or challenges to the moral authority of God, Islam, and the prophet Muhammad.

As historical, social, cultural, and political contexts in Arab countries shifted starting in the mid-20th century, the Arab literary landscape began to transform. This change was influenced by various factors that prompted the emergence of narratives focusing on slavery and its history in the region. These factors will be explored in the subsequent sections. To illustrate this trend, we will begin by presenting a list of 15 novels published in the early years of the current century.

²⁵ For more on the topic of persecution and censorship in the Arab world, see: Najjar, F. M. (1998). Islamic Fundamentalism and the Intellectuals: The Case of Naguib Mahfouz. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 25(1), 139–168. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/195851>

1.4 The List of 15 “Arabic Black Slave Narrative” Published at the Turn of the 21st Century:

In the early 21st century, a limited but notable body of Arabic literature has emerged (some of which will be listed below), which has significantly contributed to ongoing debates about the history and legacies of slavery, as well as the racial and colour biases associated with it, in the Arab world. While some novels explore historical periods that include slavery as a theme, others shed light on the experiences of black individuals. Generally, these contemporary notable Arabic slave novels address various aspects related to slavery and blackness, including historical slavery, racial discrimination, cultural identity, and social dynamics.

The following list highlights contemporary Arabic novels that explore the themes of historical slavery and its lasting impact on society today. Since there is no comprehensive bibliography of Arabic novels addressing slavery, the selected texts were chosen based on one or more of the following criteria: (1) they are cited in scholarly sources and research; (2) they received significant media attention and coverage at conferences; (3) they have won literary awards or been translated into other languages; (4) they reflect ethnic diversity, particularly in more diverse Arab societies with large black populations or a history of slavery; and (5) they re-present broad and diverse cultural perspectives, including those from authors of African descent and white authors who explore issues affecting minority and marginalised communities.

Here are 15 listed examples of these fictional novels that engage with the theme of slavery or blackness, written by Arab authors (females & males) mostly with white background²⁶ that arranged chronologically according to their earliest publication:

1.4.1 ***Dongola: A Novel of Nubia* (Arabic original title: *دنگولا/Dongola: Riwaya Nubiya*), by the Egyptian novelist Idris Ali, published in 1993 by General Egyptian Book Organisation, Egypt.**

Donqola Riwaya Nubiya marks the debut of the first Nubian novel ever translated into English. Originally published first in Arabic in 1993, the novel was then honoured with the University of

²⁶ “*Dongola*” and “*Maymoūna*” were the only novels from above listed works written by authors of “black” origin. The Egyptian author of Nubian origin Idris Ali and the Saudi writer of African origin, Maḥmūd Trāwrī who both consider themselves “black Africans”. See (1) Qualey, Lynx. M. (2020) *Black Saudi Author Focuses on Neglected History of African Migration and Slavery*. al-Fanar Media (News Organisation), July 24, 2020. (2) DiMeo, D. (2015). Unimaginable Community: The Failure of Nubian Nationalism in Idris Ali’s *Dongola*. *Research in African Literatures*, 46(1), 72–89.

Arkansas Press Award for Arabic Literature in Translation in 1997. Delving into the theme of Black Nubia in Egypt during the latter half of the 20th century, Dongola's narrative skilfully evokes the poignant memories of the older generation of resettled Egyptian Nubians who continue to mourn the loss of their ancestral lands (Kaaki, 2006).

1.4.2 *Maymūna* (Arabic original title: *ميمونة*/ *Maymūna*), by the Saudi novelist Maḥmūd Trāwri, published in 2002 by Department of Culture and Information, United Arab Emirate.

Maymūna explores the historical presence of African community in the Hijaz region in the 20th century by tracing the migration of a black African family from Mali to the area. It chronicles their challenges and their integration into the societal tapestry of the Arabian Peninsula. Woven into the narrative are historical events, myths, and tales of oppressed communities throughout history, highlighting the significant population of black Saudis, predominantly residing in the western region near Mecca. Recipient of the Sharjah Award for Arab Creativity in 2001, the novel's significance lies in its authorship by Maḥmūd Trāwri, a black writer, as it sheds light on a lesser-known aspect of the region's history and culture (Qualey, 2020).

1.4.3 *Rayḥana* (Arabic original title: *ريحانة*/ *Rayḥana*), by the Emirati novelist Maysoon Saqar, published in 2003 by Dar al-Hilal, Egypt.

The novel delves into a lesser-known chapter of the history of slavery in the Arabian Gulf Emirates, portraying snippets of the journey of the slave *Rayḥana* and her family as they serve their masters in the household of the ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah up until the mid-twentieth century. During a symposium hosted by the Cairo International Book Fair in 2003, which featured a panel of critics, Egyptian thinker Mahmoud Amin al-Alam noted the novel's rich portrayal of human, political, and intellectual relationships. Additionally, he acknowledged the novel's exploration of one of the most sensitive topics in the Arab world - the complex issues of slavery and liberation (al-Jazeera Net, 2003).

1.4.4 *Kuku Sudan Kabāshī* (Arabic original title: *كوكو سودان كباشي*), by the Egyptian writer Salwa Bakr, published in 2004 by Dar Merit, Egypt.

The novel *Kuku Sudan Kabāshī* named after a Sudanese soldier, narrates the harrowing experiences and injustices faced by members of the Sudanese band who were captured as slaves in the African jungles. They were subsequently sent by the Egyptian government in 1863 to aid Emperor Napoleon III of France in his campaign in Mexico. Through *Kuku Sudan Kabāshī* the

novel contributes to portraying a positive depiction of black individuals by emphasising the human aspects of their personalities and family dynamics. It showcases their deep connection to their roots and homeland, offering insight into their emotions and experiences both before and after being subjected to slavery, as recounted by the inner narrator (al-Bhairi, 2019:82-106).

1.4.5 *Hend and the Soldiers* (Arabic original title: *هند والعسكر/Hend wa-l-'Askar*), by the Saudi novelist Badriyya I-Biṣr, published in 2006 by Dar al 'Adab, Lebanon.

According to Marcia Lynx Qualey's review on the German website Qantara²⁷, Badriah Albeshr's *Hend wa-l-'Askar*, caused a stir in Saudi Arabia upon its initial Arabic publication in 2006. The 128-page novella, skilfully translated by Sanna Dhahir and released by the University of Texas at Austin in 2017, begins with the family servant recounting stories of *Hend's* mother and *Nweyyir*, a former slave who was taken and sold to *Hend's* grandfather. Although slavery was officially abolished by King Faisal in the 1960s, entrenched hierarchies persist in the novella. *Nweyyir* continues to work for the family without compensation, and her daughter *Ammousha* later becomes *Hend's* servant. *Ammousha* serves as the family's unseen memory, observing and remembering everything while always concealing her face, even from the younger members of the household (Qualey, 2017).

1.4.6 *Days of Ignorance* (Arabic original title: *جاهلية/ Ġāhiliyya*), by the Saudi novelist Laylā I-Ġuhanī, published in 2008 by Dar al Adab, Lebanon.

Published in 2007, *Ġāhiliyya* is the second novel in the author's literary career and centres on the story of a young black Saudi man who falls in love with a Saudi girl. The girl's brother violently opposes their relationship, objecting to his sister being involved with a black man. Reflecting prevalent themes in contemporary Saudi literature, the novel addresses issues of racism within Medina society. In *Ġāhiliyya* the portrayal of the black protagonist, *Malik*, aligns with positive representations of black individuals. *Malik* is depicted as academically accomplished, culturally aware, resilient in the face of challenges, and remarkably tolerant towards the racist adversity he encounters (Halafawi, 2017).

²⁷ See: Qualey, Lynx. (2017). In Fear of the Fury. Qantara Website, 09/08/2017. Link accessed on 24/01/2024: <https://qantara.de/en/article/book-review-badriah-albeshr%E2%80%B2s-%E2%80%B3hend-and-soldiers%E2%80%B3fear-fury>.

1.4.7 *Black Taste, Black Odour* (Arabic original title: رائحة أسود، طعام أسود/ *Ta'am Aswād, Ra'eha Swada*), by the Yemeni writer Ali al-Muqri, published in 2008 by Dar al-Saqi, Lebanon.

Published in Arabic in 2008 and nominated for the IPAF²⁸ in 2009, *Ta'am 'Aswad, Ra'eha Swada* by Yemeni writer Ali Al-Muqri immerses readers in the impoverished slums of Taiz. The novel delves into the harsh realities of poverty, degradation, cruelty, and injustice prevalent in this setting, drawing on historical research to shed light on the plight of the marginalised “Akhdam” class in contemporary Yemeni society (IPAF, 2009).

1.4.8 *Because I Am Black* (Arabic original title: لأنني أسود/ *Li-annī aswād*), by the Kuwaiti writer Sa'dā' al-Da'as, published in 2010 by Advice Art Production, Kuwait.

Li-annī aswād stands out as a bold Arab literary work that challenges marginalisation and the negative stereotypes associated with the colour black. In a similar vein to many Gulf feminist novels, the author uses blackness as a powerful tool to dismantle societal misconceptions about the colour, which is often viewed as a burden. Set against the backdrop of contemporary Kuwaiti society in the 1990s, the novel, which was awarded the State Encouragement Award in 2010, offers a unique perspective on black life through the internal narrator, highlighting the protagonist's quest for acceptance and humanity in a country where whiteness dominates and dictates societal norms (al-Shabibi, 2018).

1.4.9 *Gorilla* (Arabic original title: الغوريلا/ *al-Gorilla*), by the Tunisian novelist Kamel Riahi, published in 2011 by Dar al-Saqi, Lebanon.

al-Gorilla delves into the harsh realities that led to the Tunisian revolution on January 14, 2011. The story follows a black man who climbs the 7th of November Clock Tower in the heart of Tunisia's capital, refusing to descend for seven hours. Subsequently, he is apprehended by the police and taken to an undisclosed location for questioning, never to be seen or heard from again. Through this gripping tale, the author explores the theme of racial discrimination in Tunisia, recounting the sufferings of the black protagonist from his childhood up to the moment

²⁸ The International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) is considered the most prestigious and significant literary award in the Arab world. Its purpose is to recognise outstanding achievements in modern Arabic literature and promote the reading of high-quality Arabic works on a global scale by translating and publishing winning and shortlisted novels in various languages. The prize is currently sponsored by the Abu Dhabi Arabic Language Centre, a part of the Department of Culture and Tourism. Its website can be visited through this link: <https://arabicfiction.org/>.

he scales the clock tower, a poignant symbol of the regime of the deposed President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (Vericat, 2014:8-11).

1.4.10 *The Longing of the Dervish* (Arabic original title: *شوق الدرويش* / *Shawq al-Darwish*), by the Sudanese novelist Hammour Ziyada, published in 2014 by *Dar al-Ain*, Egypt.

The novel, which was shortlisted for the IPAF in 2015, explores the social conflict between Christian and Islamic Sufi cultures in Sudan, against the backdrop of the decline of the religious state model. Through powerful reflections on themes of love, religion, betrayal, and political turmoil, the story unfolds during a sensitive period in Sudan's modern history. After enduring a life filled with slavery, captivity, imprisonment, and exploitation, the protagonist, *Bakhit Mandil*, seeks revenge against those responsible for his suffering upon his release from prison (IPAF, 2015).

1.4.11 *The Black Brigade* (Arabic original title: *كتيبة سوداء* / *Katiba Sawd'a*), by the Egyptian novelist Muhammad Qandil, published in 2015 by *Dar al-Shorouk*, Egypt.

Katiba Sawd'a, a 2016 IPAF nominee, chronicles the years between 1863 and 1867, drawing inspiration from forgotten yet true events. The author traces the journey of a black slave who dares to challenge his captor, ultimately rising to lead his group through the adversities faced from Sudan to Egypt, and onward to Mexico. Along the way, he is chosen by the Empress to be her companion and protector, eventually playing a pivotal role in the French Revolution and the Commune of 1867. The narrative unfolds amidst two intertwined conflicts - a colonial power struggle between nations and rulers for dominance, influence, and wealth, and an internal struggle amongst the black brigade members, torn from Africa and thrust into a battle they had no stake in, driven solely by the primal urge to survive (IPAF, 2016).

1.4.12 *Slaves' Peanuts* (Arabic original title: *فستق عبيد* / *Fustuq 'abīd*), by the Jordanian novelist Samiha Khrais, published in 2016 by the General Egyptian Book Organisation, Egypt.

Fustuq 'abīd, the award-winning novel, honoured with the Katara Prize for Arabic Literature in 2017, follows the tale of a young girl hailing from Darfur in western Sudan. Abducted and traded in the slave market, she finds herself purchased by a Portuguese feudal lord who brings her to his estate to toil at his palace adjoining the farm. Set against the backdrop of World War II, the story unfolds during a time when agreements to eradicate slavery in Europe remained unfulfilled, as European societies continued to rely on the importation of cheap labour from Africa (Shureteh et al., 2022: 949–969).

1.4.13 *The Price of Salt* (Arabic original title: *ثمن الملح* / *Thaman al-Milḥ*), by the Bahraini writer Khaled al-Bassam, published in 2016 by Jadawel for publishing, translation, and distribution, Bahrain.

According to al-Khaleej Newspaper, the posthumously published novel *Thaman al-Milḥ* recounts the turmoil of slavery in Bahrain during the years 1900 to 1908, under British rule. The narrative follows the harrowing odyssey of a young Ethiopian girl, journeying from Abyssinia to Bahrain via Mecca after her desperate parents sell her in the market due to destitution. Through vivid storytelling, the book delves into Bahraini Muslim society's historical and cultural dynamics, exploring their interactions with slaves and their relationship with the Christian West, as epitomised by Great Britain. The author sheds light on the intricate cultural and economic milieu that enabled slavery to thrive, alongside the community's resistance to its abolition (Madan, 2017).

1.4.14 *Slave Pens* (Arabic original title: *زرايب العبيد* / *Zarayib al-Abeed*), by the Libyan writer Najwa Bin Shatwan, published in 2016 by Dar al-Saqi, Lebanon.

Nominated for the IPAF in 2017, the novel *Zarayib al-Abeed* uncovers the hidden history of slavery in Libya at the turn of the 20th century under Ottoman rule, illuminating its enduring consequences. As the flames of the slave pens engulf everything once concealed, a forbidden love story unfolds between Master *Muhammad* and an enslaved woman, challenging the traditions of masters who typically view slave women as concubines. To distance his son from the scandal, the father sends him on a trading mission, while the mother resorts to drastic measures to terminate her pregnancy before being wed off to another slave. Upon his return, *Muhammad* learns that his son, born to his black slave with whom he had a sexual relationship, has been killed and the woman herself has vanished, prompting him on a desperate quest to find her (IPAF, 2017).

1.4.15 *The Daffodil's Memory* (Arabic original title: *ذاكرة النرجس* / *Dhākirat al-Narjis*), by the Moroccan novelist Rachid al-Hachimi, published in 2018 by Dar Rawafed, Egypt.

According to critic Younes Dahmanī, who wrote an article published on the al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin website²⁹, this novel sheds light on the often-overlooked topic of black culture, known as “Negritude”, and its intersections with other cultures by “breaking the silence on this

²⁹ See: Dahmanī, Younes. (2018). "ذاكرة النرجس: رواية عن الزنوجة المغربية" (A Novel about Moroccan Negroism). al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin Website, Issue 5815, 14/03/2018.

topic in a country that boasts about its white identity, while forgetting about the presence of a Negro identity that is an integral part of its culture and being.” (Daḥmanī, 2018) In light of this, Younes commends the author of the novel for their bravery in shedding light on the reality of racism and injustice that has persisted and continues to plague the black person in Morocco (Ibid, 2018).

The chart presented below illustrates the timeline of the publication of Arabic Black Slave Narratives in the 20th and 21st century, organised according to the chronological order of their release as detailed in the list.

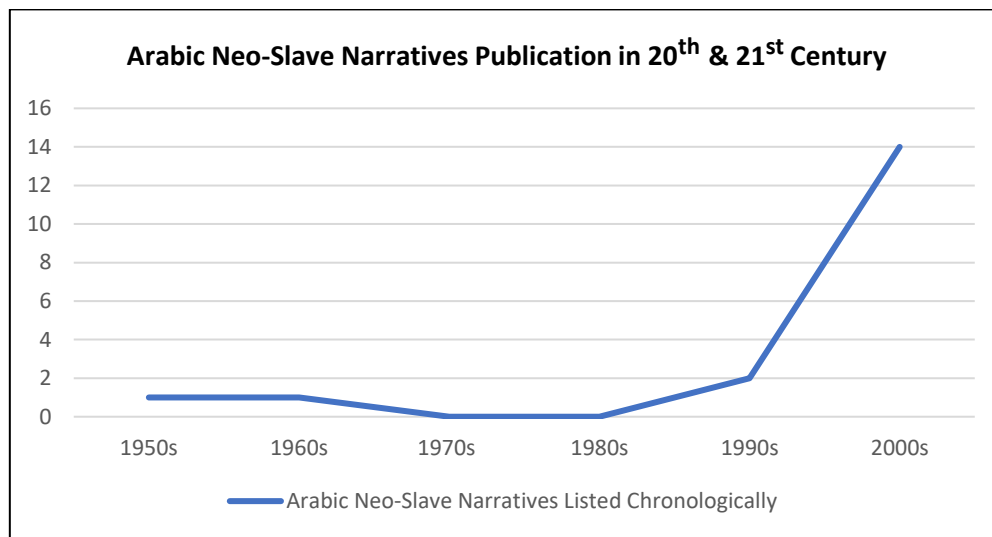
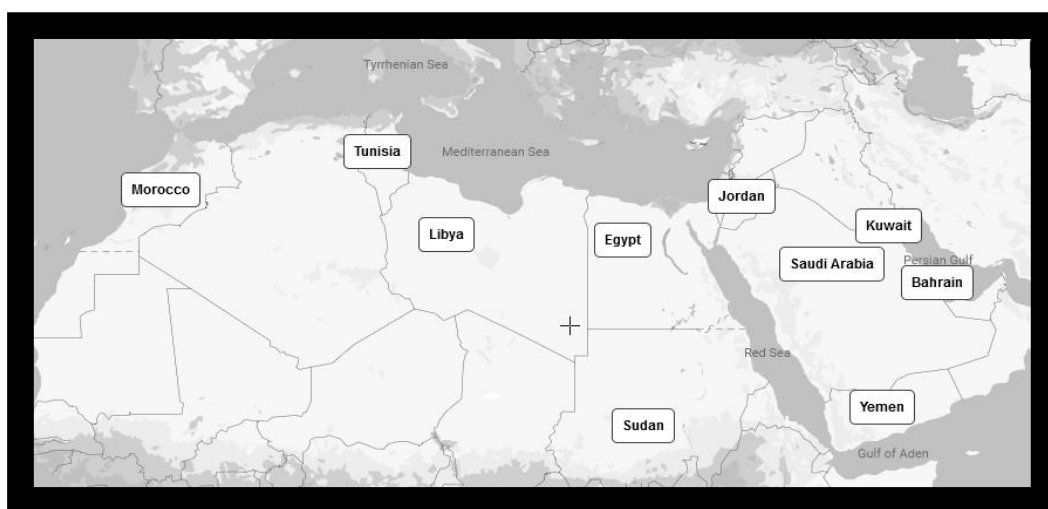


Figure 1.4: Arabic Black Slave Narrative Publication Timeline



Map 1.4: The Map of 15 Arabic Black Slave Narrative at the turn of the 21st Century (Source: Google Map 2024)

Notably, the peak of novel publications occurred in the first two decades of the 21st century, marking a significant trend reflective of profound social, political, and cultural transformations within the region. These notable changes have undoubtedly inspired Arab writers from Morocco to Bahrain to explore themes of slavery and Blackness as central motifs in their literary works.

1.4.2 The Selected Six Novels:

In general, contemporary Arabic novels that focus on slavery or blackness offer a compelling examination of the historical and social implications of these topics within Arab societies, sparking thought and insight. The six novels I have chosen for this research, do not only depict the harsh realities and injustices experienced by enslaved individuals, but also illuminate the intricate power dynamics and societal structures that enabled and perpetuated the system of slavery. While each novel can offer a unique perspective and writing style, there are common general and specific features that set these works apart from others and assist in addressing the research question. However, prior to discussing the general and specific criteria used to narrow down the list and select the six novels, we will first delve into the details of each novel in this section.

The novels³⁰ listed below are organised based on the order in which they were first published:

- 1 Ali, Idris. (1993). *Dongola: A Novel of Nubia* (Arabic original title: رواية نوبية /رواية نوبية: دنقلة/Dongola: Riwaya Nubiya). (2006) 2nd Edition. Cario: International Company for Printing and Publishing.
- 2 Trāwrī, Maḥmūd. (2002). *Maymūna*. (Arabic original title: ميمونة/Maymūna). (2007) 2nd Edition. Damascus, Dar al-Mada.
- 3 al-Muqri, Ali. (2008). *Black Taste, Black Odour* (Arabic original title: طعم أسود رائحة /سوداء/Ta'am Aswād, Ra'eha Swada). (2011) 2nd Edition. Beirut: Dar Al-Saqi.
- 4 al-Da'as, Sa'dā'. (2010). *Because I Am Black* (Arabic original title: لأنني أسود /Li-annī aswād). 1st Edition. Kuwait: Advice Art Production.
- 5 al-Bassam, Khaled. (2016). *The Price of Salt* (Arabic original title: ثمن الملح/Thaman al-Milḥ). (2017) 2nd Edition. Bahrain: Jadawel for publishing, translation, and distribution.

³⁰ Since these novels were printed by various publishing houses and released in different years, the versions used for the research are the ones mentioned in this list.

- 6 Bin Shatwan, Najwa. (2016). *The Slave Pens* (Arabic original title: زرايب العبيد / *Zarayib al-Abeed*). (2017) 2nd Edition. Beirut: Dar al-Saqi.

1.4.3 Summary Description for Each Novel and Its Author's Background:

1.4.3.1 Idris Ali, *Dongola: Riwaya Nubiya (Dongola: A Novel of Nubia)*, Egypt:

As per the publishing house *al-Karma*³¹ that released this novel in 2014, Idris Ali (1940-2010) was an Egyptian author born in Aswan who relocated to Cairo as a child. Despite facing challenging living circumstances throughout his life, he began working at ten years old and developed his literary knowledge by reading works of renowned international writers. Ali commenced his writing career by publishing short stories in 1969, eventually releasing his first novel, "*Dongola: Riwaya Nubiya*" in 1993.

During a press interview³², the writer acknowledged that the driving force behind his novel on Nubia stemmed from his exposure to Russian literature translated into Arabic, characterised by a holistic and realistic approach. He further disclosed his secular intellectual stance and highlighted his unwavering belief in the significance of reason. Opting to depict Nubia authentically, according to interviewer Abdel Nabi Faraj,

the writer ventured into forbidden and concealed territories to unveil obscured truths. The bold revelations within his writing led to a hostile reception from those taken aback by his work, sparking a conflict between reason and superstition that he perceived as perpetual and unceasing (Faraj, 2011)

In a different press interview³³, the author expressed a desire to explore forbidden and secretive realms in various ways. These include: (1) Establishing a cultural link between the Nubians, particularly noting Dongola as the last Nubian stronghold before succumbing to the Mamluks around 1272 after a prolonged resistance to the Arab-Islamic conquest spanning centuries. (2) Acting as an early alarm against extremism by shedding light on an underground Nubian movement, advocating for a rational approach to address Nubian concerns and heal the wounds of characters such as the novel's protagonist, '*Awād Shalali*'. (Issa, 2006). Furthermore, the

³¹ See: al-Karma Books. "دنگولا: تأليف إدريس علي" (Dongola: Authored by Idris Ali).

³² See: Faraj, Abdel Nabi. (2011). "حوار مع الروائي المصري إدريس علي" (An Interview with the Egyptian Novelist Idris Ali). al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin Website, Issue 3471, 29/08/2011.

³³ See: Issa, Zainab. (2006). "الروائي إدريس علي: حينما أشرع في الكتابة لا أهتم بالخطوط الحمراء" (Novelist Idris Ali: When I start writing, I don't care about red lines). al-Raya Newspaper, 14/08/2006.

novel's exploration of the conflict between reason and myth stems from the author's assertion that he challenges the notions of racial superiority among Arabs and Nubians, portraying it as mere myths in his work (Faraj, 2011).

This novel offers a poignant and candid portrayal of the Nubian tragedy. Centered around 'Awād Shalali, the narrative follows his relentless struggle against Egyptian oppression in pursuit of freedom and justice. After enduring a decade of suffering in Egyptian prisons, 'Awād escapes to Sudan with aspirations of restoring the former glory of the Nubian Kingdom of Kush and its illustrious capital, *Dongola*. Encountering resistance from the Nubian community itself, 'Awād embarks on a nine-year sojourn to Europe, where he engages in a passionate romance with a French woman. Despite his deep affection for her, familial obligations compel 'Awād to forsake the relationship and wed *Halima*, who had selflessly cared for his blind, impoverished mother. Faced with the constraints of tradition, 'Awād ultimately chooses to depart once more, leaving *Halima* behind as he rebels against the unforgiving norms of a society dictated by merciless traditions.

One of the strengths of *Dongola* is its meticulous research and attention to detail. In his discussion of Nubia in Egypt during the 1960s, Idris Ali offers a detailed account of Black Nubia, drawing upon historical documents, cultural traditions, and sources to provide a thorough depiction of Nubian civilisation across different eras. The novel suggests that its authenticity and precision could potentially engage readers in the culture and everyday experiences of the Nubian people. Moreover, Idris Ali skilfully weaves together multiple storylines and characters, each portraying a different aspect of black Nubian society. This multifaceted approach allows the novel to explore various themes, such as identity, social hierarchy, and the impact of blackness and slavery in Egyptian society. The characters themselves are well-developed and relatable, making the reader emotionally invested in their experiences. Another notable aspect of *Dongola* is its exploration of black Nubia's relationship with neighbouring cultures and civilisations. Idris Ali delves into the interactions and conflicts between black Nubia and white Egypt³⁴, exploring

³⁴ Most historical analyses of ancient Egypt indicate a keen awareness of racial distinctions among the populace. Donald B. Redford, for instance, highlighted how the Egyptian elite often depicted themselves with "russet hue" skin tones, contrasting with their portrayal of Nubians as black-skinned. Depictions of other races, particularly Nubians, were often negative during the 14th to 10th centuries BC. Iconography from this era, such as black Nubians in chains beside "blonde" Anatolians on Nefertiti's throne, and hieroglyphs in Horemheb's tomb showing Egyptians mistreating Nubian captives, suggest a hierarchal treatment of different races – with both black and white individuals relegated to secondary statuses in Egypt's early kingdoms. The 1425 BC remark by Egyptian Pharaoh Amenophis II, warning against Nubians

the power dynamics and cultural clashes between these two ancient civilisations. This adds a layer of complexity to the narrative, highlighting the Nubians' struggle to preserve their cultural heritage in the face of Egyptian authority pressures.

Through his bold revelations and engaging storytelling, Idris Ali delivers a message of resilience, cultural preservation, and the enduring quest for freedom in the face of oppression and tradition. By shedding light on the Nubian experience and challenging prevailing narratives, the impression that Ali's work may leave on the reader stands as a testament to his literary skill and commitment to uncovering obscured truths.

The main characters and their roles are as shown below in the table:

Character Name	Role
<i>'Awād Shalali</i>	After enduring losses and treacheries in Cairo, <i>'Awād</i> returns to "Qarsha", his Nubian village, aiming to uplift its people and decry their displacement without due compensation, leading to a perilous flight to Sudan in pursuit of reinstating the ancient Nubian state. However, his efforts face opposition, branding him a threat to Sudan's unity. Forced into exile across Europe, he gradually disconnects from his roots, finding fleeting solace in a romantic entanglement with Frenchwoman <i>Simone</i> , unable to fully dull the edges of his bitter past. Through the protagonist's journey, he embodies two conflicting ideals: on one hand, he re-presents the resilience and protection of Nubian culture, while on the other, he symbolises yielding to the influence of the West and its liberal principles.

and their sorcerers, further underscores the prejudicial views prevalent in ancient Egyptian society (Redford, 2004:5-6).

<i>Hoshiya al-Nour</i>	For 19 long years, she patiently waited for her son 'Awād to come back home. Firstly, during his ten-year imprisonment and exile in his homeland, and then for nine more years while he lived as an expatriate in Europe. Despite losing her sight, <i>Hoshiya</i> never wavered in her hope. She lived alone, with the support of neighbours and a young woman named Halima, who eventually became 'Awād's partner.
<i>Halima</i>	She is 'Awād's Nubian wife, finds herself trapped in a suffocating existence after her husband departs for Europe. She becomes a caretaker for the elderly blind woman, <i>Hoshiya al-Nour</i> , enduring her mistreatment while battling unfulfilled desires and the pressure of her circumstances. <i>Halima</i> is burdened by her father's refusal to grant her a divorce for compensation, as well as the unwanted attention and advances from eager suitors. Despite these challenges, Halima resists societal norms by choosing to engage in a sexual relationship with a young white man.
<i>al-Demerdash</i>	<i>al-Demerdash</i> , a close friend of 'Awād Shalali and his ally in the fight for Nubian rights, escapes with him to Sudan to demand the creation of a Nubian state with its capital in Dongola. Sharing 'Awād's vision, he sees himself as a Nubian leader who advocates for the cause by filing complaints and pursuing legal action against the government. However, he is unexpectedly arrested by the

	authorities and vanishes from the village, never to be seen again.
<i>Ahmed Abbas</i>	Ahmed Abbas, 'Awād <i>Shalali</i> 's uncle, accuses him of being delusional due to his calls for Nubian liberation and urges for his expulsion from the region. Eventually, he suggests a compromise where <i>Shalali</i> can marry a Nubian girl of his choice, in hopes that it will divert his focus from political separatist aspirations and lead to him settling down with his mother and family in Egypt.
<i>Bahr Jazouli</i>	<i>Bahr Jazouli</i> is the cousin of <i>Shalali</i> , a Nubian communist activist who was shaped by his experiences in Egyptian government cells during the 1950s, where he was subjected to physical abuse and daily insults due to his radical ideas and newspaper articles criticising the marginalisation of Nubians before his eventual release. A well-read and knowledgeable individual, <i>Jazouli</i> was deeply familiar with Nubian history. His intellectual influence had a profound impact on the development of his nephew 'Awād's personality.

Table 1.4.3.1: The Main Characters and Their Roles in *Dongola: Riwaya Nubiya*

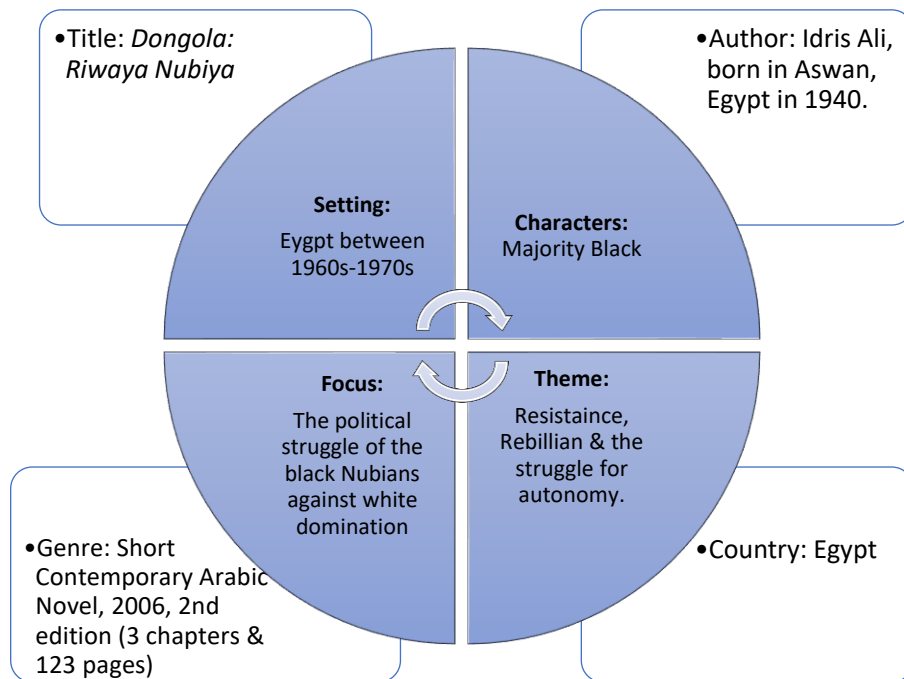


Figure 1.4.3.1: *Dongola: Riwaya Nubiya's* Novel Description

1.4.3.2 Maḥmūd Trāwrī, *Maymūna*, Saudi Arabia:

Maḥmūd Trāwrī, a Saudi journalist and novelist of African origin born in Taif 1968, has gained recognition for his works, which include his debut novel *Maymūna*. According to M. Lynx Qualey³⁵, it was 1996, when Trāwrī embarked on the challenging task of writing a novel depicting the lives of African slaves in Hejaz Saudi Arabia, in the early 20th century. Drawing from written document and oral traditions passed down by the elderly, he diligently conducted research over several years before completing his novel in 2000. The book was first published in Sharjah in 2001, with subsequent editions released in Cairo and Beirut (Qualey, 2020). In a press interview, Trāwrī revealed that his inspiration for exploring the history of black African slaves in the Gulf region stemmed not only from a personal interest in the subject matter but also from,

an environment rife with exclusion and hateful discrimination that has been rampant in our society these last three decades in a horrific and painful way, standing in contradiction to the most basic human values, not to mention the religious principles that call for equality between all people without discrimination (Ibid, 2020)

³⁵ See Qualey, Lynx. (2020). *Black Saudi Author Focuses on Neglected History of African Migration and Slavery*. Al-Fanar Media, 24/07/2020.

This deep-seated motivation led him to delve into the experiences of black Saudis in the Hijaz region at the turn of the 20th century, particularly focusing on black Muslim communities from West Africa who sought refuge in Mecca to practice their faith away from Western colonialism.

The novel follows the journey of the *Maymūna* family from West Africa in the 19th century as they flee the threat of enslavement by white Christians. *Maymūna*, an elderly character in the story, recounts the saga of her ancestors from Africa, starting from her time in her mother's womb, through her upbringing, up to her own role as a grandmother. The narrative is primarily told through *Maymūna's* perspective, chronicling her parents' arrival in Mecca and Medina in the previous century. Their voyage is fraught with peril, including her father's solo excursion to Jerusalem before her birth, leaving her mother and his brother *Omar* behind. Subsequently, *Maymūna's* uncle *Omar* abandons her mother in Medina to join a band of "Arabs Bedouin" involved in slave trafficking in Jeddah, only to be double-crossed and sold into slavery. Throughout, the novel chronicles the saga of multiple generations of a family of African immigrants to Saudi Arabia and reflects on the prevalence of slavery and its legacy in Hijaz community.

Overall, Trāwri's message in his novel transcends historical narratives to confront present-day issues of racism, discrimination, and the enduring legacy of slavery in Saudi society. Through his portrayal and exploration of these themes, Trāwri offers readers a powerful reflection on the complexities of race, identity, and social justice, urging them to confront and challenge systemic inequalities and prejudices that persist in modern society.

The main characters and their roles are as shown below in the table:

Character Name	Role
<i>Maymūna</i>	<i>Maymūna</i> , originally known as <i>Mina Qarmbaa</i> is an elderly woman who recounts her family's migration from Africa to Hijaz and the tragic loss of her father, who embarked on a journey to Jerusalem, entrusting the care of his wife to his brother Omar. <i>Maymūna's</i> narrative weaves together the oral accounts

	of her uncle and mother, as she had yet to be born during their expedition to Hijaz.
<i>Omar al-Misk</i>	<i>Omar al-Misk</i> , <i>Maymūna's</i> uncle, assumes responsibility for his niece and her mother, escorting them to Medina where he engages in religious studies at the Haram, expanding his connections with the local Arabs as a guardian of orchards and charitable endowments. Leading the family on a pilgrimage to Mecca, Omar falls into the clutches of slave traders, striking a deal with a Bedouin to sell black children. Subsequently, he is sold alongside them, embarking on a harrowing journey towards redemption and freedom.
<i>Issa</i>	Issa, known as the father of <i>Maymūna</i> , makes a sudden decision to travel to Jerusalem, entrusting his pregnant wife to the care of his brother Omar. His primary role involves challenging negative stereotypes about black individuals encountered by Arab travellers, particularly during an encounter in Jerusalem.
<i>Zain</i>	<i>Zain</i> , a resilient mother, grapples with the anguish of her husband's abrupt departure while she is expecting, anxiously anticipating his return. Her duties revolve around nurturing her daughter and eking out a living through begging and forming connections with others in her community.

Table 1.4.3.2: The Main Characters and Their Roles in *Maymūna*

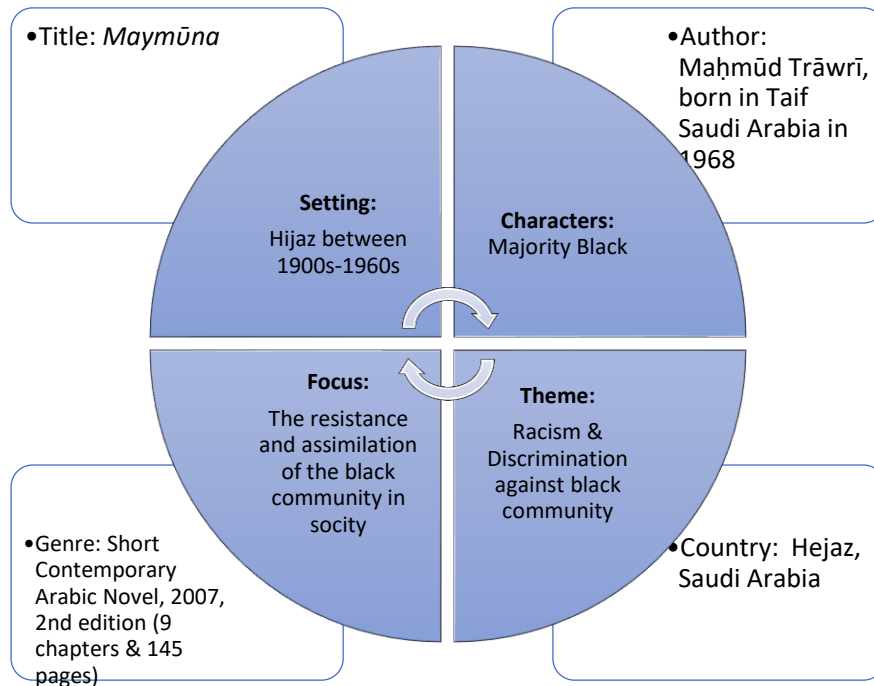


Figure 1.4.3.2: *Maymūna*'s Novel Description

1.4.3.3 Ali al-Muqri, *Ta'am Aswād, Ra'eha Swada* (Black Taste, Black Odour), Yemen:

Ta'am Aswād, Ra'eha Swada is a novel by Yemeni author Ali al-Muqri, which was published in 2008 by Dar al-Saqi and longlisted for the IPAF in 2009. According to the International Prize for Arabic Fiction website³⁶, Ali al-Muqri, born in the city of Taiz 1966, is a Yemeni writer who has been involved in cultural journalism since 1985. He has authored eight books, some of which have been translated into English, German, French, and Spanish. He has also participated in numerous literary Arabic and international festivals (IPAF, 2009).

The novel explores the lives of Yemen's marginalised black community in the 1970s and 1980s, focusing on the city of Taiz and its surrounding villages. The narrative utilises a multi-layered structure to present various perspectives and complexities of the issues addressed. al-Muqri skilfully blends different narrative techniques and flashbacks to provide a comprehensive exploration of the black community's experiences. The story follows *Ambo*³⁷, a white Arab individual who escapes to the slave ghetto outside Taiz after an intimate relationship with a black

³⁶ See the IPAF website: <https://www.arabicfiction.org/en/Ali-al-Muqri>. Link accessed on 11/07/2018.

³⁷ "*Ambo*" according to the novel, is the nickname the slaves designated for the "White" population and their city Taiz. (al-Muqri, 2008:38)

girl named *al-Doglu*. The narrative explores their love story amidst discrimination and racism, raising questions about home, politics, religion, identity, and history.

In essence, the author's choice to focus on this subject aims to draw attention to the struggles faced by the black community. Per journalist Ahmed al-Lawandi's interview³⁸ with the author, al-Muqri elaborates on the intention behind penning the novel stating, "while a slave may have some rights under agreements of purchase and sale, these individuals lack recognition as citizens unless politicians seek their votes during elections." (al-Lawandi, 2020)

The narrative illustrates how blackness in Yemen can impact the *Akhdam* community's perceived values in society, influencing their suitability for marriage, intimacy, or household labour. The novel emphasises that this form of racism stems from a long-standing social hierarchy in Yemen. Throughout the story, it becomes evident that poverty is intricately tied to the experience of being black.

The message of al-Muqri's novel is to bring awareness to the struggles and discrimination faced by Yemen's marginalised black community, urging readers to reflect on the complexities of race, oppression, and resistance. By spotlighting the experiences of individuals like *Ambo* and *al-Doglu*, the author challenges societal norms and power dynamics, inviting readers to question the impact of racism on personal relationships, self-worth, and social mobility.

The main characters and their roles are as shown below in the table:

Character Name	Role
<i>Ambo/Abdulrahman</i>	The protagonist, a man who identifies as a white free individual, makes the bold choice to reside in the impoverished neighbourhood of Taiz with his wife of African descent. In the narrative, he also goes by the name <i>Abdulrahman</i> . Seeking refuge in the black community, <i>Ambo</i> (the nickname given to him as a member of the white community)

³⁸ See: al-Lawandi, Ahmed. (2020). "الروائي اليمني علي المقري: الترجمة وهم يصيب الكثيرين من الأدباء العرب". (Yemeni Novelist Ali al-Muqri: Translation is an Illusion that Afflicts Many Arab Writers). al-Arabi Magazine. Issue# 736.

	serves as a re-presentative of the white intellectual figure who advocates for the rights of the marginalised black population in Yemen.
<i>al-Doglu</i>	She is a black woman from the disadvantaged <i>al-Akhdam</i> community, taking on the role of the main character who marries Ambo and stands up against the oppression faced by her people. Together with her husband, she leads the efforts to resist marginalisation within the slave community.
<i>Rabash</i>	<i>Rabash</i> , a black slave and former political prisoner aligned with the Communist Party, embodies an extremist communist revolutionary who rejects living in squalor and fights against injustice and inequality.
<i>Bahja</i>	She is a black leftist activist and leader within the leftist party, focuses on organising the <i>Akhdam</i> community to join the revolution.
<i>Surour</i>	A black intellectual and left-wing political activist recently freed from prison, challenges the foundations of white society using Marxist ideological arguments.

Table 1.4.3.3: The Main Characters and Their Roles in *Ta'am Aswād, Ra'eha Swada*

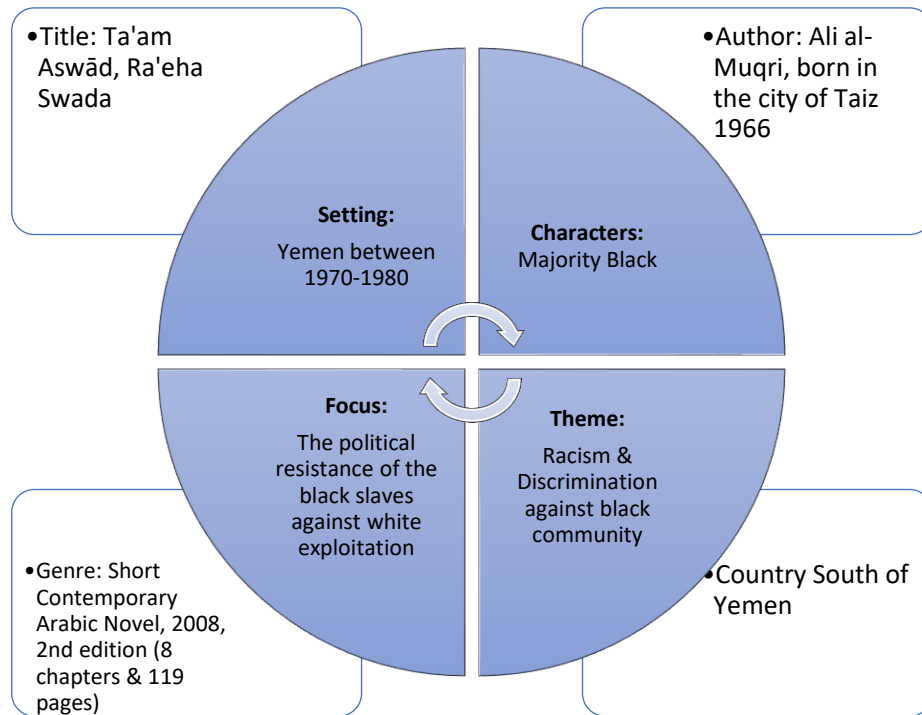


Figure 1.4.3.3: *Ta'am Aswād, Ra'eha Swada's* Novel Description

1.4.3.4 Sa'dā' al-Da'as, *Li-annī Aswād*, (Because I Am Black), Kuwait:

al-Da'as is a Kuwaiti female writer³⁹, known for her expertise in crafting short stories, novels, and critical works. She works as a professor in the Department of Theatre Criticism at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts and has seen some of her books translated into languages including English and Georgian. al-Da'as first published this novel in Arabic in 2010 (which we use in this research), and it has since been released in three Arabic additional editions, with the latest in 2015.

In *Li-annī aswād* the author delves into themes of legacy of slavery, the black other, exploring the characters' struggles with a profound identity crisis. Set in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the events of the novel unfold in both the United States and Kuwait, focusing on *Jamal's* battle against racism and discrimination in both societies. The novel chronicles *Jamal's* life journey, born to a black Kuwaiti father and an African American mother, as he moves from his childhood in America to adulthood in Kuwait, detailing his battles with racism in both Kuwaiti and American societies. Beginning with early encounters with minor racist incidents in kindergarten that opened his eyes to issues of colour and race, *Jamal* and his mother are compelled to relocate

³⁹ See: al-Hayek, Abbas. (2021). "Kuwaiti writer Dr. Sa'dā' al-Da'as" (الكاتبة الكويتية الدكتورة سعداء الدعاس).

from America to Kuwait following the sudden passing of his father, *Fawzi*. In Kuwait, their experiences with systemic racism intensify, presenting *Jamal* with formidable hurdles in adjusting to his new environment at school, university, and among neighbours and peers. Through experiences of *Jamal* and his mother *Joanne*, the author contrasts the differences between American and Kuwaiti societies, revealing the inner turmoil and external racist attacks *Jamal* endures. As *Jamal* grapples with societal pressures and increasing feelings of anger, he ultimately decides to leave Kuwait after facing rejection due to his black skin colour.

The novel places a spotlight on racism, prompting reflections on identity, otherness, belonging, and the influence of skin colour in society. It portrays how blackness is perceived in terms of lineage, often seen as contaminating a family's bloodline. The novel also addresses the intergenerational impact of systemic racism, where descendants of former enslaved individuals are expected to inherit their parents' social status, perpetuating a cycle of marginalisation.

The message of *Li-annī aswād* centres on the urgent need to address and combat racism collectively. The author suggests that defeating racism requires challenging societal norms and perceptions, as it is portrayed as a pervasive system rather than isolated incidents. By highlighting the intergenerational impact of systemic racism and the complexities of race relations, the novel prompts readers to reflect on the detrimental effects of racism on black individuals and communities. Through her nuanced exploration of identity, belonging, and the influence of skin colour, she encourages ongoing examination and critique of cultural attitudes to foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

Below is the table of the main characters and their roles:

Character	Role
<i>Fawzi</i>	<i>Fawzi</i> , a Kuwaiti man of black descent, is married to Joanne and is the father of <i>Jamal</i> . He, like his ancestors, has black skin. <i>Fawzi</i> went to the United States in the 1980s to pursue a study of theatre. It was during this time that he crossed paths with a black American woman who would later become his wife and the mother of their first child, <i>Jamal</i> .

<i>Joanne</i>	Hailing from an ordinary family in Chicago, she is an African American woman who tied the knot with <i>Fawzi</i> following a brief romance, resulting in the birth of their son, <i>Jamal</i> . Challenges arise for her when <i>Jamal</i> encounters discrimination at school due to his skin colour. Following the unexpected passing of her husband <i>Fawzi</i> , she makes the decision to journey to Kuwait with her young son. Faced with the racism her son experiences in Kuwaiti society, she begins to shine a light on the discriminatory behaviour exhibited by Kuwaiti Muslims.
<i>Jamal</i>	Born in the United States as the biracial son of <i>Fawzi</i> and <i>Joanne</i> , the protagonist finds himself faced with a unique set of challenges. Following his father's passing in America, he accompanies his mother to Kuwait at the tender age of nine. <i>Jamal</i> assumes the role of both hero and victim as he bravely battles against racism in Kuwait, only to be disheartened when faced with a deeply entrenched societal issue. When two Kuwaiti families reject his proposals to marry their white daughters, <i>Jamal</i> makes the decision to return to America, convinced that the pervasive racism in Kuwait is too difficult to endure.

Table 1.4.3.4: The Main Characters and Their Roles in *Li-annī Aswād*

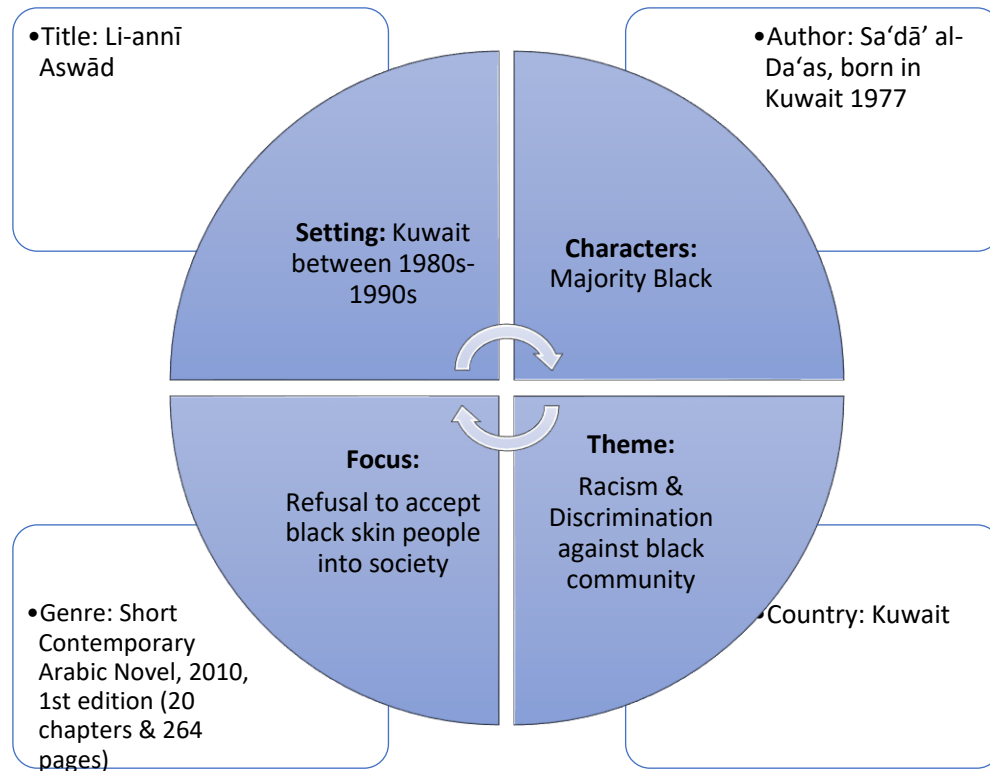


Figure 1.4.3.4: *Li-annī Aswād's* Novel Description

1.4.3.5 Khaled al-Bassam, *Thaman al-Milh*, (The Price of Salt), Bahrain:

Khaled al-Bassam (1956 - 2015⁴⁰), a Bahraini writer and historian, initially started his career as a journalist before delving into the study of documents related to the Gulf region. He authored numerous books and translations focusing on the history of Bahrain, the Gulf, and the Arab world. Alongside his historical works, he also produced various literary pieces, including the novel in question. Sadly, al-Bassam passed away unexpectedly in November 2015, before his novel was officially released in 2016. Following the end of the novel, he penned a note on the final pages titled "On the Margin of the Novel" where he discussed his in-depth exploration of slaves and their history through extensive reading, citing the real British reports on slave conditions in the Gulf as crucial sources for this novel (al-Bassam, 2016:217). Moreover, this novel features a provocative and sarcastic quote with which the author opened his novel and which the publishing house "Jadawel" placed on its back cover. This quote references a question posed by a Bahraini writer to "al-Muqtataf" Egyptian newspaper in 1910. The question reads,

⁴⁰ See: al-Wasat Newspaper. (2015). "بورتريه: خالد البسام", (Portrait: Khaled Al-Bassam). Published on 10/11/2015.

“What do you say about selling slaves, is it a virtue or a sin? If it is the first, then why do Westerners confiscate it, and if it is the second, why do not the Eastern clerics forbid it?” (Ibid:5)

The author's decision to start his novel with this quote underscores the silence of prominent clerics in Egypt⁴¹ regarding the ban on the sale of slaves at the start of the 20th century. Perhaps, the author chose this opening to set the stage for the events in his novel about slavery in Bahrain. During that period, two conflicting authorities were at odds - the Western authority, represented by the British Mandate, that rejected slavery, and the Eastern authority, represented by the Bahraini Muslim community, that still accepted it.

Through his novel, al-Bassam sheds light on a dark period in Bahrain's past, emphasising the British colonialists' role in abolishing the slave trade and exposing racist practices against black Africans ingrained within the social and cultural fabric of society. *Thaman al-Milh*, delves into the history of slavery in Bahrain during the early 20th century. Drawing on historical documents and events surrounding trade and slavery policies, the novel employs a technique where enslaved individuals write letters to the British embassy detailing their grievances and sharing their harrowing stories, only for these appeals to be disregarded and archived without action. This approach highlights that if true liberation were to come through Islam, then these Muslims would not have turned to the British colonizer for freedom. Additionally, the narrative explores the significant role played by British colonisation in the abolition and regulation of slavery, particularly in regions where this practice had deep roots dating back to pre-Islamic times.

The novel tells the coming-of-age tale of *Hanna*, a young Ethiopian girl born into slavery, as she navigates a tumultuous journey from Ethiopia to Bahrain. *Hanna's* impoverished parents, as described in the novel, desperate to escape poverty, are left with no choice but to sell her at the slave market in Mecca when she is just 14 years old. She is then purchased by a wealthy white merchant named *Mohammed Bin Nasri* and taken to Bahrain, where she endures the harsh realities of enslavement, cruelty, love, and ultimately being sold to another owner who changed her name into '*Abda*. After facing various trials, *Abda* finally secures her freedom through the intervention of the British Mandate government in Bahrain. This period in history saw colonial powers tout the prohibition of slavery as a step towards salvation, despite their continued practice of other forms of racial discrimination, highlighting the hypocrisy within their actions.

⁴¹ According to Clarence-Smith, a conference of Muslim scholars was convened in Egypt in 1908, with the purpose of declaring that Sharia law prohibits only “the owning of eunuchs”. (Clarence-Smith, 2006:139) He then adds, even moderate religious scholars such as Muhammad Abduh and his student Muhammad Rashid Rida did not have clear or outspoken positions on the prohibition of slavery (Ibid: 203-206).

Published in London in 1822, the groundbreaking pamphlet by Libyan activist Hassuna d'Ghi'es⁴² cast doubt on the true intentions of the British Empire in its efforts to abolish slavery in Africa, especially critiquing the "African Society"⁴³ and its underlying colonial agendas (Coller, 2015:537). The British colonists, however, find themselves in a paradoxical role, as the novel demonstrated, in perpetuating slavery by striking agreements with princes and merchants to facilitate the slave trade and safeguard their own interests (al-Bassam, 2016:90).

The story explores the deceitful aspect of the West's colonial propaganda of abolition and the misleading idea of liberty, exposing the manipulative relationships between European and Arab masters and their enslaved African individuals. It underscores that, within the cultural, economic, and social context, the existence of slavery was more of a choice of these individuals who were mentioned in the novel rather than a necessity. Interestingly, the novel explores the profound impact of slavery on the identity of enslaved black Africans, portraying it as an unavoidable destiny predetermined by a higher power. Furthermore, the novel emphasises the significance of slavery in Bahraini society, especially for those in the dominant white class who benefit from maintaining the status quo.

The author of *Thaman al-Milh* seeks to convey a powerful message about the historical complexities of slavery, colonisation, and liberation. Through the narrative of characters like 'Abda and the portrayal of the exploitative relationships between enslaved individuals and their masters, the author challenges readers to confront the harsh realities of these oppressive systems. By highlighting the hypocrisy and contradictions inherent in colonial efforts to abolish slavery while perpetuating other forms of discrimination, the author prompts the audience to critically examine historical narratives and question the true intentions behind supposed acts of liberation. Additionally, by emphasising the choices, cultural contexts, and power dynamics at play within the institution of slavery, the author invites readers to reflect on the enduring

⁴² In 2018, I had the privilege of translating this influential pamphlet into Arabic and releasing it online: See: Haddad, Salah. (2018). "رسالة في إلغاء العبودية". (A Letter Concerning the Prohibition of Slavery). Amazon. <https://www.amazon.com>

⁴³ The pamphlet seeks to contest the claims made by the 'African Society' regarding the abolition of slavery in Africa, instead shedding light on its true objectives, which revolve around reaching the mythical city of Timbuktu. Hence, the author questions the motivations of the people who established the 'African Society', asking, "What is their object?" Coller elucidates that while d'Ghi'es did not provide a direct response, an implicit answer can be inferred. Primarily, the primary motive of this Protestant organisation was to convert Africans to Christianity. Secondly, although not explicitly stated by d'Ghi'es, the society also played a role in founding a colony to resettle liberated slaves in Sierra Leone, aiming to alleviate England of its impoverished Black population. Therefore, its motivations were a blend of moral crusading, evangelism, and thinly veiled racism (Coller, 2015:537-8).

impacts of exploitation and the complexities of freedom and identity within societies shaped by colonisation. Overall, the author's intention is to provoke thought, spark empathy, and encourage a deeper understanding of the historical legacies and ongoing implications of slavery and colonialism in shaping our world today.

The main characters and their roles are as illustrated in below table:

Character	Role
<i>Hanna/'Abda</i>	The protagonist of the story who descends from Ethiopian parents. She portrays a slave determined to break free from her enslavement at any cost and reclaim her humanity in a society where slavery and racism are deeply ingrained. Despite enduring a journey filled with suffering, persecution, and torment under her white masters, she eventually attains freedom from the British. However, her joy turns to disappointment upon learning that her white boyfriend, <i>Barakat</i> , refuses to marry her due to her status as a black slave
<i>Umm al-Khair</i>	An elderly Ethiopian woman enslaved and working as a maid in the household of the wealthy Bahraini merchant <i>Muhammad Ibn Nasri</i> . She advises <i>'Abda</i> to accept her fate as a slave, believing it to be predetermined from her birth.
<i>Muhammad Ibn Nasri</i>	<i>Nasri</i> , a callous white Arab master, sees his black slaves merely as possessions meant to serve wealthy whites, demonstrating a lack of concern for their well-being.

<i>'Aisha</i>	<i>Nasri's</i> wife and co-owner of the slaves, appears content to adopt the role of a lazy white woman who relies on her enslaved individuals to care for her and maintain the household.
<i>Muzā</i>	A young widow and the second owner of <i>'Abda</i> , treats her servants kindly but exploits one of her attractive black slaves, <i>Salim</i> , for secret sexual encounters in her opulent residence.
<i>Barakat</i>	A handsome white man and <i>'Abda's</i> lover, assists her in navigating the process of emancipation. Despite showing respect and affection towards <i>'Abda</i> , he ultimately declines to marry her due to her skin colour.

Table 1.4.3.5: The Main Characters and Their Roles in *Thaman al-Milh*

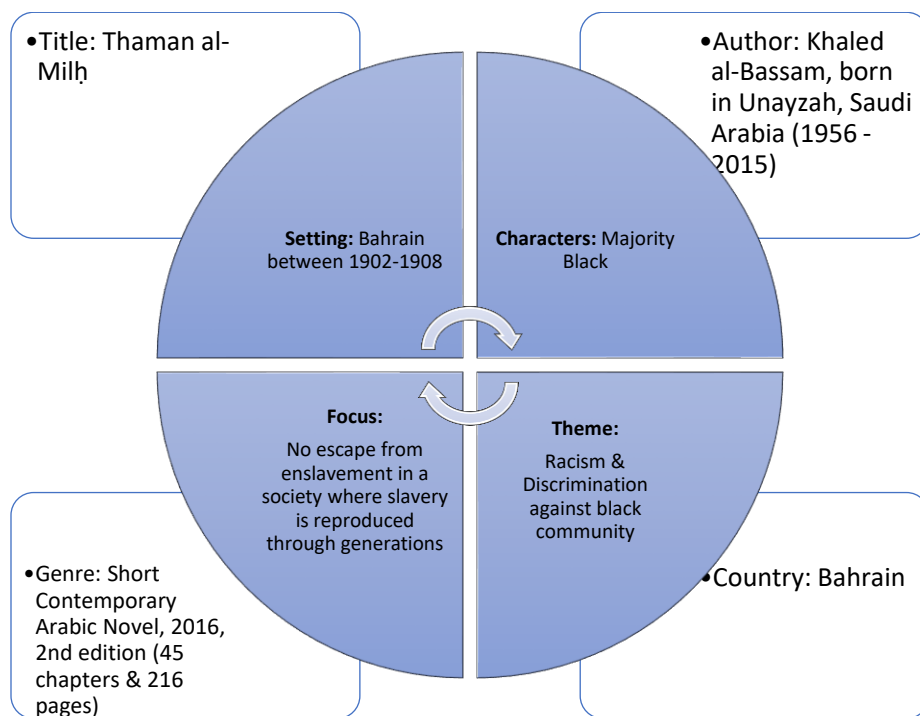


Figure 1.4.3.5: *Thaman al-Milh's* Novel Description

1.4.3.6 Najwa bin Shatwan, *Zarayib al-Abeed*, (The Slave Pens), Libya:

According to literary agency RAYA⁴⁴, Najwa Bin Shatwan, was born in the 1970s to an illiterate family in the village of Ajdabiya in Libya. In 2012, she made the decision to leave Libya to further her studies, ultimately earning a Ph.D. in humanities (history) from La Sapienza in Rome in 2017 (Raya Agency Website). Throughout her career, Bin Shatwan has made significant contributions to literature, with publications including plays, collections of short stories, and four novels including this one. During an interview with German online portal “Qantara”⁴⁵, Bin Shatwan discussed the reasons behind the novel in question, highlighting a poignant photograph of slave pens (Houses built of nest inhabited by slaves) as a primary motivator. In 2006, she visited a historian friend in Benghazi seeking some books to borrow. A photo inside an open book on his table caught her attention, depicting “The Slave Pens” in Benghazi. This piqued her curiosity, prompting her to delve into the history through conversations with elderly residents who had lived in the area and survived those times. Despite her efforts, none were willing to openly discuss their painful past, as her friend had predicted. “The Slave Pens” had long disappeared, leaving behind only Italian photographs taken before and after their occupation.

Inspired by the four individuals in the picture, Bin Shatwan embarked on a journey to uncover and amplify the voices of enslaved black individuals who had been silenced for far too long during that era. These reasons culminated in the creation of the novel *Zarayib al-Abeed* a contemporary Arabic work published by Dar al-Saqi in 2016. The author narrates the tale of the black community's plight in the impoverished neighbourhoods of Benghazi, Libya, during the early 20th century in Ottoman Libya.

The novel chronicles the odyssey of ‘*Atiqa*, a young woman fighting for her freedom in the infamous slave enclosure of Benghazi. The novel portrays the grim realities endured by enslaved individuals within the nation's slave markets and pens, delving into the intricate power dynamics, the profound impact of slavery on individuals and communities, and the ongoing struggle for liberation and dignity. Through ‘*Atiqa*’s narrative, Najwa bin Shatwan sheds light on the persistent issue of slavery in Libya and its lasting repercussions. Through the interplay of its characters, the novel delves into identity politics and the intricate dynamics that surround them. By showcasing the deep-seated racism within Libyan society, the writer sheds light on the impact

⁴⁴ RAYA is a literary agency specialising in the translation rights of Arabic works. See: <https://www.rayaagency.org/client-publishers/bin-shatwan-najwa/>. Link accessed on 20/01/2024.

⁴⁵ See: Viene, Valentina. (2017). Libyan author Najwa Binshatwan on “The Slave Pens”: Confronting a Dark Chapter. 20/07/2017. Link accessed on 17/12/2020: <https://qantara.de/en/node/9021>.

of Italian colonialism in the abolition of slavery. The narrative irony suggests that had the Italian authorities not officially prohibited slavery in practice in early 1900s Libya, the institution would have persisted for more years among the Libyan people⁴⁶. Additionally, the novel proposes that slavery is a multifaceted construct, with layers stemming from divine subjugation of humans to one another and the subsequent colonisation by the Italians (1911-1943). It reveals the complex dynamics of enslavement within the local populace, both by the colonisers and the colonised. Overall, the book explores themes of oppression, resilience, identity, and the quest for justice and offers a poignant and thought-provoking examination of the complexities of slavery and its lasting impact on individuals and societies.

The message of *Zarayib al-Abeed* revolves around themes of oppression, resilience, identity, and the pursuit of justice. Through the character of 'Atiqa, Bin Shatwan highlights the ongoing struggles of enslaved individuals and communities, raising awareness of the lasting repercussions of slavery in Libya. The novel offers a poignant and thought-provoking examination of the complexities of slavery and its enduring impact on both individuals and societies, urging readers to confront the legacy of slavery and reflect on the intricate dynamics of power, oppression, and liberation.

Below are the main characters and their roles:

Main Characters	Role
<i>Ta'awidha/Sabriya</i>	She is a black woman who has a romantic relationship with her white Arab master, <i>Mohammed Bin Shatwan</i> , while serving as his concubine. After giving birth to a daughter named 'Atiqa she changes her name to <i>Sabriya</i> upon escaping from the brothel in order to protect her child's identity. <i>Ta'awidha</i> conceals her true background from 'Atiqa out of fear that her real family may harm or exploit her. Despite bearing a child with <i>Mohammed</i> , <i>Ta'awidha's</i> status as

⁴⁶ The abolition of the slave trade in Libya, especially in Benghazi, was not carried out until the early thirties of the last century. See Montalbano, G. (2022). "Despite the Fear": Emancipation Trajectories in Libya, 1890–1930. *The Journal of African History*, 63(3), 400-417. doi:10.1017/S0021853722000573.

	a slave remains unaffected, and her attempt to secure proof of her daughter's lineage tragically leads to her demise in a fire at the slave pens.
<i>Muhammad bin Shatwan</i>	He is ' <i>Atiqa</i> 's white Arab father, hails from a wealthy trading family in Benghazi with an assortment of concubines, slaves, and a white wife and daughters. Eager to have a son but discreet about his relations with <i>Ta'awidha</i> , <i>Muhammad</i> fails to acknowledge ' <i>Atiqa</i> ' as his offspring due to her enslaved mother and the potential backlash from his family.
<i>'Atiqa</i>	<i>'Atiqa</i> , a central figure in the narrative, grapples with uncovering her true lineage and acquiring the documentation for her freedom. With her mixed-race heritage manifesting in her fair complexion and almond-shaped eyes, ' <i>Atiqa</i> ' navigates her quest for identity and emancipation.
<i>Ali Bin Shatwan</i>	He's ' <i>Atiqa</i> 's cousin and confidant of her father <i>Muhammad</i> , endeavours to reveal the truth about ' <i>Atiqa</i> 's parentage and advocates for her rightful inheritance from her father's family.

Table 1.4.3.6: The Main Characters and Their Roles in *Zarayib al-Abeed*

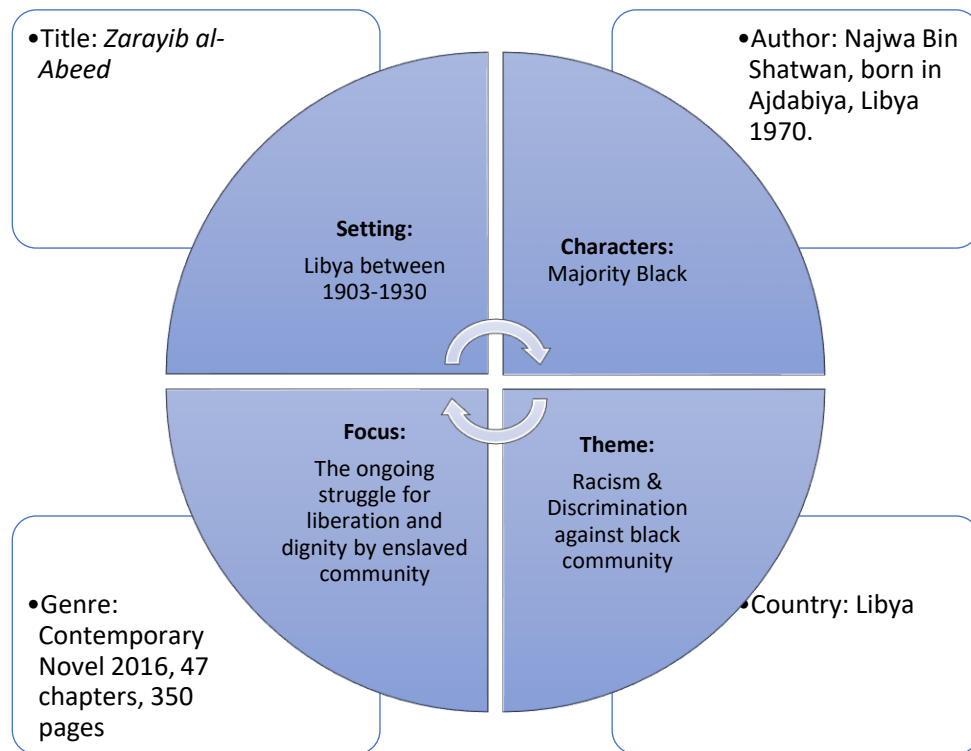


Figure 1.4.3.6: *Zarayib al-Abeed's* Novel Description

1.4.3.7 Six Novels: An Overview Table

Below is a table comparing different works and their messages, which provides a quick overview of the country and date of the slavery events depicted, as well as the topic and the ratio of diverse racial and ethnic re-presentations among the characters.

The Work	<i>Zarayib al-Abeed</i>	<i>Thaman al-Milḥ</i>	<i>Li-annī Aswād</i>	<i>Ta'am Aswād, Ra'eha Swada</i>	<i>Maymūna</i>	<i>Dongola</i>
Setting	Libya 1900-1930	Bahrain 1903-1908	Kuwait 1980-1990	Yemen 1975-1982	Hejaz, 1855-1916	Egypt 1952-1975
Theme	Slavery	Slavery	Blackness	Blackness	Slavery	Blackness
Characters	Majority Black (64%)	Majority Black (63%)	Majority Black (58%)	Majority Black (65%)	Majority Black (57%)	Majority Black (55%)

Message	Raising awareness of the lasting repercussions of slavery in Libya.	To confront the harsh realities of these oppressive systems.	Defeating racism requires challenging societal norms and perception s, as it is portrayed as a pervasive system rather than isolated incidents.	To bring awareness to the struggles and discrimination faced by Yemen's marginalised black community.	To confront present-day issues of racism, discrimination, and the enduring legacy of slavery in Saudi society.	Resilience, cultural preservation, and the enduring quest for freedom in the face of oppression and tradition.

Table 1.4.3.7: Six Novels: An Overview Table

The percentage of characters mentioned in the text was calculated based on the number of individuals referred to, including both those who played a role in the novel's events and those who were merely cited as historical figures or names. Including characters particularly black ones who are only mentioned by name or have no roles can also be significant for the following reasons: (a) Mentioning black characters by name, even if they have no role, implies that they hold some level of significance in the narrative, even if it is not explicitly stated; (b) Including names of historical figures or cultural references can add depth and authenticity to the narrative, acknowledging the existence and contributions of black people in history; and (d) These minor appearances can also hint at unspoken or underlying themes or tensions in the narrative, such as racism, systemic oppression, or social hierarchy.

1.4.4 The Criteria Used for the Six Novels:

1.4.4.1 The Common General Characteristics of Selected Novels:

The six novels listed above were selected for this dissertation because, collectively, they showcase a range of common general characteristics such as theme, perspective, writing style, literary background, and personal experience. These characteristics include the following:

1.4.4.1.1 Historical consciousness:

Arab societies have had historical connections to the trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean slave trades, resulting in a significant presence of enslaved Africans across the region (Gordon, 1992:4-5). With growing historical awareness, all of these novelists have decided to explore these past connections and to shed light on the experiences of enslaved and black individuals in their fictional works. The driving force behind this effort is a desire to fill the void left by the dominant narratives and restore the humanity of the enslaved by reimagining their subjectivity. In essence, these new novels reconfigure the traditional narrative styles of historical, geographical, scientific, religious, and philosophical texts written mostly by white Muslim authors in the Middle Ages⁴⁷, focusing instead on the subject formation of black African slaves. These works empower slaves to tell their own stories of slavery, enslavement, racism, and marginalisation, crafting narratives that maximise emotional and political impact. By doing so, they assert that even though these black slaves did not own their bodies, they were able to reclaim agency in shaping their own life stories.

As shown previously, due to the long historical silence surrounding the existence of slave narratives and the tendency for authority to cater to white audiences or conceal painful pasts, the new slave narrative serves as a form of literary archaeology. It emphasises the need to access the inner lives of slaves through fiction in order to bear witness to the experiences of people who did not leave written records of their history. This does not mean that they did not own their stories or histories; rather, it acknowledges that these narratives can fill the void left by earlier eras of enslavement.

1.4.4.1.2 The Impact of “Post-Modernism Movement⁴⁸” On Traditional Narrative Forms, Styles, and Themes:

The evolution of literary genres in human societies often mirrors historical events that embody social and cultural shifts. In Western literature, the concept of “post-modernism” is intricately woven into the narrative, but the classification of Arabic literature cannot be approached in the

⁴⁷ According to Nader Kazim, Medieval Arabic literature was replete with the weight of negative representations of black slaves, perpetuating stereotypes that permeated various fields of knowledge during that era (Kazim, 2004:15-16).

⁴⁸ “Post-modernism” is a complex and multifaceted intellectual and cultural movement that emerged in the mid-20th century. It is often characterised by scepticism towards “grand narratives”, “normative concepts”, and “absolute truths”. Instead, it emphasises the subjective nature of knowledge, the role of power dynamics in shaping discourse, and the importance of context and plurality (Hogue, 1996, Hicks, 2004 & Stephan, 2019).

same manner. The term “post-modernism” poses a challenge when applied to Arab literature due to the unique way culture and society manifest in the Arab world. Unlike the West, where “modernism⁴⁹” and “postmodernism” emerged from significant social, intellectual, cultural, and economic revolutions, the adoption of these literary styles in the Arab context can be seen as borrowed rather than organically developed. Some argue that these concepts were imposed on Arab literature similar to Western products invading Eastern markets.

In light of this, Meyer suggests that discussing “modernism” and “postmodernism” in the same context as Western literature may be inappropriate and misleading. Rather, it is more accurate to acknowledge the distinct literary modernisms that have evolved in the Arab world, shaped by their own historical predecessors. By acknowledging these differences, we can better understand the unique experimental nature of the Arabic novel (Meyer, 2001: 1-2 & Jumaa, 2022:37-40).

Nevertheless, the impact of intellectual currents on modern Arabic literature, spanning various genres such as poetry, novels, and visual art, is widely recognised. This influence can be attributed to several factors, with Western colonisation of the region being a key catalyst. Beginning in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Arab literature started to experience significant Western and European influence (Starkey, 2014:1). As the 20th century unfolded, the Arabic novel underwent a transformation, incorporating elements of “modernism” and “postmodernism” with their respective ideologies. Many novels of this period exhibited narrative fragmentation and deconstruction, moving away from traditional plot structures. Characters were portrayed with a sense of nihilism and fluid identities, often depicting anti-heroes whose negative actions overshadowed any positivity.

According to al-Behairi and Jumaa, the new novel embraced a structural openness that encourages boundless creative possibilities and a variety of narrative techniques. They emphasise that, in today's information age and era of globalisation, Arab novelists are increasingly focused on re-representing marginalised individuals, whether based on social, ethnic, or religious factors. This imaginative landscape has broadened to incorporate narratives

⁴⁹ “Modernism” is a literary and artistic movement that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is characterised by a break from traditional forms and styles of expression, focusing on experimentation, individualism, and a sense of disillusionment with societal norms. Modernist works often feature fragmented narratives, stream-of-consciousness techniques, and unconventional structures. The movement challenged the conventions of realism and explored themes such as alienation, the fragmented self, and the impact of technology on society (Butler, 2010).

that showcase people from a wide range of backgrounds, including diverse colours, races, and genders (al-Buhairi, 2019: 19-52; Jumaa, 2022: 43-179).

Therefore, the influence of “post-modernism” has played a substantial role in shaping various aspects of these Arabic slave novels, including themes, narrative structures, and the exploration of identity. These Arab novelists embraced the intellectual climate concerned with the epistemic and semiotic instability triggered by “post-modernism”. This includes questioning gender roles, exploring diasporic experiences, and challenging traditional power structures. According to Youssef, the impact of post-modernism has provided contemporary Arabic novels with a platform to amplify the voices of those from diverse ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds, allowing for the exploration and explanation of their struggles. These novels expose instances of Eurocentrism and racist colonial practices, while showcasing the richness of civilisation in their own countries. Furthermore, these works grant black individuals and slaves’ prominent roles, offering a counter-narrative to their long history of social exclusion and marginalisation (Youssef, 2018:1-41).

These selected Arab novelists, as we will show in the following chapters, have adopted various strategies, such as irony, parody, intertextuality, and fragmentation, to encounter racial hierarchies or challenge established notions of cultural authenticity. By using these techniques, they expose the constructed nature of racial and colour ideologies, disrupting traditional power dynamics, highlighting the universalities of human suffering, resilience, and liberation. Furthermore, these narratives challenge the limitations of the traditional official narrative used to convey Arab-African history and can thus be regarded as exemplars of postmodern slave narratives. This genre, characterised by its scepticism towards grand narratives and absolute truth, encourages the questioning of dominant accounts and the search for alternative perspectives.

1.4.4.1.3 Global Socio-Political Movements:

Global civil movements, such as “The Civil Rights Movement⁵⁰” and “The Black Lives Matter Movement⁵¹”, which began in America, have brought attention to racial injustice and systemic racism worldwide. These movements have inspired, in a way or another, these Arab novelists to examine their own societies' historical and contemporary treatment of black individuals, leading to the exploration of themes related to slavery and blackness. al-Behairi argues that the increased visibility of minorities and marginalised groups, including slaves and Black individuals, particularly among Arab writers, can be attributed to the flow of information around the globe. The United Nations and the United States have recently enforced human rights conventions and issued regular reports on human rights violations worldwide, with a particular focus on the Arab world. The United States has utilised human rights as leverage to influence policy decisions in these countries, resulting in a surge of voices advocating for the rights of minorities and marginalised populations to freedom of expression, belief, movement, leadership roles, and parliamentary representation within many Arab nations. This movement has extended beyond seeking support from external international powers to achieve their goals. This shift is evident in the portrayal of minorities in art and literature, where there has been an increase in the space given to the oppressed and marginalised to express their concerns and struggles through various forms of creative expression, such as these novels (al-Behairi, 2019:31-50).

Beyond simply exploring the topic of slavery, these narratives delve into the interconnected themes of race, colour, gender, identity, and place, examining the enduring relevance of past practices in contemporary society. This literary genre is heavily influenced by the post-civil rights era in the United States, where Arab creators - both black and white - reevaluated the significance of slavery and subverted its pervasive negative re-presentation. By offering a new, more nuanced portrayal of slavery, these novelists provide a means to reimagine the institution

⁵⁰ “The Civil Rights Movement” was a social and political movement in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s, which aimed to end racial segregation and discrimination against African Americans and to secure their equal rights and opportunities in all aspects of society. The movement utilised nonviolent protests, legal challenges, and civil disobedience to bring about change, ultimately leading to the passage of important legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Civil Rights Movement is considered a defining moment in American history and a key step in the ongoing struggle for racial equality (Sirimarco, 2005:1-14).

⁵¹ “The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement” is a global social justice movement that aims to address various forms of systemic racism and violence towards Black individuals. It emerged in the United States in 2013 after the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's killer and gained significant momentum following the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and other high-profile cases of police violence (Hillstrom, 2018:1-15).

and its complexities. They move beyond simplistic binaries of slaves and masters, victims, and perpetrators, to reveal the intricate web of social dynamics that underpinned the era.

1.4.4.1.4 Loss and Resilience:

These Arabic novels have delved into themes of slavery and blackness to challenge prevailing stereotypes and prejudices that were socially and culturally ingrained throughout various periods in Arab societies. By humanising the experiences of enslaved individuals and exploring their stories, these novelists aimed to broaden perspectives, challenge societal prejudices, and encourage empathy and understanding. Through the focus of these works on the ways in which they address the ongoing legacies of slavery in 21st-century issues such as economic and social inequality, racism, and the elusiveness of full belonging, these narratives demonstrate that understanding the present and envisioning the future requires acknowledging the past of slavery. Given the historical reality and theoretical significance of black slavery as a framework for understanding the exchange of bodies and ideas between Africa and the Arab region, these narratives can be seen as exemplars of a new slavery genre that transcends geographical boundaries. In light of this history of loss and resilience, these new narratives, as we will see later, not only invite us to reevaluate the past but also urge us to reconsider re-presentations of black bodies and subjects in recent history. The genre's central impulse - rewriting history in a way that resonates with the present - constitutes a "struggle with history" a counternarrative that seeks to understand what makes certain structures and systems what they are. The new genre demands a "re-reading" of history, one that recognises the need to confront and challenge dominant narratives.

1.4.4.1.5 Intersectional Experience:

As Arab societies become more diverse and interconnected, these Arab novelists have explored the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. Addressing themes of slavery and blackness have allowed them to examine power dynamics, social hierarchies, and the impact of racism within their own communities. They explore, as we will see through examples in subsequent chapters, the interconnectedness of different cultures and histories, illuminating the shared experiences of enslaved and black individuals regardless of their racial or ethnic background. By reenacting the experiences of enslaved individuals through storytelling, using narrative as a means to reconstruct their history, this new genre may educate contemporary audiences to confront the dark past. Rather than viewing identity as a fixed entity, already predetermined by cultural practices, we should adopt Stuart Hall's perspective, considering identity as a dynamic

“production” that is constantly evolving, shaped by and within re-presentation. As identity always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth, hence there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental “law of origin” (Hall, 1994:223-226). For this reason, cultural identity is not fixed, but is always subject to political considerations that change according to group interests, and which are dictated by certain circumstances. As Hall points out:

Our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continues frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history (Hall, 1994:223)

1.4.4.1.6 The Evolution of the Literary Scene:

With the rise of these new generation of Arab novelists, there has been a push for more diverse and inclusive narratives in literature. (Pepe, 2019: 179–202). By exploring themes of slavery and blackness, these writers, as we will illustrate in the subsequent chapters, contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the Arab world and challenge traditional literary tropes like plot structure and rigid character roles, dismissing them as outdated and inadequate artistic concepts. In addition, they refuse to adhere to the idea of centrality, a singular perspective, and the notion of meaning itself as a futile illusion. For instance, the influence of “postcolonial studies⁵²” on contemporary Arab literature is evident as novelists now celebrate the “black” community in their works, shedding light on their historical marginalisation and experiences of racism and persecution across various civilisations and nations.

One of the manifestations of the development of the narrative landscape in the selected novels is their use to employ diverse narrative techniques, exploring the complexities of Arab slavery and its re-presentation in literature. While some works utilise contemplative fiction and time travel to recover historical events and connect them to the present, others challenge assumptions about race and loyalty, rewriting not only the history of Arab slavery but also the literary canon. The narratives within these novels take various forms, including first-person testimonial narration, which adopts elements of the slave narrative and fable/myth to present

⁵² “Postcolonial studies” explores how colonialism has shaped the lives of colonised peoples, including their identity, culture, language, and power structures. It also examines the ways in which colonialism has been re-presented and narrated in various forms of literature, art, and media. It emerged as a response to the neglect or erasure of the experiences of colonised peoples in traditional Western-dominated academic disciplines such as literature, history, sociology, and anthropology. See: Overbey, K. E. (2012). Postcolonial: *Studies in Iconography*, 33, 145–156. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23924279>.

a realistic portrayal of slavery. Others employ third-person narrative, parody, satire, and science fiction, featuring multiple voices, gaps, and time shifts.

1.4.4.1.7 Gender Roles and Women's Empowerment:

Since the emergence of the sale of slaves, particularly relevant to post “Arab-Spring⁵³”, at public auctions in both Iraq in 2014⁵⁴ and Libya in 2017⁵⁵, the issue of slavery and racism against black people across the Arab world has gained social and political visibility. During this period, certain Arab writers, particularly those whose works were released around or after this time, as we will see in the examined novels selected for this research, started to explore significant instances of black marginalisation and discrimination, such as the legacies of slavery and racism. Most of these novels challenge traditional gender norms and explore the experiences of enslaved and black women, their agency, and resistance to oppression. Enslaved and black women in these novels frequently engage in acts of resistance, such as escaping, sabotaging their captors, or negotiating with their masters. These actions demonstrate their agency and resilience in the face of oppression. By depicting enslaved and black women as active agents, the novels question patriarchal authority and challenge the notion that men have exclusive control over women's bodies and lives.

1.4.4.1.8 Platform for Silenced Voices:

Regardless of how the themes of slavery and blackness were re-presented, all of these novels seemingly hold the power to provide a platform for silenced voices. By bringing topics such as social injustice to the forefront, these authors give voice to marginalised individuals or groups whose perspectives are often silenced or overlooked. Through narratives that delve into the experiences and struggles of these communities, these novels have empowered them by

⁵³ The so called “Arab Spring”, which began in 2010-2011, led to political upheaval and instability in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa, including Libya and Iraq. Unfortunately, these countries faced significant challenges in the aftermath of the uprisings and reports of slave markets or human trafficking emerged in both nations. See (1) Renahan T. M. (2017). *The Struggle for Iraq: A View from the Ground Up*. Potomac Books an imprint of the University of Nebraska Press. P. 414; and (2) Mafu, L. (2019). “*The Libyan/Trans-Mediterranean Slave Trade, the African Union, and the Failure of Human Morality*,” SAGE Open, vol. 9(1), February. Accessed 20/12/23: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019828849>

⁵⁴ Sullivan, Gail. (2014). *Report: The Islamic State Puts Price Tags on Women, Literally, and Sells Them*. Published on 03/10/2014. Link accessed on 16/10/2020: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/10/03/report-the-islamic-state-puts-price-tags-on-women-literally-and-sells-them/>

⁵⁵ Graham-Harrison, E. (2017). Migrants from West Africa Being ‘Sold in Libyan Slave Markets’. Published on 10/04/2017. Link accessed 07/05/2020: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/10/libya-public-slave-auctions-un-migration>

shedding light on their stories, challenges, and aspirations, thereby challenging stereotypes, and bringing about greater understanding and empathy. Ultimately, as these novels continue to gain attention and recognition, they amplify the voices of marginalised communities, enabling a more inclusive re-presentation of history, and encouraging a deeper examination of the legacy of slavery within the Arab Muslim world.

1.4.4.1.9 Fame and Recognition:

The perpetuation of racist stereotypes in some of the aforementioned novels, as will be explained later, has led critic Kareem to question the motives and the intentions of those writers, especially those who are not of African descent, portraying black individuals and slaves. Mona Kareem's concerns about the motivations and intentions of some authors are rooted in the fact that the decline of black re-presentation in the Arab world has created an opportunity for non-black writers to write for these communities. Moreover, it is crucial to note that even "black" Arab writers, such as Sudanese novelists Tarik al-Tayeb and Hammour Ziyada, do not identify themselves as "black writers," raising questions about their true motivations for writing about black people (Kareem, 2019). She observes this point firsthand when commenting on al-Tayeb's remarks in a television interview at a conference. During the interview, Sudanese-Egyptian writer Tariq al-Tayeb stated, "we still deal with blacks in stereotypical ways, especially in film, *they* are always presented and associated with certain jobs." (Ibid, 2019).

Kareem responded to al-Tayeb's statements, while reporting on the Second Annual Arabic Novel Conference⁵⁶ in Tunis 2019 by saying,

It struck me how a black Arab writer chose the we and they in this sentence, or perhaps there is a small we within a bigger we in here. This is noteworthy considering the good number of black writers in attendance [...] From one panel title "Black writer, White reader," in a nod to Fanon, it was clear how the Arab fixation on black skin functions as an erasure of race, therefore assuming Arab is White (Ibid)

⁵⁶ The second Annual Arabic Novel Conference was held in Tunisia in March 2019, where Arab writers across the Arab world held a discussion concerning the re-presentations of Black people in Arabic fiction around the topic of "Black-skin Issues". See: (1) Kareem, Mona. (2019). *Arabic Literature and the African Other: Africa is a Country*, 05 May 2019: Link accessed on 12/09/2020: <https://africasacountry.com/2019/05/how-do-arabs-talk-and-write-about-black-people>. (2) See: MCD (Monte Carlo Doualiya- Radio network/مونت كارلو الدولية/الدولية). (2019). "قضايا البشرة السوداء: محور اهتمام ملتقى تونس. للرواية العربية" (Black skin issues: the focus of the Tunis Forum for Arabic Fiction), published 08/03/2019.

Additionally, she pointed out that the term “Arab-African” to describe these writers does not exist in Arab academic circles and elsewhere, because “it is not an actual term that Arab thinkers are trying to adopt or even think about.” (Ibid) Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that the term “Afro” racially implies African blackness, which is used by black African “in opposition to Arabness, often citing Arab racism and exclusionary politics as reasons to depart from that historical bond.” (Ibid)

Therefore, in her same report, critic Mona Karim highlighted the existence of racist stereotypes in these works⁵⁷ and emphasised the role of their Western translators in addressing the author’s offensive language. She suggests that these writers may be driven by a desire for fame and recognition, as they exploit marginalised groups such as black Arabs, African immigrants, immigrants from South and East Asia, women, Assyrians, Yazidis, and Arab Jews. Following the Iraq War and the rise of identity politics in the region, Arab authors have taken advantage of the opportunity to write about these groups, potentially gaining acclaim from Western academics and NGOs (Ibid, 2019). However, despite the various motivations behind these portrayals, the lack of genuine first-hand narrative of black individuals in contemporary Arabic fiction has enabled non-black authors to step in and address this gap.

Overall, these Novels offer a critical lens through which to examine the historical legacy of slavery in the region. They aim to shed light on often overlooked aspects of the Arab world's past and challenge readers to reflect on the continuing implications of slavery and blackness on contemporary societies. Indeed, the increased visibility of these topics in the contemporary Arabic novel reflects an evolving literary landscape that seeks to confront historical realities, challenge stereotypes, and engage with broader global dialogues on race and social justice. All in all, these novelists tend to challenge this imbalance by uncovering the untold stories of those who were enslaved or discriminated against in the Arab-Muslim societies across different time periods.

1.4.4.2 The Distinctive Qualities of Selected Novels:

Once the common characteristics are identified, it is essential to highlight the distinctive qualities that led to the choice of these novels instead of others. But before we delve into it, it is important to stress here that attaining literary awards, achieving commercial success, or receiving acclaim

⁵⁷ The critic Kareem literally identified those works, as “Riahi’s own novels *Gorilla* and *The Scalpel* (Tunisia), Ali Muqri’s *Black Taste*, *Black Smell* (Yemen), Samiha Khrais’s *Pistachio* Obaid (Jordan) or Najwa Bin Shitwan’s *Slave Pens* (Libya).” (Kareem, 2019)

from critics and media outlets does not contradict or suggest otherwise regarding the sensitivity of the topic of slavery in the Arab world. As previously noted, while there is a significant disparity in the amount of discourse and literary works on slavery between American and Arab societies, acknowledging and grappling with this issue remains challenging and delicate even within American society. As Jonathan Brown has observed, discussing slavery in contemporary America is burdensome not only because it elicits strong emotional responses but also because it raises complicated issues of moral and sectarian contradiction due to the moral quandary it poses (Brown, 2019:50).

It is evident that the sensitivity towards slavery is not exclusive to America or the Arab world. According to Patterson, who has examined slavery across the continents, slavery “is not the peculiar institution but the embarrassing institution.” (Patterson, 1982:ix) Clarence-Smith quotes Michael Selman, who echoes this notion in his book, adding that the “accusations of slavery are 'a lasting source of anxiety' for all civilisations.” (Clarence-Smith, 2006:1)

1.4.4.2.1 Winner of Literary Awards:

All of these novels have either been long or shortlisted for the IPAF, or have been highly praised by critics, received considerable acclaim in the media and translated into other languages particularly English as follows:

(a) The novel *Dongola* was the first Nubian work to be translated into English. Originally released in Arabic in 1993 as “*Donqola: Riwaya Nubiya*.” It was awarded the University of Arkansas Press Award for Arabic Literature in Translation in 1997. The English translation, titled “*Dongola: A Novel of Nubia*.” was published in 1998 by the University of Arkansas⁵⁸.

(b) *Maymūna* was awarded the prestigious 2001 Sharjah Award for Arab Creativity in the United Arab Emirates⁵⁹ for his debut novel. This award, created in 1998 by the Emirate of Sharjah, aims to support and encourage literature and artistic endeavours in the region.

(c) *Ta’am Aswād, Ra’eha Swada* was longlisted for the IPAF in 2009⁶⁰. The critic Ahmed Al-Madini describes the work on the back cover of the novel, “this novel offers a fresh and unique

⁵⁸ See: University of Arkansas Press Award. “*Dongola*”. Link accessed on 20/01/2024: <https://www.uapress.com/product/dongola-2/>.

⁵⁹ See: al-Bayan Arabic Newspaper. “إعلان أسماء الفائزين بجائزة الشارقة للإبداع العربي” (Announcing the Names of the Winners of the Sharjah Arab Creativity Award). 13/02/2002. Link accessed on 20/01.2024: <https://www.albayan.ae/culture/2002-02-13-1.1289980>.

⁶⁰ See: the International Prize for Arabic Fiction: Black Taste, Black Odour | International Prize for Arabic Fiction, Link accessed on 11/07/2018.

perspective, presenting a literary approach that deviates from the norm.” (al-Muqri, 2008) al-Mushaed al-Siyasi magazine describes it as “powerful and emotionally evocative.” (Ibid) Additionally, al-Yamamah magazine praises the text for its “exquisite language and insightful revelations.” (Ibid)

(d) *Li-annī aswād* has won the Kuwaiti State Incentive Award for Fiction for (2010)⁶¹, as well as the Arab Prize for Cultural Creativity (ALECSO) for (2013)⁶². According to a critical review⁶³ appeared in the al-Quds al-Arabi newspaper on March 26, 2018, the Iraqi critic Jamil al-Shabibi said, “*Li-annī aswād* is one of the brave Arabic novels that challenge marginalisation and the unfair demonisation of blackness. Through its exploration of deep and provocative human inquiries, the novel offers new perspectives that empower readers, restoring dignity and acknowledging the value of all individuals irrespective of their skin colour, ethnicity, or language.” (al-Shabibi, 2018)

(e) *Thaman al-Milḥ* novel took centre stage at the Second Annual Arabic Novel Conference, titled “Issues of Black People” which held in Tunis in March 2019. Regarding this novel, Tunisian writer and novelist Shukri al-Mabkhout, one of the participants in the conference, commented, praising the novel, “It is intertwined with the emerging awareness of anti-racism, as well as the novel's role in amplifying the voices of the marginalised and showcasing the diversity within Arab society and history.” (MCD, 2019) He further noted, “It delved into the historical oppression and subjugation of black individuals in ancient Arab societies that relied on various foundational pillars, including the slave trade.” (Ibid)

Despite not receiving nominations or literary awards, nor being translated into other languages, this work, as mentioned earlier, has garnered literary significance through the author's diligent research on slavery in the Gulf region, focusing specifically on Bahrain in the 20th century. The author relied on real reports and letters from British archives as crucial sources for crafting this novel.

⁶¹ See: el-Watan newspaper "لأنني أسود" رواية .. "لأنني أسود" (elwatannews.com), (About the Never-Ending Cycle of Racial Discrimination). Link accessed on 15/09/2020.

⁶² See: al-Anba Arabic Newspaper سعداء الدعاس والرميضي يحصدان جائزة عربية (alanba.com.kw), (Sa'da al-Da'as and Al-Rumaidhi win an Arab award). Link accessed on 15/09/2020.

⁶³ See: al-Shabibi, Jamil. (2018). قراءة في رواية "لأنني أسود للكويتية سعداء الدعاس: إشكالية الصبغة الأقوى في عالم البياض" (An analysis of the novel “Because I am Black” by Kuwaiti woman Sa’dā’ al-Da’as: The Problem of the Strongest Colour in the World of Authoritarian Whiteness.”). al-Quds al-Arabi Newspaper. 26/03/2018.

(f) “*Zarayib al-Abeed*” was shortlisted for IPAF in 2017⁶⁴. Alongside its nomination, the novel was translated into English as *The Slave Yard* by Nancy Roberts and released by Syracuse University Press in 2020 (Ltifi, 2020:121). The Arabic publisher described the novel on its back cover, stating: “The slave Pens reveal the undisclosed story of slavery in Libya, a dark history that continues to resonate to the present day.” (Bin Shatwan, 2017) On the other hand, Syracuse University Press has included in its English version snippets of reviews and comments from newspapers and critics about the novel, as listed below⁶⁵:

“A challenging, powerful story of people trying to survive through some of life's harshest conditions. It captures a time and place with nuance and care.”—Book Riot

“Explores questions of race, class, and freedom. This is a novel that showcases lives of extreme poverty and lavish wealth, and explores the ways in which its setting—Libya in the nineteenth century—was a particularly fraught time for women.”—Words Without Borders

“An amazingly rich and fascinating novel.”—*Roger Allen, translator of A Sleepless Eye*

“This beautifully written novel is a milestone because an Arab woman writer dared to investigate, describe, and expose two slaveries: that of slaves and that of women.”—Fadia Faqir, author of *Willow Trees Don't Weep*

“The Slave Yards penetrates the soul and lives deep down in the heart.”—The Arab News

“A richly-layered story with several subplots--each interesting in its own right.”—Banipal

1.4.4.2.2 Diversity of Authors' Backgrounds:

One notable aspect of the novels chosen is the cultural diversity of their authors, with two black authors reclaiming their historical narratives from their own perspectives. By offering their unique viewpoints, these authors attempt to bring an authentic and personal voice to the discourse, enabling a more nuanced and comprehensive exploration of Arab slave narratives.

Specifically, *Donqola* by Idris Ali and *Maymūna* by Maḥmūd Trāwrī stand out as examples of black authors among not only our 6 titles, but the 15 titles listed above. These black-authored novels distinguish themselves through meticulous research and attention to detail, providing thorough

⁶⁴ See the IPAF: <https://arabicfiction.org/en/The-Slaves-Pens>. Link accessed on 15/09/2020.

⁶⁵ See: Syracuse University Press Website link: <https://press.syr.edu/supressbooks/2981/slave-yards-the/> Link accessed on 09/06/2023.

accounts of Nubia and sub-Saharan Africa drawing from historical records, archaeological discoveries, and cultural sources. The counter-narratives created an impression of authenticity and accuracy that deeply may immerses readers in the culture and daily life of Nubians and black Africans. Furthermore, there is significance in the inclusion of white Arab authors addressing slavery's injustices, striving to enhance understanding of history, and fostering conversations on the collective responsibility of acknowledging and rectifying past wrongs. In addition to cultural diversity, contemporary authors of different genders increasingly delve into themes of slavery and racial oppression, with the inclusion of women authors being paramount for heightened visibility and contributions.

Two of the featured novels are authored by women who bring unique perspectives challenging prevailing narratives and shedding light on the experiences of enslaved individuals. Their accurate portrayal of historical events and marginalised communities contributes to a deeper comprehension of the impact of slavery, particularly on women.

Geographical re-presentation across a broad spectrum from the Gulf countries to North Africa, historically known for its prominent slave markets and routes, alongside the region's rich cultural diversity, was carefully considered in the selection process. This diverse background and varied perspectives enrich the literary realm, providing a deeper understanding of the regions' cultures, experiences, and social issues.

Moreover, it should be noted that all of these writers⁶⁶ were born and grew up in the second half of the 20th century, a period when most Arab countries witnessed decrees abolishing slavery⁶⁷. Living through this transition, those writers either witnessed first or second-hand how society perceived slaves, former slaves, and other black individuals. Saudi writer Maḥmūd Trāwri, a descendant of African immigrants from Mali, delves into this theme in his novel *Maymoūna*, which follows one family of three generations of Muslim immigrants on a challenging journey

⁶⁶ The writers' birthdates and birthplaces are as follows: Idris Ali, born in Aswan, Egypt, in 1940; Najwa Bin Shatwan, born in Ajdabiya, Libya, in 1970; Khaled al-Bassam, born in Unayzah, Saudi Arabia, in 1956; Sa'dā' al-Da'as, born in Kuwait in 1977; Ali al-Muqri, born in Taiz, Yemen, in 1966; and Maḥmūd Trāwri, born in Taif, Saudi Arabia, in 1968.

⁶⁷ In the early 20th century, Arab countries gradually abolished and suppressed slavery, largely due to pressure from Western powers such as Britain and France. In the Gulf region, Bahrain was the first to abolish slavery in 1937, followed by Kuwait in 1949 and Qatar in 1952. Saudi Arabia and Yemen abolished slavery in 1962, with Oman doing so in 1970. Mauritania was the last country to officially end slavery, doing so in 1981. In 1990, the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam formally stated that "human beings are born free, and no one has the right to enslave, humiliate, oppress or exploit them." (Clarence-Smith, 2006:221)

from West Africa to the Arabian Peninsula. Egyptian Idris Ali, a descendant of black Nubian Africans, also shares the extent of persecution and marginalisation faced by the black Nubian community in Egypt during the 1960s in a semi-autobiographical work. On the other hand, writers who are not of black African descent, such as Libyan Bin Shatwan and Bahraini al-Bassam, focused on slavery in the early 20th century. They drew upon historical documents, archival records, oral histories, and actual photographs to depict the lives of these slaves in their narratives.

1.4.4.2.3. Variety of Narrative Themes, Style, and Structures:

Three of the selected novels namely *Zarayib al-Abeed*, *Maymūna* and *Thaman al-Milḥ*) take place during the 20th century, the same historical period when slavery prevailed in the Arab world, including the trans-Saharan slave trade era, in late Ottoman Empire, and during the Western colonisation. By drawing on historical documents, archival materials, and cultural references, these novels attempt to replicate historical events and create a detailed and immersive portrayal of the era. Conversely, the rest of the novels in the selection focus on the social and political circumstances of Blacks during the post-colonial period in 19th and 20th century in Kuwait, Yemen, and Egypt. They provide a platform for social and political critique, unveiling the remnants of moral values perpetuated by slavery and spotlighting hypocrisy in societal norms, structural injustice, and challenging the concepts of superiority and inferiority based on race, ethnicity, class, colour, or religion.

In terms of structures and style, each novel employs a wide variety of styles. The novel is divided into three or more parts, each told from the perspective of a different character. Each section contains flashbacks and memories from different time periods, which add depth to the characters and the story. For example, the protagonist's story, *ʿAtiqa*, in *Zarayib al-Abeed* is told through a series of intertwined flashbacks and narratives that jump between her present-day experiences and her past life as a slave. Additionally, the novel incorporates various narrative techniques, including “first and third-person narration accounts⁶⁸”, letters, and dialogue

⁶⁸ There are several types of narrative voices known as “point of view” and commonly used in literature, particularly the first and third, each creating a distinct style and perspective. Some of the most common types of narrative voices include: 1. First-person narrative: In a first-person narrative, the story is told from the perspective of a character within the story, often using pronouns like “I” or “we.” This perspective provides a personal and intimate view, allowing readers to experience events through the eyes of the narrator. 2. Second-person narrative: In a second-person narrative, the story is told from the perspective of someone addressing the reader as “you”. This technique is less common but can create a more immersive and interactive reading experience. 3. Third-person narrative: It is a type of storytelling where the narrator is not a character in the story, but an outside observer who is able to describe the events,

between characters, to create a layered and complex narrative structure. The mixture of “first and third-person accounts” offers a comprehensive exploration of life, allowing readers to experience events through the eyes of the narrator and creating an engaging and interactive reading experience. Overall, the novels' diverse narrative style mirrors the fragmented experiences of the novel's characters, who are struggling to piece together their past and their present.

1.4.4.2.4. Secular and Traditional Perspectives:

These novels offer a diverse range of perspectives on the subject of slavery. Bin Shatwan, al-Muqri and Ali's works reflect secular views, placing slavery within a historical and social context rather than taking a defensive or apologetic stance based on religion. The characters in these novels express critical opinions and address them using modern moral and human rights frameworks. The point of view in these novels highlights the importance of recognising that religion is a human creation and emphasises the need to confront and condemn the injustices of slavery, promote equality and freedom for all individuals.

In contrast, al-Da'as, al-Bassam and Trāwri 's novels present conservative viewpoints within a culturally traditional context. These works and their main characters at times justify and minimise the historical significance of slavery. These conservative perspectives prioritise preserving traditional values. As I will argue in Chapters 2 and 4, they appear less inclined to question or critique the institution of slavery from a human rights or secular moral perspective.

1.4.4.2.5. Perpetuating Stereotypes:

Despite attempts by authors to address the marginalisation of enslaved and black individuals in novels, most re-present their characters in a racialised manner. As I will elaborate on in Chapter 3, this often involves the use of negative stereotypes in their depictions and even in the titles of their works⁶⁹.

thoughts, and feelings of the characters. This perspective uses pronouns like “he”, “she” or “they” to refer to the characters, rather than “I” or “we” as in first-person narrative. Third-person narrative can be further divided into different types, such as third-person limited, where the narrator focuses on the thoughts and experiences of a single character, or third-person omniscient, where the narrator has insight into the thoughts and perspectives of multiple characters. This narrative style allows for a broader perspective and can provide readers with a more objective view of the story and its characters (Baldick, 2001:166, Schipper, 1985:53-79 & Nielsen, 2004:133-50).

⁶⁹ Detailed discussion and demonstration on these stereotypes in Chapter 4.

In his 2019 study on re-presentations of black individuals in contemporary Arabic novels, researcher al-Behari highlighted how novels like *Ta'am Aswād*, *Ra'eha Swada* perpetuate stereotypical images of black people found in both world classic texts and renowned Arabic narrative literature (al-Behari, 2019:98). These excluded characters, for example, are already marginalised due to their vulnerable social position, and the authors further alienate them by depicting them callously, often focusing on their physical attributes. With a narrative style that involves first-person accounts, where the narrator is also a character, these novels exhibit a dual layer of alienation as the characters' stories are presented through the racialised lens of the narrators. While there are typically three distinct writing voices – the character's, the author's, and the narrator's – they are not always clearly separate but remain present. Titles such as *Ta'am Aswād*, *Ra'eha Swada*, *Thaman al-Milh* and *Zarayib al-Abeed* are examples of reinforcing common stereotypes about enslaved and black individuals prevalent in the region for centuries. Notably, these titles often allude to racial stereotypes, suggesting derogatory associations between black slaves and animals or low value.

1.4.5 The Definition of the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative”:

Based on the outlined emerging phenomenon of “Arabic Black Slave Narrative” at the turn of 21st Century and its key characteristics, it can be defined as: a contemporary literary genre that re-examines and delves into themes slavery and its legacy in the Arab speaking world. This literary genre emerged primarily in the aftermath of independence from Western colonialism in the early 1960s and reached its peak of proliferation and flourishing during the first two decades of the 21st century. These novels are written by authors with diverse backgrounds, including descendants of enslaved Africans or individuals deeply connected to the legacy of slavery. They explore various facets of the slave trade, as well as the dynamics between masters and slaves, white and black, touching on themes such as power, oppression, resistance, freedom, and the moral dimensions of slavery. By shedding light on this often-overlooked aspect of Arab history, this genre aims to challenge societal norms and values.

An important feature of the definition is that this genre approaches the institution of slavery from a multitude of perspectives, incorporating diverse writing styles. This includes realist novels grounded in historical research, as well as fictionalised and semi-autobiographical narratives. Therefore, the contemporary novels on slavery can be categorised into three main forms. Bin Shatwan, al-Bassam, al-Maqri, and Trāwri's works exemplify historical fiction about slavery, narrating the personal and political transformations from slavery to freedom in the third person.

In contrast, the autobiographies of 'Atiqa and 'Abda present the life story of a former slave in her own words, granting her a platform to recount her experiences. *Maymūna*, *Dongola*, and *Li-annī aswād* novels, on the other hand, explore the lingering effects of slavery on subsequent generations by examining how black people of African descent in the late 20th century struggled with family secrets and societal legacies inherited from their enslaved ancestors.

These works are set against a backdrop where the past is obscured yet still palpable, serving as a powerful reminder of the importance of preserving historical truth. Through these narratives, authors aim to fill the gaps and correct the distortions in dominant histories, fulfilling a moral imperative to create a past that would otherwise be lost. By bridging the gap between past and present, memory becomes a crucial tool for storytelling, allowing readers to connect with the experiences of those who came before. As a symbol of collective remembrance, memory enables individuals to not only recall their past but also reconstruct it through imagination or "reality". This process is essential for true remembrance, as it allows us to relive and reexperience the events that shaped the collective identity. Through this mediation of the narrator, the story becomes tangible, embodied, and deeply personal, making the past feel more immediate and real.

1.4.6 Conclusion:

The emergence of "Arabic Black Slave Narrative" in the contemporary literary scene marks a significant shift in addressing the historical legacy of slavery and blackness within Arab societies. These novels provide a platform for silenced voices, offering nuanced perspectives on themes of oppression, resilience, and identity. Through diverse narrative styles, authors from varied backgrounds challenge prevailing stereotypes and engage with complex issues of race, colour, power dynamics, and social hierarchies. While some novels perpetuate harmful stereotypes, others strive to promote social justice and equality through their storytelling. By winning literary awards and garnering critical acclaim, these novels have gained recognition for their authentic portrayal of historical events and marginalised communities.

The distinctive qualities of these novels contribute to a deeper understanding of the legacy of slavery in the Arab world and underscore the importance of exploring this challenging subject with sensitivity and depth. Idris Ali, Maḥmūd Trāwrī, Ali al-Muqri, Khaled Al-Bassam, Najwa Bin Shatwan, al-Da'as all address themes of slavery, blackness, racism, and discrimination in their respective works, drawing upon their rich backgrounds and personal experiences to bring depth and authenticity to their narratives. While the association between slavery and blackness

remains prevalent in literature and society, these contemporary Arabic novels aim to shed light on the subject either as a historical event or intertwined with black identity. Although the historical influences that have moulded perceptions of slavery and blackness in the Arab world are acknowledged by these authors, they also recognise that the continued use of derogatory terms in literature and society presents a significant obstacle. Furthermore, they acknowledge the detrimental effects of racism on marginalised communities.

In the following chapter, we will explore the novels and their prominent themes related to slavery and blackness, examining how they shed light on the historical, social, and cultural influences that impacted the enslaved and black communities. Through thoughtful analysis and guided by key questions, we will delve into the complexities of their themes and historical and social contexts to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of these works and their contributions to the larger literary and social dialogue on slavery and blackness in the Arab world.

CHAPTER TWO

Themes in the Six Literary Works

2. Theoretical Introduction: The Narrative Settings and their Historical Background

The setting of these selected novels can span a sweeping timeline, taking the readers from the era of widespread slave trading, through the tumultuous period of slavery's abolition in the mid-20th century, and finally to the present day, where its lingering impact still resonates within societies. Some novels are set during the colonial era, when countries like Libya, Bahrain, and Hejaz were under foreign rule. Others explore the post-colonial period in Kuwait, Yemen, and Egypt, delving into the experiences of black people and the ongoing impact of slavery.

As the themes of the novels are rooted in particular social and historical contexts, this chapter seeks to analyse these events within those frameworks. According to Ladegaard and Nielsen, historical context encompasses the intricate interplay of social, religious, economic, and political factors that defined a specific time and place. It encompasses all the details surrounding an event (Ladegaard and Nielsen, 2019: 1-16). Therefore, analysing these events within their historical context is crucial as it fosters a deeper understanding of the narrative and clarifies the reasons behind characters' actions. This approach offers valuable insights into the motivations and decisions that drive these actions, enabling us to interpret and analyse past or future behaviours without solely relying on contemporary standards (Ibid).

Having explored the historical context surrounding the authors in the previous chapter to better grasp their intentions and messages, this chapter focuses on the historical context of events to understand the complexities of social phenomena such as slavery in contemporary Arab novels. It is essential, as I mentioned earlier, to acknowledge that these authors, particularly those writing historical fiction, create their narratives from the perspective of the 20th century, even when addressing events that occurred long before their lifetimes. As a result, the beliefs, values, and experiences characteristic of their own era significantly influence the authors' expressions and interpretations of those historical events. This dual lens allows us to appreciate how historical narratives are shaped not only by the past but also by the contemporary contexts in which they are written.

This chapter seeks to explore multiple contexts—colonial, traditional, and postcolonial—in order to identify both the similarities and differences in the portrayal of slavery and its effects on societies. Through this comparative analysis, we can uncover significant shifts over time, particularly the transition from acceptance to critique.

This evolution has been influenced by the rise of nationalist and Arab movements, alongside a growing awareness of human rights and a re-evaluation of traditional Islamic justifications for slavery within postcolonial narratives. The period of independence and the formation of nation-states marked a global shift toward a greater emphasis on human rights, resulting in a more explicit condemnation of slavery and its ongoing relevance in contemporary society.

Moreover, this analysis highlights the complexity of slavery's legacy, particularly regarding its enduring psychological impacts on individuals and societies, manifested in forms such as racism, discrimination, and hatred. By examining these dynamics across different contexts, this chapter offers a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of slavery's impact and its lingering effects on modern society.

Similar to the previous chapter, this chapter employs a set of questions as a framework to uncover the significant roles that slavery and blackness play in these literary works. It examines themes such as oppression, exploitation, racism, identity, colonialism, heritage, freedom, and equality. By investigating the following central questions, the chapter probes into the profound legacy of slavery within the collective history of these societies and addresses related issues.

2.1 The Chapter's Questions:

The questions of this chapter are as follows:

2.1.1 What is the Historical Context of the Work?

The setting of a novel is crucial in shaping its themes and character experiences. By situating the story in a specific time and place, we can understand the historical context that influenced attitudes towards slavery and blackness in the Arab world. Analysing the setting will allow us to uncover the complex cultural and social dynamics that underpin the novels and their themes.

2.1.2 What Socio-Historical Factors Shape the Work?

To fully comprehend the nuances of the narratives, we must consider the critical socio-historical background related to place. This includes exploring the political climate, economic conditions, religious influences, and cultural norms of the time and place. This context will provide a deeper understanding of the characters' experiences, motivations, and the societal structures that shape their lives.

2.1.3 How Does Slavery/Blackness Shape the Narrative?

The theme of slavery and blackness is a crucial element in many of these novels. Understanding its importance and significance is vital to unravelling the complexities of the narrative. By examining the extent to which this theme is woven into the fabric of the story, we can better understand its impact on characters, events, and key messages conveyed by the author.

2.1.4 How (if at all) is Slavery Conceptualised in the Work?

A crucial aspect of our analysis is to examine how slavery is conceptualised in the novels. By exploring the author's conceptualisation of slavery, we can gain a deeper understanding of the power dynamics, legal frameworks, and social structures that shape the characters' lives. This will help us grasp the themes more fully.

2.1.5 What Are the Works' Implicit and Explicit Messages about Equality, Freedom, and Justice?

Understanding the struggles and aspirations of the characters, as well as the societal structures that constrain or enable agency, is essential to grasping the authors' perspectives on equality, freedom, and justice. By examining these themes, we can uncover the novels' commentary on these fundamental human values.

2.1.6 Which Narrative Techniques Are Employed?

Finally, understanding the techniques from which the story is told is critical to grasping the complexities of the narrative. By identifying the different narrative techniques, whether from black or white characters, enslaved or free individuals, we can appreciate the diverse experiences and lenses through which slavery and blackness are explored. This examination will provide a richly nuanced understanding of the stories and their implications.

2.2 The Chapter's Structure:

To facilitate this analysis, we will divide this chapter into two sections. The first part will focus on novels set in the early 20th century during Ottoman rule and the British Mandate in countries such as Libya, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. The second part will explore novels set in the post-colonial era, in Yemen, Kuwait, and Egypt. Part One provides a historical framework to understand the nuances of slavery during a critical period of transition, allowing for a comprehensive examination of how colonial powers influenced and perpetuated systems of oppression. Part Two, on the other hand, provides a historical framework to explore how the historical practices of slavery continue to influence social structures, relationships, and cultural

identities in post-colonial societies. It allows for a nuanced understanding of how the past shapes contemporary issues related to race, class, and power dynamics.

This foundation helps to illustrate how historical contexts shape perceptions and practices of slavery. By separating the chapters into two parts, this chapter can effectively analyse the evolution of slavery and its impacts over time. This chronological structure allows for a clearer understanding of how the legacies of slavery from the early 20th century continue to affect socio-political landscapes in the post-colonial period.

This analysis sets the stage for a nuanced understanding of the work and its themes by exploring the following key areas: (1) slavery in the early 20th century under Ottoman rule and the British Mandate in Libya, Bahrain, and Hejaz; (2) the setting, themes, and perspectives of each novel in this period, culminating in a conclusion; (3) the legacy of slavery during the post-colonial era in Yemen, Kuwait, and Egypt; (4) the setting, themes, and perspectives of each novel in this phase, summarised at the end; and (5) the similarities and differences between the six novels.

The division facilitates comparisons between the differing contexts within which slavery operated, as well as how these contexts influenced the experiences of enslaved individuals. It allows for an examination of both the similarities and differences across regions during and after colonial rule. Each part can spotlight specific themes relevant to its time period. For example, Part One emphasises themes of colonialism and exploitation, while Part Two focuses on themes of identity, heritage, and post-colonial struggles for equality.

At the conclusion of this chapter, we will present a summary of the main differences and similarities between the six works that tackled slavery and blackness in these spatial and temporal contexts, highlighting key findings.

2.3 Slavery in the Early 20th Century During the Ottoman Rule and British Mandate: Libya, Bahrain, and Hejaz

Despite the varying degrees of similarity and dissimilarity between the Ottoman and British Empires in the Arab region, with regards to duration, ideology, administrative systems, culture, economy, colonial mentality, and legacy, a crucial consideration emerges when discussing slavery. Can colonialism be regarded as a form of slavery?

This question warrants equal consideration, at least within the historical context of this analysis, regardless of the two empires' differing stances on slavery. The Ottoman and British colonialisms have undoubtedly left a lasting imprint on the institution of slavery in the Arab world⁷⁰. However, recognising the complexity of historical events, we will refrain from simplistically evaluating their legacies, opting instead to explore these themes through the novels that tell their stories.

In the early 20th century, slavery persisted in various forms across territories under Ottoman and British rule, including Libya, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. Enslaved individuals, comprising men and women, were deeply entrenched in the social and economic fabric of these societies, being exploited in domestic servitude, commercial ventures, backbreaking labour, military service, and agriculture. Furthermore, they were subjected to providing entertainment and sexual services for their white Arab masters (Clarence Smith, 2006:162 & Zdanowski, 2008:100).

In Libya, however, even though the first official declaration for the prohibition of slave trading occurred in 1856 by “Uthman Muzhir”, the Ottoman ruler in Tripoli, slavery was practiced predominantly by the traders who benefited from their value as a commodity and by the rich or ruling local families who purchased slaves to be used as servants, or domestic slaves and concubines (Wright, 2007:153-165 & Altaieb, 2015:78-88). Enslaved individuals were typically taken as of war or captured during raids and were often traded or sold within the region or to neighbouring countries (Wright, 2007:27, Altaieb, 2015: 108).

As Libya is strategically located on the Mediterranean coast, it served as a crucial Middle Passage for the transportation of black slaves from North Africa. The majority of these slaves in the 19th

⁷⁰ See for example: (1) Nguyen, Ngoc. (2021). *From Slavery to Kafala: British Colonialism and Its Impact on Labor Governance in the Persian Gulf 1800 – 1950*. A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of Honors in Culture and Politics. Georgetown University in Qatar. (2) Toledano, E. R. (1998). *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*. University of Washington Press.

century were shipped by sea to various destinations in the Balkans, the Aegean, Anatolia, or the Levant for final sale (Wright, 2007:127).

The Ottoman authorities made efforts under the pressure⁷¹ from the western powers to abolish slavery in Libya, but the practice persisted until well into the middle of 20th century. According to Altaieb, “although slavery was formally abolished between 1856 and 1911, in practice, there was very little change in the social lives of slaves, or indeed in the formal status that underlined the institution of slavery.” (Ibid:21) In this context, according to researcher Montalbano's groundbreaking study⁷² on slavery in Libya, the institution persisted in practice, particularly in Benghazi, and it was not until the early 1930s that the slave trade was officially abolished.

In Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, slavery also continued into 1937 in Bahrain and 1962 in Saudi Arabia, with enslaved individuals being predominantly of African descent and used for various forms of labour (Clarence Smith, 2006:116-183 & Hopper, 2015:209). The Ottoman Empire officially abolished slave trade in the Gulf region around 1847⁷³, but the practice lingered on in these regions due to cultural and economic factors. Hopper argues that the growth of the oil industry played a crucial role in the Gulf economy, allowing Gulf sheikhdoms to financially support the liberation of slaves. Furthermore, pressure from the League of Nations pushed the British administration in the Gulf to advocate for official declarations to abolish slavery, especially with the potential for oil concessions after 1937, the increasing influence of Persia, and the relocation of the British Residency from Bushire to Bahrain in 1947. The progression towards formal abolition in the Gulf states closely mirrored the advancements in the oil industry, which not only provided funds to compensate slave owners, as seen in Qatar, but also created new opportunities for the recently emancipated slaves (Hopper, 2015:209).

Overall, the persistence of slavery in these regions reflects the deep-rooted inequalities and power dynamics that defined the social structures of the time.

⁷¹ According to Clarence Smith, Wright, Altaieb, and Scaglioni, the Ottoman authority found itself in a difficult position due to conflicting pressures during this time. On one side, there were demands from European abolitionists to end slavery, while on the other side, there was the threat of rebellion from Libyan slaveholders and merchants. In order to navigate these pressures and concerns about potentially losing control over territories like Libya and Tunisia, the Ottoman governor (Sultan) made the decision in 1856 to sign an anti-slavery agreement that would be enforced across all regions (Clarence Smith, 2006:101-104, Wright, 2007:58-68, Altaieb, 2015:20, & Scaglioni, 2020:67-74 &).

⁷² See Montalbano, G. (2022). ‘Despite the Fear’: Emancipation Trajectories in Libya, 1890–1930. *The Journal of African History*, 63(3), 400-417. doi:10.1017/S0021853722000573.

⁷³ See: Erdem Y. H. (1996). *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise, 1800-1909*. Palgrave. (PP. 67-99)

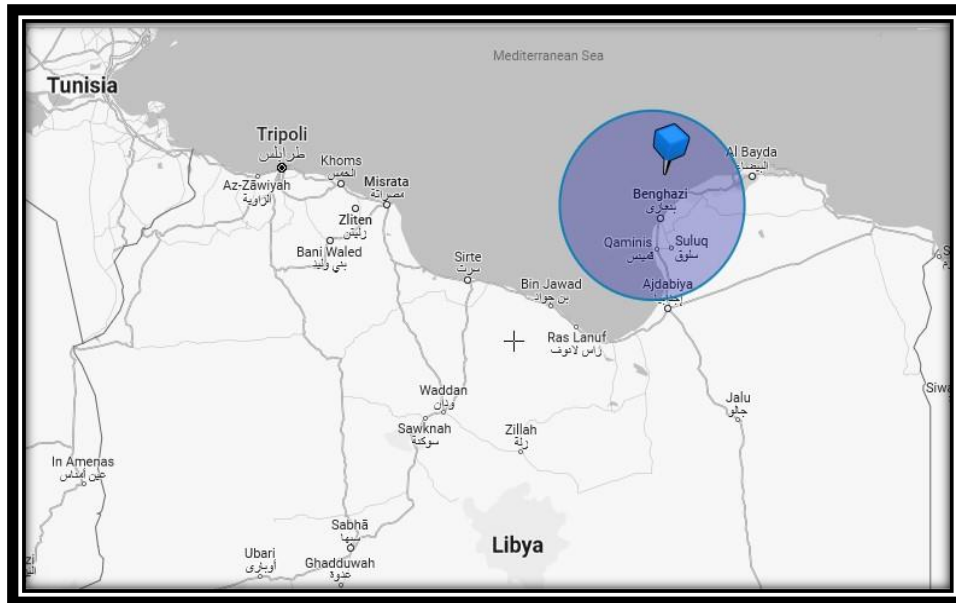
Having, briefly, shed light on the institution of slavery, its pervasive practices, and the failed attempts to eradicate it during Ottoman and British rule in Libya, Bahrain, and the Hejaz during the early 20th century, we will now delve into the historical context, setting, and thematic nuances surrounding these narratives, beginning with Libya, followed by Hejaz and then Bahrain.

2.3.1 Najwa Bin Shatwan's Novel *Zarayib al-Abeed*, Libya:

2.3.1.1 Brief Historical Background:

Libya was part of the Ottoman Empire from the early 16th century until the early 20th century. During this period, Libya was divided into several provinces, each governed by a local Ottoman governor or “Pasha”. The Ottoman provinces in Libya included Tripolitania (western Libya), Cyrenaica (eastern Libya), and Fezzan (southern Libya). The three Ottoman provinces in Libya - Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan - played significant roles in the trans-Saharan and trans-Mediterranean slave trade during the Ottoman rule (Wright, 2007:114). The importance of these provinces for the slave trade can be understood through their strategic locations along key trade routes, their connections to regional markets, and their roles in facilitating the movement of enslaved individuals between different parts of Africa and Europe. The trans-Saharan and trans-Mediterranean slave trade networks that operated through these provinces were integral to the economy and society of the Ottoman territories in North Africa. In the early 20th century, Libya was a key region for the trans-Saharan and trans-Mediterranean slave trade, with several famous trade routes traversing the country (Altaleb, 2015:72).

Some of the notable slave trade routes in Libya during this time period included the caravan routes. Caravan routes were used to transport enslaved individuals from the interior regions of Libya to coastal cities such as Tripoli and Benghazi, where they were then sold and shipped to markets in Europe and other Mediterranean countries. These caravan routes were crucial for the movement of enslaved individuals within Libya and connecting them to the broader trans-Saharan and trans-Mediterranean trade networks (Wright, 2007:18-40 & Altaleb, 2015:47-51).



2.3.1.1 Map of Libya, Benghazi (Source: Google Map)

Indeed, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, slavery persisted in Libya, particularly in coastal areas controlled by the Ottomans. Fuelled by the trans-Saharan slave trade, this practice involved capturing and moving individuals from sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and beyond, playing a pivotal role in the country's social and economic fabric. In this era, slavery significantly influenced the social and economic landscape of Libya under Ottoman rule, profoundly impacting the lives of enslaved individuals by shaping their experiences, opportunities, and social standing (Wright, 2007: 153-166, Toledano, 2007: 62-116, & Altaieb, 2015:87-101) Additionally, it contributed to the broader regional slave trade, as highlighted by Altaieb⁷⁴ and Wright⁷⁵.

According to the author of *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*, the slave trade thrived along the Benghazi-Saharan Valley route under the protection of the Senussi caliphs⁷⁶, lasting longer than

⁷⁴ See: Altaieb, Amal. (2015). *The Social and Economic History of Slavery in Libya (1800- 1950)*. University of Manchester. PP 63-81.

⁷⁵ See: Wright J. (2007). *The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade*. Routledge. PP 58-68.

⁷⁶ The Senussi movement was a prominent religious and political movement in Libya and North Africa during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Founded by Sidi Muhammad ibn Ali al-Senussi in the 19th century, the Senussi order advocated for a puritanical form of Islam and sought to promote spiritual and social welfare among its followers. Under the leadership of prominent figures such as Ahmed al-Sharif, the Senussi movement grew in influence and power, establishing a network of religious schools, lodges, and centres across the region. The movement also had economic interests, including control over trade routes and commercial activities. Despite its decline in political power following the Italian occupation, the Senussi movement continued to have cultural and religious significance in Libya and beyond. See: (1) Shukrī, F. Muhammad. (2014). *Al-Sanusiyya: A Faith and A State*. Centre for Libyan Studies (Oxford,

any other desert route. The British consul in Benghazi noted in 1892 that the Muslim population considered the slave trade to be a legitimate business. The Sultan of the Valley, a prominent member of the Senussi order, frequently sent slaves as gifts to the head of the order. Upon assuming leadership of the Senussi Sufi movement in 1902, Ahmed al-Sharif (d. 1933) requested eunuchs, beautiful young female captives, and employed slaves as agricultural laborers and soldiers in northern Chad (Clarence-Smith, 2006:162).

Yet the Senussi movement's stance on slavery is a topic of debate among European scholars. While some argue that the movement's leader, al-Senussi, was vehemently opposed to the slave trade and worked to eradicate it, others dispute this, citing a lack of evidence that he preached against enslavement or the slave trade (Ibid:161-2). In fact, as mentioned earlier, some believe that the Senussi himself profited from the lucrative trade, particularly in Benghazi during his time (Wright, 2007:105-6). However, other research suggests a more complex reality. According to Bell's account, in the 1930s, the city of Kufra, a stronghold of the Senussi movement, had a population of approximately 5,000 people, with 1,500 of them being slaves. In the village of Taj, another key Senussi stronghold, nearly half of the slave population lived with Senussi families, with each family owning around 100 slaves (Bell, 1945: 7-8). This raises questions about the Senussi movement's complicity in or silence regarding the institution of slavery.

Nevertheless, a significant and enduring legacy of slavery in Libya is the perpetuation of derogatory language used to refer to individuals with black skin, regardless of their social background. The terms “‘Abd” (Slave) and its diminutive forms, such as “‘Abaīd” for a male and “‘Abaīdah” for a female, as well as “Khadim” (plural: khuddam) for a female slave, continue to be employed to describe black individuals. According to researcher Amal Altaieb, these terms originated from the past's recollections of the social status of black slaves before the abolition of slavery. They were widely used in Sharia court records, government documents, and everyday conversations, often specifically referring to male or female slaves who worked in domestic service or as concubines, with their masters having a son known as “Umm al-Walad⁷⁷”, literally meaning “mother of the son” (Altaieb, 2015: 14-15). In addition to the terms “‘Abd” and its

England). (2) Ziadeh, N. A. (1983). *Sanūsīyah. A Study of Revivalist Movement in Islam* (2., photomech. repr. (d. Ausg.) Leiden 1958. With an appendix by R.J.I. ter Laan). Brill.

⁷⁷ This term known as (mother of the son) refers to an enslaved woman who gives birth to a male child from her master, whereby the enslaved becomes, according to Islamic law, free upon the death of her master and the child is entitled to inherit as equal to his free brothers (Sobers-Khan, 2014:77). Sobers-Khan N. (2014). *Slaves Without Shackles: Forced Labour and Manumission in the Galata Court Registers 1560-1572*. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag.

diminutive forms, other derogatory labels are prevalent in Libya, including “Zinji/Shwshan” for male slaves or freed male slaves, and “Zinjiya/Shwshana” for female slaves or freed female slaves. The terms “Waṣīf” (male) and “Waṣīfa” (female) are also used to describe black servants, which, like “Abd” and “Abaidah”, carry racist connotations linked to physical appearance, specifically “blackness” (Ibid:15). These terms are not only used in Libya but are also employed in other North African countries such as Tunisia (Scaglioni, 2020: 19). What is particularly striking is that these labels serve as derogatory nicknames for dark-skinned individuals, implying a supposed slave past.

2.3.1.2 The Setting, Themes and Perspectives:

2.3.1.2.1 Story Preview

Zarayib al-Abeed novel is set against the backdrop of late Ottoman Libya, weaving a fictional narrative that offers a nuanced exploration of the country's social and political landscape during that era. Through the characters' experiences and the challenges they face, the novel provides a vivid portrayal of the complexities and obstacles that shaped the country's history. The novel tells the story of long-run effect of slavery and class struggle on Libyan society through a love story between the white master *Muhammad Bin Shatwan* and his black female slave *Ta'awidha*. After a period of sexual intercourse, *Ta'awidha* gave her Master *Muhammad* a daughter, whom she named ‘*Atiqa*, meaning freed slave. As *Ta'awidha*’s life unfolds little by little, her daughter gets an opportunity for education in one of the Italian missionary institutions known as “Josephite mission” in al-Fwayhāt area of Benghazi (Bin Shatwan, 2017:24). According to Montalbano,

Fwayhāt Mission, was a Catholic institute dedicated to Black manumitted children, founded in 1904 on the outskirts of Benghazi, in a locality called (al-)Fwayhāt (الفوايهات)... Father Girolamo Apolloni founded the mission in 1904, and it became fully operational in 1905. During its mission, the Fwayhāt institute hosted dozens of young Black formerly enslaved children, teaching them the Italian language, Catholic catechism, and handcrafting. A female section was established and managed by the Sisters of Charity of Immaculate Conception. The manumitted children hosted in the Fwayhāt institute were referred to in the Italian sources as Moretti ‘little Moors’ (Montalbano, 2022:403-4)

The story of the girl and her mother is later twisted by a bloody conflict over colour, identity, and race, for which these enslaved black people pay a high price as a result of a racist cultural

system that has been rooted in society for centuries. Indeed, we will see that the theme of the novel is filled with identity politics and race and colour complexities, shedding light on the dominant tradition of Arabic discourse that strongly associates blackness with brutality, excessive sensuality, bestiality, ugliness, and degeneration. The narrative paints a picture of how racism is deeply rooted in this culture. In other words, the story constructs, through the dialogues between the characters, how racism creates unjust conditions lasting for generations. To depict the scenes of this inhuman treatment, the narrative focuses on the place where black people live in an isolated, closed, and neglected area, suffering poverty, diseases, illiteracy, and lack of resources. It is crucial to note that the “animal pen-like shelters” featured in the title of the novel are not fictional constructs, but rather actual structures that existed in Ottoman Benghazi, as attested to by the author herself, Najwa Bin Shatwan. According to Bin Shatwan, she came across a photograph of these structures, taken by an unknown Italian traveller before the Italian occupation of Libya (Ltifi, 2020:124).

2.3.1.2.2 The Conflict Between “Blackness” and “Whiteness”⁷⁸

Through the poignant love story between the white master, *Muhammad bin Shatwan*, and his slave woman *Ta'awidha*, the narrative poignantly highlights the struggles faced by the neglected and marginalised black community living in isolation under the control of their dominant white slave owners. For instance, when Master Muhammad first encountered *Ta'awidha*, he was drunk and took advantage of her without consent. When she became pregnant with his child, his family forced her to undergo a painful abortion procedure (Bin Shatwan, 2017: 178-186). His mother insisted on this cruel decision, citing the shame that would befall the family if a black child born to a slave were to join their family, stating: “No, it will not be. A baby whose mother is black slave, and Muhammad has a white wife like the moon.” (Ibid:202).

This incident serves as a stark illustration of the callous disregard for the well-being of enslaved women and their unborn children, who were treated as mere commodities rather than human beings. It underscores the egregious injustice and cruelty that slaves faced, as they were subjected to brutal treatment and exploitation by their white masters. Meanwhile, the masters themselves seemed oblivious to the suffering they had inflicted, going about their lives with a sense of normalcy as if nothing had occurred. This stark contrast between the margins and the

⁷⁸ According to Badawī, 1988:21, Lewis, 1992: 54-61, Schine, 2019: 36-68, and Lange, 2007: 429-445, Arabs, generally, tend to identify themselves as “white” rather than “black”, which we will discuss in some detail in Chapter 4, especially in the context of Egypt.

centre also highlights the stark inequalities disparities in power, resources, and privileges that define their social hierarchy. One prominent issue explored within the context of the social historical background is the juxtaposition of blackness and whiteness, freedom, and slavery, as well as colonialism and independence, all of which contribute to the complex narrative unfolding within the story.

2.3.1.2.3 Colonialism: Servitude or Liberation?

The author's nuanced exploration of the Italian colonialism in Libya during the early 20th century raises fundamental questions about the nature of freedom and enslavement. If the Italian colonisation of Libya can be viewed as a form of slavery, it is reasonable to ask whether the subsequent ban on slavery was a genuine attempt to transition from enslavement to freedom, or merely a superficial measure to mask the true nature of colonial rule. This inquiry prompts readers to consider the complexities of colonialism and its relationship to slavery and liberation. It also invites scrutiny of the Italian government's motives, forcing us to wonder whether their prohibition on slavery was genuine or simply a veneer of hypocrisy. Furthermore, this analysis highlights the interconnectedness of colonialism and slavery, leading to questions about whether colonised individuals can ever truly be liberated or if they are forever trapped in a state of enslavement.

Furthermore, the author acknowledges that the Italian colonisers played a role in emancipating slaves by seizing the land from their Arab Muslim masters (Bin shatwan, 2017:336). Following Italy's occupation of Libya in 1911, the colonial authorities compelled slave owners to release their black slaves, either by registering them under their former owners' surnames or letting them to choose their own names (Ibid:337). The writer offers her perspective on these inquiries, "Italy was among the nations that substituted human bondage with a type of colonial servitude to manage its freshly acquired lands." (Ibid:337)

In this context, the novel offers a distinctive perspective on the concept of slavery, transcending traditional notions of colour or race to reveal a more intricate and obscured dimension. Western colonialism, in particular, is often shrouded in misleading propaganda, with the most pervasive narrative being that of the "saviour" the "bringer of civilisation" and the "liberator" of people from enslavement and dictatorship. This dominant narrative has been instrumental in perpetuating a simplistic and inaccurate understanding of colonialism, hiding the complex and often brutal realities beneath its surface. The novel, however, pierces through this veil of

deception, offering a nuanced and thought-provoking exploration of the true nature of colonialism and its relationship to slavery.

2.3.1.2.4 From Slavery to Slavery

Upon uncovering his uncles' scheme to exploit his mother's inheritance for their own gain, *Muhammad bin Shatwan* confessed to his nephew *Ali bin Shatwan* that their trade partnership was purely for short-term advantages, and they would discard him once his services were no longer required. He states: "We have become a different kind of slaves, invisible slaves. We manage the affairs of others and survive on the scraps they distribute to us, yet we are not permitted to rival them in the commercial realm." (Ibid:346) Therefore, he admits, "Freedom in this country is not easy, even for free men." (Ibid: 348)

Hence, the author implies that neither legal systems nor cultural norms were sufficient to eradicate slavery in Libyan society. Instead, it was the Sufi concept of love, which views the master as equal to the slave, that gave the country a new sense of identity and allowed it to transcend the realm of destitution. This idea is exemplified through *'Atiqa's* account of her educational experience at the Italian missionary headquarters, where she recounts how this alternative understanding of love and equality allowed her to reevaluate her circumstances and find a path towards freedom. *'Atiqa* describes her learning experience:

Upon that moment, I departed from the realm tainted by the hardships of black slums and ventured into a new world, one more expansive and interconnected with all of humanity. This world transcends the division of individuals based on colour or gender, rendering blood ties irrelevant in its scope (Ibid:26)

The author's perspective, in this passage, highlights the limitations of legal and cultural frameworks in eradicating slavery, suggesting that transformative ideas, such as the Sufi concept of love and equality, played a crucial role in redefining identity within Libyan society. *'Atiqa's* experience at the Italian missionary headquarters serves as a powerful testament to this shift, as she embraces a worldview that transcends societal divisions and offers her a pathway to liberation and empowerment.

2.3.1.2.5 Blackness and Fractured Identity

The author skilfully weaves together first-person and third-person perspectives, giving readers a distinctive vantage point from which to witness the unfolding narrative through the eyes of both

the narrator and the enslaved black characters. This approach allows for a rich and layered exploration of the societal complexities of the time. While the writer establishes the overarching framework of the story, it is through the character of *'Atiqa* that readers are provided with a deeply personal account of her quest to gain recognition of her lineage from the white man and ultimately secure her freedom.

'Atiqa's sense of self is fractured as she internalises racist attitudes. She starts to believe in her own inferiority based on her skin colour and social status, prompting her to reconsider her views on race. At this point, she reflects on how she used to categorise people by their skin colour, seeing the world through a black and white perspective. The sense of being enslaved eventually takes on a surreal aspect, becoming a means of escaping from “reality”. In the relationship between *Ta'awidha* and her master *Muhammad*, the love they share leads *Ta'awidha* to feel equal to him. She confides in her friend about the affectionate treatment she receives from her white lover and the happiness he brings her:

I no longer see myself solely as his servant who exists only to please him. I take pleasure in his company as well. This sense of divine equality solidifies my belief that we are united as one. In our love, he is more than just a typical slave, he becomes enslaved by me. The Muhammad I know is different from the one others perceive. He belongs to me, not as a master, but as a partner (Ibid: 192)

This passage illustrates the complexity of *Ta'awidha's* relationship with her master, *Muhammad*, transforming traditional power dynamics through an emotional bond that fosters a sense of equality. By experiencing love that transcends the constraints of their societal roles, *Ta'awidha* redefines her identity, asserting agency and companionship in a situation typically characterised by subjugation, challenging the conventional notions of master and slave.

2.3.1.2.6 The Illusion of Equality

As *Ta'awidha* seeks to break free from the constraints of “reality” the enigmatic essence of her love transforms the master into a slave and the slave into a master. The following example exemplifies the situation she was experiencing. When *Ta'awidha* informed her master *Muhammad* that she was pregnant with his child and inquired whether he wanted her to terminate the pregnancy, he responded, “He is my son, and I will escort him to the mosque when he arrives so that everyone is notified. I worship for myself and my mistress. I am her devoted

servant.” (Ibid:198). As Master *Muhammad* kneels and kisses her belly button, she questions, “Would masters kneel to their slaves unless they truly cared for them?” (Ibid:199)

However, this illusion dissipates swiftly in the final chapters when a disagreement arises between them following the loss of their child. She expressed to him, “I am no longer your slave. You mean nothing to me now.” (Ibid:337) Certainly, the writer seeks to portray love as a kind of enchantment that diminishes all worldly disparities. The external narrator steps in to share her perspective in the situation,

Love transcends societal constructs like master and slave, black and white, or Arab and Negro. These are arbitrary boundaries that are non-existent in the relationship between a master and a concubine, with which no one should interfere (Ibid: 238)

However, one cannot help but wonder: can idealistic beliefs truly combat slavery? When slavery is internalised and takes on a hazy, illusory quality, it can become a choice, allowing individuals to rationalise their circumstances and accept the status quo when there seems no escape. In my opinion, this perspective embodies despair, and *‘Atiqa’s* attempt to convince herself that slavery has an inner essence is a coping mechanism.

Conversely, the previous passages reveal *‘Atiqa’s* subconscious acquiescence to the prevailing narrative regarding her own identity. She holds the belief that individuals, regardless of their race, possess inherent worth. At the same time, she reminisces, in the subsequent passages about how residents in the predominantly white neighbourhood, even those with darker skin, condescend towards them due to their blackness:

I was tormented by my own blackness, rejected by the non-black individuals in Benghazi. Even those with darker skin than whites feel entitled to deny our black identity, particularly in the context of the Mediterranean region (Ibid:59)

These different perspectives have played a role in shaping the characters' perceptions of themselves and their community, leading to internal conflicts and struggles with identity. When *Muhammad* approaches *Ta'awidha* with the intention of forming a close bond, she appears taken aback and doubting that her master truly desires her exclusively, as she was stunned by the revelation that “She is a Black servant for whom no one has shown interest in yet.” (Ibid:178)

This painful experience leads her to believe that she is “an ugly black slave from whom men run away.” (Ibid:179) Ultimately, the confluence of different perspectives in this novel serve to

challenge and complicate the reader's understanding of slavery and its impact on individuals and communities. Through a nuanced exploration of diverse perspectives and experiences, the author presents a multidimensional portrayal of slavery and its far-reaching impacts on society. By weaving together the narratives of *'Atiqa*, her mother, their master, and his family, the author provides a rich tapestry of stories that reveal the complexities of this entrenched institution.

2.3.1.2.6 Conclusion:

In summary, the story unfolds in late Ottoman-era Libya, particularly in the impoverished al-Sabri neighbourhood near Benghazi, emphasising the social and historical context of slavery prevalent during this period. The narrative explores themes of slavery, blackness, freedom, and colonialism, notably highlighting that enslaved Muslims could enslave fellow Muslims. While attributing the abolition of slavery to Western powers symbolised by Italy, the narrative overlooks local contributions because local efforts focus on emancipation rather than prohibition. It presents black individuals as commodities subject to exploitation for profit, domestic duties, sexual exploitation, and labour.

Through the character of *'Atiqa*, the novel revisits slavery and blackness, underscoring the crucial role of women in the fight for liberation. The events depicted are plausible and reflective of historical realities, emphasising the dominance of white individuals in shaping societal norms, making the elimination of entrenched beliefs seem more idealistic than achievable. While the form of slavery portrayed belongs to the past, the novel warns that its legacy may persist in contemporary society without substantial changes to existing social and economic structures.

The narrative examines the relationships among equality, freedom, justice, slavery, and colonialism, challenging readers to consider the limitations of legal frameworks in eradicating slavery. It depicts love as a transformative force for societal change and presents freedom as a spiritual ideal rather than merely a worldly pursuit. Lastly, the story is told through diverse perspectives, alternating between first-person and third-person narration, allowing a nuanced exploration of the dynamics of the era and prompting a re-evaluation of slavery's enduring impact.

2.3.2 Khalid al-Bassam's novel *Thaman al-Milh*, Bahrain:

2.3.2.1 Brief Historical Background:

Since the 16th century, Bahrain has been ruled by tribal sheikhdoms like other countries in the Gulf region, while the management of its foreign affairs has been entrusted to the British authorities since 1880, when Bahrain signed a treaty with Britain, which made it a British protectorate. The British provided military protection to Bahrain in exchange for control of the country's foreign affairs. This arrangement continued until 1971, when Bahrain gained independence. During the early 20th century, however, slavery was deeply ingrained in Bahraini society, with enslaved individuals involved in various industries such as agriculture, pearl diving, domestic service, and even for females' prostitution. These slaves were considered property, facing harsh living, and working conditions, primarily brought from East Africa and the Indian subcontinent (Zdanowski, 2008: 16-44, Hopper, 2015: 105-141, Nguyen, 2021:9, & al-'Awadī, 2021:49-75)

In 1905, Africans were said to make up 11% of Bahrain's population, with J. J. Lorimer estimating that Africans accounted for approximately 17% of the total population in eastern coastal Arabia from Oman to Kuwait. The population of Manama was 25,000, with around 20% of its residents believed to be of African descent (Zdanowski, 2008:24 & Hopper, 2015: 9).



2.3.2.1 Map of Bahrain, Manama (Source: Google Map)

Indeed, slavery, in conjunction with patron-client relationships, played a critical role in upholding the social structure and power dynamics of the Bahrain society. It was often regarded as a symbol of wealth and status, with ruling Arab elites leveraging large numbers of slaves to showcase their power and wealth (Zdanowski, 2008:103 & Hopper, 2015:8). With Bahrain under British rule, British authorities purportedly took steps to combat slavery and human trafficking, either through agreements with local leaders or by intercepting slave traders and ships transporting enslaved Africans. As Hopper points out, however, the British government,

made little serious effort to suppress the slave trade. Its primary goal remained protecting the route to India, and this goal required the maintenance of the political and economic status quo in Arabia and the Gulf. Any efforts to disrupt the slave trade were deemed likely to breed discontent (Hopper, 2015:149)

In the same context, Zdanowsky points earlier to the same point, arguing that the British authorities chose not to push for the abolition of the slave trade in regions under their influence, including Bahrain, because they understood that slavery was deeply ingrained in the local system and feared that its abolition could destabilise the political landscape (Zdanowski, 2008:32). As the pearling industry declined and international abolitionist movements gained momentum, pressure from these movements and British officials began to erode the institution of slavery over time (Zdanowski, 2014:1-20, 2008:155-180, Hopper 2015:104 & Nguyen, 2021:28-42).

Ultimately, Hopper posits that with the rise of oil wealth in the Gulf region leading to a new economic prosperity, the area began to rely on cheap labour from South Asia, which some argue either replaced or rekindled the region's historical practices of slavery. As the demand for African labour waned, many enslaved individuals were released, while others were left to navigate life independently. Some chose to remain in the households of their former masters, working either for themselves or as hired help. A number found job opportunities in the burgeoning oil sector, with the British colonial administration, or within the rapidly expanding Gulf urban centres. By the 1960s, slavery was no longer sanctioned as an institution, and by 1970, it was formally abolished throughout the Gulf region. Nevertheless, entrenched systems of domination and patronage persisted, reflecting the enduring legacy of past hierarchies (Hopper, 2015:210-11).

2.3.2.2 The Setting, Themes and Perspectives:

2.3.2.2.1 Story Preview

Thaman al-Milḥ sets the backdrop of slavery as the foundation for its narrative, characters, and plot, exploring the themes of social hierarchy and continuity in Bahraini society during the British Mandate period. The story is starkly divided between the wealthy, privileged white Arab elite and the poor, enslaved black African population. The novel highlights this dichotomy through the characters of 'Abda and Umm al-Khair, who are sold into slavery by their parents to escape poverty, while the Arab masters reap the benefits of their enslavement, enjoying the privileges of whiteness, wealth, and ownership (al-Bassam, 2017:18-25).

The offspring of the masters inherit their wealth and status, perpetuating a cycle where individuals like 'Ismā'īl Ibn Nasri continue to thrive in trade, mirroring their fathers. Conversely, figures such as 'Abda and Umm al-Khair find themselves bound by the chains of enslavement, following in their parents' footsteps. Inequity persists across generations, shaping individuals' opportunities based on their access to resources and means of production. As we will see later, what may seem like oppressive enslavement to some can be viewed as a form of liberation by others, particularly in circumstances marked by poverty and scarce economic prospects, where slavery emerges as the sole route out of extreme deprivation.

The novel illuminates this complex issue through 'Abda's interactions with 'Aisha, the spouse of her first master. While serving her white Bahraini masters, 'Abda comes to the realisation that the Bahraini white community will never fully accept her, prompting her to seek emancipation from slavery through the British consulate (Ibid:197). Despite eventually securing her freedom after a tumultuous struggle with her master, 'Abda swiftly comprehends the limitations she faces. Her white paramour, Barakat, who assists her in navigating the path to official liberation, reveals that their union is impossible due to societal constraints; his white lineage would never approve of him marrying a black slave (Ibid:213). Refusing to acknowledge her continued enslavement, 'Abda asserts, "My physical appearance may be black, but I am liberated and not enslaved." (Ibid:213) While initially denying any intention of changing her name from Hanna to 'Abda, she ultimately opts to retain the latter as it has become ingrained in her identity and personal history (Ibid:202).

The novel employs a narrative structure that oscillates between third-person narration, which offers an objective view of the plot, and first-person narration, which is voiced by the protagonist,

'Abda. This dual approach allows the author to adopt a multifaceted perspective, simultaneously observing the characters from outside and granting *'Abda* a personal voice to express her inner thoughts, feelings, and experiences as an enslaved woman fighting for her freedom. By switching between these two narrative modes, the author creates a rich and nuanced portrait of *'Abda's* life, moving seamlessly between the external events of the story and her internal struggles.

2.3.2.2.2 Abolition of Slavery Between the West and the East

From the novel's opening scene, the author keenly focused on the portrayal of colonial powers, particularly the British, and their role in abolishing slavery, contrasting it with the apparent silence within Bahraini society towards this oppressive institution. This theme permeates the narrative as the story unfolded. Whether intentional or not, the writer skilfully illustrated this contrast by depicting the people of Manama, a predominantly Muslim area, sleeping peacefully as the clock struck minutes before midnight, marking the dawn of a new century—the 20th century. The narrator sarcastically referenced the situation by jokingly warning that “only the dogs seemed determined to stay awake on this particular night, persistently barking and howling, their cries echoing throughout the city.” (Ibid:7)

In contrast, the British Consulate was lively and bustling with activity as officials and guests mingled, creating a celebratory atmosphere with champagne toasting the start of the new century. It is at this juncture that the writer portrays the moment of irony, as the British Consul addresses the crowd with the following words: “Wishing everyone a Happy New Year! Here's to celebrating the esteemed nation of Great Britain and its efforts in safeguarding the less fortunate nations.” (Ibid: 9)

The novel explores a significant theme, as it delves into the complexities of slavery and its lingering impact. This theme sparks thoughtful questions about the challenges faced by societies in addressing enslavement and moving forward. What underlying factors have contributed to the persistence of this institution? How can we work towards a more just and equitable future? What factors have shaped and perpetuated this culture of bondage? Crucially, how does the coloniser facilitate liberation for the colonised? Is colonialism synonymous with enslavement or liberation, and does the spectre of slavery persist or dissipate?

In light of the above, the novel explores the intricate nuances of slavery in the country, raising thought-provoking questions to the outset. What drives individuals to reject the freedom they have been given? Is enslavement a matter of circumstance or choice?

The narrative takes us to the British government headquarters in Manama, where a group of enslaved individuals, newly freed by the British consulate, make a poignant decision. Instead of embracing their newfound liberty, they request to be returned to their masters or sold back into slavery. Although the narrator does not elaborate on the aftermath, let us consider the conversation between the slave trader and the British Consul:

(Local officer): The issue is that the freed slaves wish to return to their homes.

(Consul): Alright, what seems to be the issue?

(Local officer): This particular slave, my lord, along with the others, desire to go back to their masters or be resold.

(Consul): That doesn't seem logical, what reasoning is behind this?

(Local officer): That is precisely their desire... they do not seek freedom.

(Consul): That's inconceivable... I find it hard to believe." (Ibid:12-3)

This occurrence prompts contemplation on why the slaves initially rejected freedom. Were the motives economic, social, or cultural? Did enslavement re-present a choice?

The absence of the enslaved characters' voices in the earlier exchange allows the reader to imagine potential resolutions. Reasons for favouring slavery over freedom might include: (a) inability to secure means of survival; (b) societal dehumanisation; and (c) mental confinement to the concept of slavery. Thus, in the slaves' perspective, refusal of freedom appears logical as it ensures survival under their masters. However, amid economic disparities in Bahrain, with the affluent prospering while the poor struggle, the author accentuates the economic aspect as the sole avenue out of destitution. '*Abda*, grappling with tough questions on self-liberation after being sold for a second time, faces the complexity of shedding enslavement. She reflects, unable to discern a path to freedom, saying: "If I were to obtain my freedom, what benefits and opportunities would be available to me, and where would I find employment?" (Ibid:185)

'*Abda*'s poignant reflection on the challenges of self-liberation highlights the harsh reality that freedom can be fraught with uncertainties and limited opportunities, questioning the true value of liberation in a society that may not support her thriving. This internal struggle underscores the complex interplay between personal agency and systemic barriers, as she grapples with the implications of her freedom beyond mere physical emancipation.

2.3.2.2.3 Social Stratifications and Reproduction of Inequality

As mentioned earlier, the story highlights the ways in which enslavement can perpetuate cycles of injustice across generations, as social constructs like race can be inherited and passed down. The narrative portrays a stark contrast between the upper and lower classes, with each aspect of life viewed through the lens of these two groups. This leads to economic disparities that are deeply rooted and transmitted from one generation to the next. As a result, for many people, enslavement becomes a means of survival. Throughout the novel, characters like *'Abda* and *Umm al-Khair* are passed from one family to another as a way to protect them from poverty. At times, their parents convince their children that slavery, despite its hardships, offers a better alternative to destitution. Enslaved individuals like *Umm al-Khair* believe that some wealthy families treat their slaves with kindness, providing basic necessities like housing, food, drink, and clothing – if this is the only way to survive (Ibid:48-49).

For instance, when *'Abda's* father reluctantly decides to sell his daughter, he exhausts all efforts to retain her by his side, but ultimately finds himself with no other choice. He says:

After exhausting all possibilities and considering every solution, I found myself with no alternative but to sell Hanna in order to ensure the survival of us all, including Hanna herself. The sole remaining option is to sell her in the Arabian Peninsula (Ibid:18)

Regarding the girl *'Abda*, she also reached a similar conclusion when she made the decision not to flee from slavery but to accept her new fate. She expresses, “maybe being enslaved is preferable to being poor. It's hard to say for sure.” (Ibid:20) When *'Abda* inquires her mother whether she and her husband were enslaved, the mother responds,

Yes, we were sold twice in Abyssinia. The first time was through a dealer and the second time was when your father married me. Your father is very poor, so much so that he was rejected even by slavery. One day, a wealthy prince purchased him. Your father worked for the prince for a short period, but unexpectedly, the prince decided to castrate your father and even displayed his testicles on the door of his house (Ibid: 20-21)

This is one of the key points the writer wanted to emphasise: abolishing slavery cannot be achieved simply by enacting laws as long as the economic, social, and cultural conditions that support it remain unchanged. Slavery is not merely a legal matter, but a complex socio-economic system established by the ruling class to preserve the existing power structure. As long as societal inequalities persist, individuals facing these challenges are left with limited and increasingly

difficult options. For instance, when *'Abda* successfully attains her freedom after a struggle with her master, she soon discovers the constraints that still confine her. Despite her assertion that she is no longer a slave and is now free, with only her physical appearance marking her as black, her white lover *Barakat* informs her that their marriage is impossible due to his family's rejection of a union with a black former slave. This underscores the fact that emancipation does not automatically erase the social hierarchy imposed on her based on her skin colour. In this context, her mistress *Muzā* reiterates the following argument,

Do not celebrate excessively, slave. Emancipation merely changes your title from slave to servant, so you may no longer be referred to as a slave ... Countless males and females have been granted freedom, yet they continue to exist unchanged (Ibid: 99)

While she may have altered some aspects of her enslaved status towards the conclusion of the narrative through acquiring the deed of manumission, her skin colour remains an indelible mark. Due to her blackness, others will persist in presuming that she is still a slave, subjecting her to disrespect. Consequently, she encounters obstacles such as the inability to secure a room or employment. Both men and women in the urban marketplace ridicule her and reject acknowledging her newfound freedom. She recalls,

Several individuals informed me that they do not rent to slaves, while others asserted that houses are solely for white masters. Renting a residence was deemed unavailable to a black woman by some, and a minority suggested that I should bring my master along to handle negotiations (Ibid: 211)

Ultimately, she discovered that manumission certificates hold little value without accompanying regulations or safeguards to ensure the rights of emancipated individuals. She says,

These dogs [referring to white people] disregard any agreements, accords, or crucial documents. They harbour distrust and desire only to maintain black people as their servants, perpetuating a slave-like existence. This allows them to inhumanely abuse and exploit these individuals without compassion (Ibid:214)

The implications of this statement highlight a critical perspective on the limitations of manumission certificates—in essence, documents that grant freedom to enslaved people—when not supported by robust legal protections and societal reforms. It suggests that the mere act of granting freedom is insufficient if the broader systems of power and social relations remain unchanged. Furthermore, the use of derogatory language indicates deep-seated resentment and

frustration toward the dominant group (in this case, white people) who, despite formal agreements, continue to undermine the rights and dignity of Black individuals. This reflects a belief that systemic racism and a desire to maintain control over Black lives lead to ongoing exploitation and abuse, thus perpetuating a dehumanising status quo that resembles slavery despite the existence of freedom documents.

2.3.2.2.4 Blackness is Synonymous with Slavery

Slavery and blackness have become intertwined in this work, often serving as default identities for black characters. While one may find a white character with enslaved ancestry, it is challenging to locate a black character who is not associated with slavery or enslavement. Even when a black individual is legally free, they are still perceived within narratives as if they belong to slavery due to their skin colour. The novel explores the idea that deep-seated societal attitudes and systemic biases continue to influence characters' understanding of race and social hierarchies.

The novel poignantly illustrates how the characters' experiences of blackness are shaped by a pervasive, often invisible force that affects their lives regardless of social class or status. Both enslaved black women like *'Aisha* and emancipated ones like *'Abda* are marginalised by a societal structure that reinforces dominant power dynamics, leading to feelings of isolation and disenfranchisement within their communities. The above quote subtly suggests that after emancipation, the primary option for many black characters is to continue in domestic work, blurring the lines between slavery and servitude. Former maids, like those who had previously worked in white households, often found themselves limited to similar roles if they were able to secure employment. For instance, *'Abda* struggles to envision a life beyond domestic drudgery, imagining herself only as someone who would return to the kitchen to wash dishes and face punishment for any mistakes she might make. This leads her to question the value of freedom, asking: "What is the benefit of freedom then?" (Ibid: 211)

These black women are faced with a double-edged sword: even when they experience racist treatment, they are denied the right to fight for freedom. *'Abda's* situation is a stark example of this struggle. On the other hand, re-presenting white colonisers, particularly the British, as abolitionists is a deceptive re-presentation. By transforming enslavers into liberators, the writer may unknowingly serve the interests of the colonisers. This portrayal allows colonialism to be viewed as a force of liberation, positioning the oppressor as a saviour. Ultimately, this approach

enables Western colonisers to impose their standards and norms on other cultures and societies, making colonial culture the benchmark against which all others are judged.

2.3.2.2.5 Conclusion:

In summary, the narrative unfolds in early 20th century Bahrain during the British Mandate, highlighting the deeply entrenched slavery within sectors such as agriculture and domestic service. The social context underscores how slavery and patron-client relationships-maintained power dynamics in Gulf tribal sheikhdoms. The novel focuses on the treatment of black slaves as commodities, illustrating their systematic exploitation, with poverty and social status as key factors in enslavement. Notably, the narrative attributes the decline of slavery solely to British colonial influence, lacking any depiction of internal efforts to abolish the institution.

The work explores themes of slavery and blackness, revealing the adversities faced by marginalised black individuals in Bahraini society. It emphasises societal attitudes that link blackness to slavery, suggesting a predetermined fate that reinforces the subjugation of African descendants. The character *Umm al-Khair* conveys the harsh reality of this oppression: "Remember, our lives were written for us from birth... This is our reality." (Ibid:49)

Through characters like *'Abda* and *Umm al-Khair*, the novel portrays the struggle for recognition and freedom amid interactions with white Bahraini masters, highlighting women's pivotal roles in resisting injustice, though these efforts remain isolated. The depiction aligns closely with the societal reality of the time. Moreover, the narrative connects slavery to societal power dynamics and economic inequalities, prompting questions about agency and liberation. The fact that the enslaved characters are Muslims complicates the narrative, revealing that they are enslaved by fellow Muslims. The novel asserts that abolishing slavery requires more than legal reforms; it demands a comprehensive overhaul of the social and economic systems sustaining oppression. By challenging traditional notions of colonialism and emancipation, it encourages readers to rethink their understanding of freedom.

2.3.3 Maḥmūd Trāwri's Novel "*Maymūna*", Hijaz, Saudi Arabia:

2.3.3.1 Brief Historical Background:

Slavery in the Arabian Peninsula has roots that predate the rise of Islam by many centuries (Gordon, 1992:18 & Lewis, 1992:3). In the Hejaz region, located in the northwest of the Arabian Peninsula, which was initially governed in the 20th century by the Ottomans before World War I and later incorporated into Saudi Arabia under the rulership of Ibn Saud, slavery persisted until 1962⁷⁹ when it was finally abolished. Because Hijaz was a poor, barren land, its economy depended on Hajj and the slave trade. For example, Zdanowski highlighted the extent of slavery and the lucrative nature of the slave trade in the Hijaz region in the first half of the 20th century. According to him, the prevalence of slavery in the early 20th century is starkly illustrated through numerous records from British archives between 1904 and 1937. These documents that he cites in his book reveal the significant profits made by brokers and owners through the buying and selling of slaves, with some cases showing that a single slave was resold up to six times over a period of 26 years. Furthermore, Zdanowski suggests that even prominent figures, such as King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, were involved in this trade (Zdanowski, 2008:104). Clarence Smith's research corroborates these findings, highlighting the significant slave ownership of King Ibn Saud himself. After his conquests of 'Asir and the Hijaz between 1924 and 1926, Ibn Saud implemented Sharia law and reportedly owned around 3,000 people. Additionally, his close associates were gifted slaves as a symbol of his favour. The Dutch consul in Jeddah at the time noted in 1923 that many Hejazi people viewed slavery as a sacred institution, deeply ingrained in their society (Clarence Smith, 2006:181).

⁷⁹ The abolition of slavery happened abruptly towards the end of 1962, when Prince Faysal bin Abdulaziz assumed de facto power from his staunchly conservative older brother. In his address to the newly established Council of Ministers in 1962, Faisal declared: "The government has found a timely moment to declare the full abolition of slavery and the liberation of all slaves." (Clarence-Smith, 2006:183)



2.3.3.1 Map of Saudi Arabia, Hejaz region: Mecca & Media (Source: Google Map)

The acquisition of slaves extended beyond mere transactions of buying and selling, as black African Muslim communities were also vulnerable to enslavement during their pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina for the Hajj (Ahmed, 2019: 3-4). Despite Islamic teachings allegedly condemning the enslavement of Muslims⁸⁰, most instances of slavery in this region were perpetrated by Muslims against other Muslims.

Zdanowski, however, highlighted two primary ways in which black Africans became enslaved. The first method involved sales, where Arab pilgrims often brought black slaves to sell in order to finance their journeys, or alternatively bought slaves to bring back to their own homes. The second method involved kidnapping by Bedouins while black pilgrims were en route to Mecca and Medina for the Hajj (Ibid: 41, 87-161). The kidnapping and enslavement of black African

⁸⁰ While Muslim law unequivocally forbids the enslavement of free Muslims of whatever race, this law was not always strictly enforced to protect Muslim African captives from Arab slave traders. In practice, although enslavement of free Muslims is not permitted, a slave who becomes a Muslim is not automatically freed from slavery (Cory, 2009:629 & Clarence-Smith, 2006:22). In fact, in the Qur'an (4:92) there is a reference to the existence of believing Muslim slaves, and this means that it is valid for a Muslim to be enslaved, but on the condition that his/her conversion to Islam was occurred after his/her enslavement, or he inherited the slavery from his mother. According to Gordon, the enslavement of Africans who converted to Islam after they fell into slavery caused a problem among the jurists. The Moroccan jurist, Ahmad al-Wansharisi (d. 1508), had solved this problem in the 15th century. The Moroccan jurist determined that the timing of an African slave's conversion - whether before or after enslavement - did not affect the validity of their ownership or sale. According to Gordon's analysis, the crucial aspect was that these rulings consistently favoured the merchants or owners over the rights of the slaves. This shift prioritized property rights over human rights, emphasizing the significance of ownership rather than the well-being of the individuals involved (Gordon, 1992:33-34).

pilgrims en route to Hajj is supported by a substantial collection of original documents from British archives. Historians, including Zdanowski, Reilly, and Hopper, have verified this finding, noting that African pilgrims were a valuable commodity in the slave trade, particularly during the early 20th century (Zdanowski, 2008: 88, Reilly, 2015:101 & Hopper, 2015:206).

In the 19th century through the first half of 20th century, the Hijaz faced significant pressure from France and Britain, who were advocating for reforms and the eradication of slavery. This external push for change coincided with internal demands for empire-wide reforms from Western-influenced Ottoman elites, including the elimination of slavery. The starting point was in 1855, when the Ottoman Sultanate announced the abolition of slavery across its territories, including the Hijaz region. The local governor, Kemal Pasha, was aligned with the progressive Ottoman elites and their reformist agenda. He instructed his representative in Mecca to inform the slave traders of the decree, prompting a backlash from the Meccan populace. The residents of Mecca, viewing the ban on slavery as a violation of divine permission, rose up against Ottoman rule. The situation escalated into a full-fledged rebellion, leading to violent clashes between the masses and Ottoman authorities near the Grand Mosque, resulting in casualties on both sides. The rebellion was fuelled by the belief that the abolition of slavery not only contradicted Sharia law but also symbolised a concession to Christian influences, perceived as a sign of weakness from the Sultan towards non-Muslim adversaries (Ahmed, 2019: 16-19, Toledano, 2007:117 & Brown, 2019:203). Consequently, the decision to end slavery in the Hijaz was postponed indefinitely due to the resistance of the population and religious authorities, who rejected the reform on both legal and geopolitical grounds.

Furthermore, Zdanowski explores various documented exchanges from the 1920s involving King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud of Arabia and the British authority. According to an archival document⁸¹, a

⁸¹ In his 2008 book *Slavery in the Gulf in the First Half of the 20th Century: A Study Based on Records from the British Archives*, author Zdanowski shed more light on the same meeting that took place in September 1926. According to his account, he added that later that same day, the British consul met with Sheikh Yousef Yassin, who was then acting as Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, to discuss the matter. Yassin stated that, in his argument, "slavery was permitted by the Qur'an in the case of prisoners taken in the holy war. The tradition sanctioned slavery, while it laid down that slaves were to be properly clothed and fed and considerately treated." (Zdanowski, 2008:161) In a different light, however, Clarence-Smith shed new perspective on the issue when he revealed that Ibn Saud, in his negotiations with the British, acknowledged that the institution of slavery was "barbaric". However, he expressed concern that scholars and the people would not support the abolition of the slave trade, let alone slavery itself. As a result, he agreed to cooperate in suppressing trafficking under the Treaty of Jeddah in 1927 but continued to impose import duties on slaves. When informed in 1928 that pilgrims were still selling slaves, Ibn Saud justified the practice by claiming that the slaves were better off in slavery, as they "lived like beasts" in their homelands. The British responded by reserving the right to free fugitive slaves at their legation. Based on

meeting between Ibn Saud and the acting British consul, Norman Mayers, in Jeddah in September 1926 revealed that Ibn Saud's people were resistant to freeing their slaves, citing Islamic doctrine and considering it a divine command. In fact, Ibn Saud, as per the same document, warned that abolishing slavery could undermine his authority (Zdanowski, 2015:786-804).

The Wahhabi movement⁸², aligned with the House of Saud, epitomised Islam's stance on slavery in the Arabian Peninsula during that era. Embracing Sharia law as the governing legal framework, the Wahhabi movement faced challenges in reconciling traditional interpretations of Islam with external pressures to abolish slavery. The movement's alliance with the House of Saud underscored the complex interplay between religious principles and socio-political realities regarding the practice of slavery in the region (Clarence-Smith, 2006:178).

Indeed, as mentioned earlier, slavery in Saudi Arabia was eventually outlawed in 1962 under the leadership of Prince Faysal b. 'Abd al-Aziz, who later became King of Saudi Arabia from 1964 to 1975, leading the effort to outlaw the practice. According to Benjamin Reilly, the delay in abolishing slavery despite British campaigns for emancipation was due to various practical challenges. These challenges included a lack of readiness and an insufficient naval fleet capable of besting the skilled Arab dhows, particularly in their evasive tactics when confronted by British ships attempting to intercept slave vessels. Reilly also highlights how British economic, diplomatic, and political interests in the Gulf region and the Arabian Peninsula influenced the country's commitment to eradicating slavery (Reilly, 2015: 1-115). On the other hand, Matthew Hopper suggests that the country's success in achieving this abolition was likely facilitated by its oil wealth and related industries at the time. This economic prosperity enabled the state to financially compensate slave owners and support the transition of freed individuals into the workforce by providing job opportunities and wages (Hopper, 2015:209).

these details, Clarence-Smith questioned Ibn Saud's sincerity regarding the abolition of the slave trade, suggesting that he was attempting to hide behind the clergy in the Hijaz (Clarence-Smith, 2006:181).

⁸² The Wahhabi movement is a conservative Islamic reform movement that emerged in the 18th century in Arabia. Founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the movement sought to return to what its followers believed were the fundamental teachings and practices of Islam as outlined in the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. The alliance between the Wahhabi movement and the House of Saud in the 18th century played a significant role in the political and religious landscape of the Arabian Peninsula. The Wahhabi movement's influence spread through alliances and conquests, shaping the political and religious structures of the region. Today, the Wahhabi movement remains influential in Saudi Arabia and has had a significant impact on Islamic thought and practice in the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. See: Firro, T. K. (2018). *Wahhabism and the Rise of the House of Saud*. Sussex Academic Press.

2.3.3.2 The Setting, Themes and Perspectives:

2.3.3.2.1 Story Preview

Maymūna's novel is deeply rooted in the historical and social context of slavery in the Arabian Peninsula during the early 20th century. The narrative of the novel sheds light on the prevalent practices of slavery in the Hijaz region encompassing Mecca and Medina before their official abolition in 1962. Against the backdrop of this historical context, the novel recounts the journey of a black African community that migrated from West Africa to the Holy Land in the early 20th century, braving treacherous circumstances. As mentioned earlier, despite the alleged Islamic teachings that condemn the enslavement of Muslims, Arab slave traders from the Hejaz region flouted these principles, capturing black Africans en route to Mecca and Medina for the slave trade. Through the lens of the novel *Maymūna* themes of enslavement, exploitation, identity, freedom, and racism are illuminated, offering insight into the intricate societal dynamics of Hejazi society and the enduring legacy of slavery on the black populace.

The novel unfolds through the first-person perspective of Grandma *Maymūna* as she recounts the story through a series of flashback memories. By adopting this approach, the narrative offers a distinctive lens through which to examine the experiences of slavery and the historical practices of Arabs enslaving black African Muslims from the viewpoint of the African community. As the author hails from African heritage, the novel can be seen as a counter-narrative that subverts the dominant “white narrative” by presenting alternative perspectives and experiences. This counter-narrative is reinforced by the text's themes and details, which challenge the notion of a singular, Arab centric narrative.

2.3.3.2.2 The Clash Between Black and White Narratives

The story begins with the recounting of her family's migration from the natural resource-rich west African jungle to seek refuge and answer the call of the Muezzin, “Bilal al-Aswad⁸³”, the first to proclaim Islam during the time of the prophet Muhammad in Mecca. Fleeing from the oppression of white Christians who had enslaved their ancestors, as recounted by the father of *Maymūna* and her uncle *Omar*, the family was forced to abandon their homes and villages in

⁸³ This refers to Bilal Ibn Rabah, one of the earliest black converts from Africa to embrace Islam in Mecca. Chosen by Muhammad to be the Muezzin who calls the faithful to prayer, Bilal's roots trace back to Abyssinia. Prior to his conversion, he was enslaved by a Meccan family. Islamic sources indicate that Bilal took part in the initial military expeditions led by Muhammad, however, following Muhammad's passing, he chose to migrate to the Levant (present-day Syria), where he passed away in Damascus in 640 AD (Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani, 1994, 1:455-6).

Mali. These ancestors endured unimaginable cruelty, stripped naked and packed onto ships bound for distant shores, their cries drowned out by the shouts of “*Allāhu ’akbar*” (God is Greater), many perished at sea, their watery graves bearing witness to the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade (Trāwrī, 2007:11-12).

As *Omar* engages in a lengthy conversation with *Maymūna*'s father, they reflect on the Western Christians enemy's brutality and the bravery of their people in the face of resistance. Drawing on historical accounts like that of “Mansa Musa⁸⁴”, they seek to uphold their pride and refute any rumours attempting to distort their rich history (Ibid:13).

By highlighting the accomplishments and stories of black ancestors, the novel focuses on the courage, resilience, and selflessness they displayed in the face of challenges from “the brutality of Christians” (Ibid:15). *Maymūna*'s mother shares a plethora of names and stories, like that of a man named “Nihorika⁸⁵” who rallied the tribe to confront the “white Christians that steal the land” (Ibid. 14), underscoring a stark contrast between friendly Muslim blacks and enemy Christian whites (Ibid. 18).

The novel often portrays the “white Christian” with derogatory descriptors, such as likening the Nile River to a “cemetery for the white man” who sought its origins and mouths (Ibid:21). Conversely, the black Muslim is depicted as a valiant hero, like “Usman Dan Fodio⁸⁶” from the Fulani tribe, who led a jihad against the French alongside his sons (Ibid. 21), highlighting the role

⁸⁴ “Mansa Musa” was a renowned ruler of the Mali Empire in the 14th century. He is widely recognised for his incredible wealth and extravagant pilgrimage to Mecca, which showcased the wealth and riches of Mali to the world. “Mansa Musa” is often considered one of the wealthiest individuals in history and played a significant role in expanding the influence and wealth of the Mali Empire during his reign. See: Krasner, Barbara. (2017). *Mansa Musa: The Most Famous African Traveler to Mecca*. The Rosen Publishing.

⁸⁵ According to African mythology, it is believed that *Nihorika* was the leader of Buja tripe, who guided his people to establish a settlement in the Mutoko town in what is now Zimbabwe. He and his tribe are affiliated with the Shumba (Lion) totem (Motobu). *Nihorika* also pronounced as Nehoreka or Nohureka played a significant role in uniting and settling his people following conflicts with rival tribes, eventually forming a cohesive community in the area. Today, descendants of the Buja people still live in Mutoko, preserving their traditions and cultural heritage (Pongweni, 1996:45).

⁸⁶ Shehu Usman Dan Fodio, also known as Sheikh Usman Ibn Fodio, was a prominent Islamic scholar and leader in the Sokoto Caliphate in what is now northern Nigeria. He was a reformer and preacher who played a key role in the Fulani Jihad, a religious and political movement that sought to establish Islamic governance and societal reforms in the region. Dan Fodio advocated for education, justice, and moral reform, and his teachings had a lasting impact on the region. He eventually became the Caliph of the Sokoto Caliphate, which became one of the largest and most powerful Islamic states in West Africa. See: El-Masri, F. H. (1963). The Life of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio Before the Jihād. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 2(4), 435–448. Link accessed 20/01/2024: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41856671>.

of Islam in fostering pride and honour with the enduring motto: “The religion that does not unite us, we do need it” (Ibid. 22).

This depiction of the black Muslim as a heroic figure emphasises the empowering role of Islam in mobilising resistance against colonial oppression, reflecting a deep sense of cultural pride and unity. The motto underlines a powerful call for solidarity, suggesting that faith must serve to connect communities and inspire collective strength in the face of adversity.

2.3.3.2.3 The Glorification of Black Ancestors

Additionally, the novel brims with myths about black individuals, notably the intriguing legend of a village sheikh who recounted a tale about a man who, on his deathbed, instructed his son to bury his little finger in the middle of the village. After doing so, new houses sprouted around the spot like crops within a month (Ibid:20).

Based on the text above, the narrator wants to stress on the significance of the rich cultural heritage and oral tradition of the region being described in the novel. The inclusion of myths and legends about black individuals suggests that the narrator is highlighting the importance of storytelling and folklore in the culture. The specific story about the village sheikh and his dying instructions also seems to convey a sense of mysticism and spiritual significance. The image of new houses sprouting like crops around the spot where the man's finger was buried implies a sense of growth, fertility, and perhaps even sacredness. The fact that these myths and legends are being passed down through generations suggests a deep connection to the past and a sense of continuity with one's ancestors. Another captivating myth involves Sheikh *Adamua* endowed with the extraordinary ability to comprehend the language of various creatures invisible to humans, including talking to snakes and ants (Ibid:23).

The persistence of memory plays a key role in preserving and celebrating the legacy of these individuals within the collective consciousness. In this novel, the glorification of black ancestors is a powerful way to honour their contributions, resilience, and struggles throughout history. By keeping alive the memory of black ancestors, creators contribute to a broader narrative of resilience, resistance, and triumph in the face of discrimination and oppression.

2.3.3.2.4 Freedom Must Be Seized

Through *Maymūna*, the author sheds light on the reasons behind the enslavement of blacks in the Hijaz, as well as the harsh treatment they endured, all while advocating for their defence and

civilisation. She describes the Bedouins as “Outlaws and unruly groups of individuals, shaped by the events of history, view the passing pilgrim caravans as a chance to fulfil their cravings.” (Ibid:27) One of her companions inquires, “Are these individuals Muslims?” to which she responds, “They were looting the caravan completely, mercilessly killing the men and capturing the women.” (Ibid:27) She then remarks, “Ignorance and hunger can tarnish both the soul and one's religious beliefs. They were terribly unenlightened.” (Ibid:27)

Moreover, the writer explores his characters' perspectives on the concepts of freedom and slavery. The slave *Tahseen Jaber Abdel Khair* offers advice to his enslaved companion, *Omar*, while they are captive, stating, “You must seize your own freedom, as it is not freely given by others.” (Ibid:59) In response, *Omar* asserts, “Those who enslave others are not considered greater in the eyes of their captives.” (Ibid:60) Additionally, *Omar* subtly criticises the behaviour of these Arab Muslims in discriminating against black people, as he reflects on his shared prayer experiences with the Bedouins by remarking, “It is peculiar how prayer brings us together, yet in everyday life, disparities exist.” (Ibid:63)

The dialogue between *Tahseen* and *Omar* poignantly illustrates the philosophical struggle for freedom, emphasising personal agency in the face of systemic oppression, while highlighting the harsh reality that liberation is often a self-driven endeavour. *Omar's* reflections on prayer juxtaposed with social inequalities reveal the ironic disconnect between spiritual unity and the persistent prejudices within society, challenging the integrity of communal bonds.

2.3.3.2.5 Blacks Enslave Blacks

Yet in the novel, it is revealed that *Omar* collaborates with an Arab Bedouin named *Manawer* in the abduction of ten black children as slaves, whose families perished during a caravan journey from Mecca. They seize the children with the intention of selling them to affluent Arabs, including sheikhs and merchants, who have a penchant for owning slaves (Ibid: 37-8).

This occurrence highlights how the practice of slavery can also exist within black African communities despite attempting to justify his actions later as a moment of weakness (Ibid:129). Furthermore, *Tahseen Jabir Abd al-Khair* and another enslaved individual named Seter, make a pact with *Omar* to pursue salvation and liberation (Ibid:64). Seter's enslavement stems from a homicide he committed against his cousin, underscoring the various factors that lead to enslavement that even impact non-black Arabs.

2.3.3.2.6 The Trauma of Slavery Continues Across Generations

In the final chapter of the novel, *Maymūna's* daughter, *Quds*, takes over and expresses the unspoken opinions of the other characters, shedding light on significant issues. She articulates that “slavery persists, only the facade has changed,” (Ibid:136) and asserts that “War is the catalyst for slavery, providing justification.” (Ibid:136) Reflecting on the enduring pain of enslavement, she conveys, “We forgive, yet we do not forget,” (Ibid:136) revealing the lasting scars etched on the soul. The narrative emphasises the notion that war serves as a gateway to the slave trade where the powerful subjugate the weak, shaping history in their favour. The conqueror enslaves the vanquished, with Arabs rationalising their appropriation of Africa by claiming it as an extension of the Arabian Peninsula in ancient times before the continent splits (Ibid:136-7)

Quds, who is symbolising the third generation, delves into a poignant monologue, lamenting the fading presence of this phenomenon in the region. She contrasts her obscured dreams with the vivid vision of Martin Luther King Jr., musing on the significance of dreams devoid of colour. Pondering the alignment of dreams with “reality”, she questions whether their aspirations have materialised (Ibid:143).

In a thought-provoking conclusion, *Quds* reflects on the echoes of dreams in the wilderness, pondering whether their aspirations have manifested or if the dreams themselves falter. Despite her inquiries, the unanswered questions linger, resonating in a haunting manner. Those were her last words: “Have we transformed into what we dream, or have our dreams fallen short? I ask... I question and ask and ask, and that is all.” (Ibid:145)

The passage above suggests that the lasting psychological impact of slavery on the individual's psyche is one of deep-seated trauma, pain, and emotional scarring. *Quds*, as the third generation of a family affected by slavery, conveys the ongoing legacy of enslavement through her words, “We forgive, yet we do not forget”. This statement implies that the trauma of enslavement has been passed down through generations, and while forgiveness may have been attempted, the memories and emotions associated with it remain raw and unprocessed. It also suggests that the experience of enslavement has left an indelible mark on *Quds'* psyche, affecting her emotional well-being and worldview. *Quds'* words when she says, “War is the catalyst for slavery”, imply that the trauma of war and violence is inextricably linked to the experience of enslavement, highlighting the profound impact on the individual's sense of self and identity.

Most importantly, *Quds'* lamentation of the decline of slavery's visibility suggests that even as the physical institution of slavery has disappeared, its emotional residue remains, affecting how people perceive their past and their place in the world. Through *Quds'* monologue, we see how slavery's legacy continues to shape her thoughts, emotions, and aspirations. Her musings on dreams and reality indicate a sense of disconnection between her aspirations and the harsh realities she faces. Her final words, "Have we transformed into what we dream, or have our dreams fallen short?", convey a sense of uncertainty and longing, as if she is still searching for answers to questions that haunt her.

Overall, the passage suggests that slavery's psychological impact is multifaceted and long-lasting, affecting not only individuals but also their families and communities across generations. The trauma of enslavement can lead to feelings of disconnection, fragmentation, and disorientation, which can persist even as external circumstances change.

2.3.3.2.7 Conclusion:

The story is set in early 20th century Arabia, primarily in the Hijaz region (Mecca and Medina) under Ottoman rule, highlighting the prevalent slavery practices of the era. Although there are no organised uprisings by African slaves to abolish slavery, the narrative focuses on individual efforts to challenge the inhumane treatment of enslaved individuals, showcasing their courage and resilience.

Central to the narrative is the theme of slavery and blackness, emphasising the plight of enslaved black African Muslims captured by Arab slave traders. The author envisions a society where enslaved individuals unite in the Hijaz through their Islamic identity, examining various causes of enslavement, such as kidnapping and indebtedness, which predate Islam.

The narrative, presented through flashbacks by Grandmother *Maymūna*, provides a distinctive perspective on slavery and exploitation in the Hijaz, tracing the journey of a black African community seeking solace in the sacred land. As a counter-narrative to dominant "white narratives," the novel celebrates the resilience of black individuals and emphasizes the Islamic faith's role in uniting and empowering them against oppression.

Slavery is portrayed as contradictory to Islamic teachings, as Arab traders capture black Africans while disregarding these principles. The narrative explores the brutal realities of slavery, the complex dynamics of freedom and bondage, and challenges conventional notions of justice, illustrating the lasting psychological impacts of slavery on individuals.

Having completed the analysis of the social historical context of the first three novels set in the early 20th century during the Ottoman and British rule, we will now delve into the social historical background of the remaining three novels during the post-colonial era in the second half of the 20th century. In doing so, we will focus on exploring the lasting impact of the practice of slavery within these communities, delving into how it was directly and routinely carried out.

2.4 The Legacy of Slavery During the Post-Colonialism: Yemen, Kuwait, and Egypt

The legacy of slavery in Yemen, Kuwait, and Egypt during the post-colonial period has had lasting social, cultural, and economic impacts on these countries. While slavery was officially abolished in these regions in the late 19th century in Egypt (1877) and the second half of the 20th century in Kuwait (1949) and Yemen (1962), its effects have continued to shape societal dynamics and perceptions. In Yemen, the legacy of slavery is still evident in the social hierarchy and discrimination faced by Afro-Yemeni communities known as *Akhdam*, who are often descendants of enslaved individuals. These communities, according to Aljaedy and De Regt⁸⁷, continue to face marginalisation, limited access to resources, and discrimination based on their ancestry. The legacy of slavery has also influenced perceptions of race and identity in Yemen, with enduring prejudices against individuals of African descent (Aljaedy and De Regt, 2022:7-37).

Regarding Kuwait, the legacy of slavery is reflected in the treatment of marginalised communities, including “Afro-Kuwaitis” who are descendants of enslaved individuals. These communities often face discrimination, economic disparities, and social exclusion. The legacy of slavery has contributed to entrenched social inequalities and challenges faced by marginalised groups in Kuwait. In November the first 2019, BBC News Arabic⁸⁸ aired a documentary uncovering an online slave market operating in Kuwait, where domestic workers, primarily from Asia and Africa, were treated as commodities and bought and sold like cattle. This disturbing investigation by BBC News Arabic shed light on the role played by major tech companies in Silicon Valley in enabling this illegal online slave trade. The documentary *Silicon Valley's Online Slave Market*, revealed how major technology companies, including Google, Facebook, Apple, and Instagram, inadvertently enabled the online slave trade by permitting and hosting apps originally designed for other purposes that were later repurposed for the exploitation and trafficking of domestic workers in the Gulf region. Through undercover operations, the film captured app users in Kuwait engaging in activities that violated local and international laws on modern slavery, including a distressing incident where a black African woman was seen offering a child for sale.

⁸⁷ See also: (1) Nevola, Luca. (2020). *Black People, White Hearts: Origin, Race, and Colour in Contemporary Yemen*. *Antropologica*, vol.7, no.1 (2020), pp. 93-115: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14672/ada2020162693-116> and (2) Gokh, Amin. Alshaif. (2021). *Black and Yemeni: Myths, Genealogies, and Race*. POMEPS: <https://pomeps.org/black-and-yemeni-myths-genealogies>. Link accessed 12/02/2023.

⁸⁸ See: “*Silicon Valley's Online Slave Market*”, 01/11/2019. Link accessed on 14/09/2021: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ldII_n28e0.

The documentary followed the woman's rescue and eventual journey back to her home country of Guinea in West Africa. According to a report on the Frontline Club website⁸⁹ dated March 5, 2020, the documentary highlighting the online slave market in Kuwait has reached significant milestones. The investigation has garnered 4 million views online across various platforms, been translated into 19 languages, and received extensive press coverage globally. Furthermore, the documentary has been showcased in the UK Parliament and at the United Nations in Geneva, further amplifying its impact and raising awareness about this critical issue (Frontline Club Website, 2020).

In Egypt, the legacy of slavery is visible in the persistence of discriminatory practices and attitudes towards individuals of African descent. "Afro-Egyptian" communities, who are often descendants of black enslaved individuals, continue to face social stigma, economic disadvantages, and limited opportunities for upward mobility (al-Qudah et al., 2023:291-3, Powell, 2012:3-4 & Sabry, 2021:61-2). The legacy of slavery has influenced perceptions of race and identity in Egypt, shaping societal attitudes towards marginalised communities. Despite Egypt's location in North Africa, Egyptians have historically perceived their country as distinct from the rest of the continent (Shafik, 2007: 64-68; Smith, 2006:401; Poole, 2011: 3-6; Powell, 2012: 17-18). This viewpoint extends beyond mere geographical awareness, signalling a deeper cultural and social perspective on Africa. According to Maurita N. Poole, for many Egyptians, the term "Africa" is synonymous with blackness, a concept often linked to notions of disadvantage and oppression. In extreme cases, this association with blackness can be interpreted as primitive, backward, and devoid of civilisation (Poole, 2011:179). Moreover, researcher Islam Sabry notes that despite the diverse origins of slaves, the term "Abd/slave" became synonymous with black individuals, perpetuating negative associations with blackness (Sabry, 2021:21). Sabry continues to highlight that in contemporary Egypt, the word "slave" continues to be used as a derogatory term specifically targeting black individuals. He further emphasises that the lived experiences of black individuals in Egyptian society differ significantly from those of the general population. The historical legacy of slavery and entrenched anti-black sentiments have created distinct

⁸⁹ See: 'Silicon Valley's Online Slave Market' + Panel Discussion, 05/03/2020. Link accessed on 17/03/2024: <https://www.frontlineclub.com/silicon-valleys-online-slave-market-panel-screening/>

challenges and inequalities that specifically impact black communities in Egypt such as Nubians and African immigrants and refugees⁹⁰ (Ibid:21-48).

Beyond the mundane, low-paying jobs assigned to them, such as guards, cleaners, and doormen, the lives of black individuals are marked by a pervasive lack of re-presentation and stereotyping in the media. Sabri notes that during the first half of the 20th century, cinematic roles typically relegated to Nubians included cooks, servants, and doormen. According to a 2018 report by the Egyptian Observatory for the Elimination of Racism's Project to Promote and Reject Racial Discrimination in Egyptian media, which analysed 120 films from 2007 to 2017, a staggering 60% of these films perpetuated racial discrimination and hate speech against black people by mocking their skin tone or accent or stereotyping them as servants and janitors. Moreover, nearly 40% of the films examined featured colour, racial, and ethnic satire, while 22% exhibited explicit racial discrimination, and 20% relied on stereotyping (Ibid: 39).

Overall, the legacy of slavery during the post-colonial period in Yemen, Kuwait, and Egypt has had enduring effects on marginalised communities, social dynamics, and cultural attitudes, shaping their social dynamics and relationships even after its formal abolition. These lingering effects manifested in various forms, such as socio-economic inequalities, discrimination, and prejudices against individuals who were formerly enslaved or descended from enslaved black individuals.

⁹⁰ See for example: Siegelbaum, Max. (2013). *Black Egyptians Decry Daily Racism*, Aljazeera, 19/07/2013. Link accessed on 20/01/2024: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2013/7/19/black-egyptians-decry-daily-racism>.

2.4.1 Ali al-Muqri's Novel *Ta'am Aswād, Ra'eha Swada*, Yemen:

2.4.1.1 Brief Historical Background

The “Yemeni civil war⁹¹” provided the overarching historical context for the novel, impacting the narrative and its characters as they navigated the political power struggle. This war emerged from a power struggle between the royalists, supported by conservative factions and the Imamate⁹², and the republicans⁹³, who sought to establish a new government under a republican system. The war began in 1962 when a military coup overthrew the monarchy, leading to the establishment of the Yemen Arab Republic (republican government) in North Yemen. The “Yemeni Civil War” had significant consequences for the country and its people. The conflict resulted in a protracted and bloody conflict, marked by political and ideological divisions, military interventions from external forces, and a substantial loss of life. The war exacerbated social and economic disparities, creating an environment of conflict and inequality that further marginalised certain groups within Yemeni society (Hill, 2017:9-32 and Rabi, 2015:41-96).

Within this framework, this novel vividly depicts the slums of “*Mahwa Al-Akhdam*⁹⁴”, located outside the city of Taiz as a result of this bloody conflict between political parties in their struggle for power. The inhabitants of these slums are called “Akhdam”, a marginalised and socially disadvantaged black community in Yemen that faces discrimination and marginalisation based on their descent and occupation. Researchers De Regt and Aljaedy further highlight this issue,

⁹¹ For more details on the Yemeni civil war during the sixties and seventies see: (1) Rabi, Uzi. (2015). *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification*. I.B. Tauris; (2) Hill G. (2017). *Yemen Endures: Civil War Saudi Adventurism and the Future of Arabia*. Oxford University Press.

⁹² “The Imamate of Yemen” refers to the religious-political system that was in place in North Yemen before the Yemeni Civil War. The Imamate was ruled by the Zaidi Shia religious leaders known as Imams, who held both spiritual and political authority. According to Pukhovaia, this Zaidi Shi’ite state, “was characterized by a domination of sayyids, descendants of the Prophet. They alone could qualify to rule as imams.” See: Pukhovaia, E. (2023). Sayyids, Tribal Kinship, and the Imamate in Zaydi Yemen under Imam Yahyā Sharaf al-Dīn (d. 965/1558). *Medieval Encounters*, 29(5-6), 442-463. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700674-12340173>.

⁹³ “The Republicans of Yemen”, on the other hand, refer to the political factions that emerged during and after the Yemeni Civil War in the 1960s. The Republicans were primarily composed of various leftist and nationalist groups, including the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) and the National Liberation Front (NLF). They sought to modernise Yemen, enact social reforms, and establish a more egalitarian society (Gandy, 1998: 247–274).

⁹⁴ According to Nevola, “Mahwa” is a term typically used to describe a dog shelter where there is a lack of access to water and electricity (Nevola, 2020:95).

the terms *abid* and *akhdam* are derogatory, respectively meaning “slaves” and “servants”... those considered to be descendants of former slaves (*abid*) and individuals who cannot trace their lineage (*akhdam*) (De Regt and Aljaedy, 2022:19)

This group is often subjected to systemic social and economic discrimination, and their access to education, healthcare, housing, and employment opportunities is limited. Discrimination against the *Akhdam* community is deeply rooted in Yemeni society, based on their perceived low social status and occupation. The origins⁹⁵ of the *Akhdam* community in Yemen are complex, and their marginalisation is rooted in a combination of factors such as caste-like systems, social stigma, and economic disparities. The *Akhdam* belong to a larger marginalised social class called the “*Muhamasheen*”⁹⁶.



2.4.1.1 The Map of Yemen, Taiz (Source: Google Map)

⁹⁵ Researcher Gokh Amin Alsheif from the University of California has linked the origins of the Yemeni *Akhdam* community to the Abyssinian occupation of Yemen in the 6th century AD. During this period, an East African king and his troops invaded pre-Islamic Yemen, only to be repelled by the “indigenous” Yemeni population. The defeated African soldiers were enslaved and marginalised, known as “*al-Akhdam*” or “servants.” This historical event marked the beginning of the societal exclusion and marginalisation of black Yemenis, who were often treated as slaves and kept at the fringes of society. This discrimination continues to endure, as these marginalised individuals are perceived as perpetual outsiders due to their black African identity, which sets them apart from the Arab Yemeni population (Al-Shaif, 2021).

⁹⁶ “*Muhamasheen*”, a community of Black Yemenis, have endured enduring systemic and structural racism. Located on the fringes of displaced person camps, the “*Muhamasheen*” of Yemen are forced to seek shelter in these areas (Alshaif, 2021).

The *Akhdam* community represents the lingering impacts of the historical slavery system that was declared officially abolished in Yemen in 1962; however, evidence suggests that slavery persisted in Yemen until more recent times. As noted by Clarence-Smith⁹⁷, it was the National Liberation Front, Yemen's ruling Marxist party, that took the decisive step to formally abolish slavery in 1967. Following the British withdrawal from Aden in 1967, the National Liberation Front, in a significant move, enforced the liberation of those enslaved (Clarence-Smith, 2006: 117-118).

In present-day Yemen, the enslavement of African Yemenis continues to persist well into the 21st century. A case in point is a 2014 documentary titled *The Black Box: Slaves in Yemen*⁹⁸, produced by Al Jazeera Arabic. The documentary sheds light on the ongoing reality of enslavement of Yemeni Africans, employing a covert approach with hidden cameras to gather insights and testimonies from Yemeni Africans directly affected by this abhorrent practice.

2.4.1.2 The Setting, Themes and Perspectives:

2.4.1.2.2 Story Preview

Ta'am Aswād, Ra'eha Swada is set in Taiz, a city in southwestern Yemen, around 1975, during the left-wing party's attempts to integrate former slaves into society. Characters in the novel struggle for dignity using ideological arguments while the dominant socialist party claims to liberate slaves through the slogan "Tahrir Al-Akhdam", liberating the slaves (al-Muqri, 2011: 88). The novel critiques the political system by giving voice to forgotten individuals facing racist treatment daily due to their skin colour. It boldly addresses racism, exploring how blackness determines a slave's suitability for marriage, sex, or domestic work. This racism is a result of Yemen's centuries-old social stratification system. The racial hierarchical system, according to Aljaedy and De Regt, is historically,

⁹⁷ Researcher Suzanne Miers also highlighted the ineffectiveness of the British Empire, whose influence was exerted through local rulers such as the Zaidi Imam in North Yemen, who achieved independence in 1918 with British support, in eradicating slavery in Yemen following the 1926 Slavery Agreement. It was not until 1934, during exchanges of diplomatic correspondence with Britain, that the importation of slaves was finally prohibited. Furthermore, the Yemeni authorities declined to respond to a 1948 United Nations questionnaire regarding the issue. The majority of these enslaved individuals were African by birth, with a small percentage being imported Africans. Mixed-race individuals were scarce, and individuals of Caucasian descent were rare. As per Miers' assessment, none of these enslaved individuals were purely of Arab descent (Miers, 2003:261).

⁹⁸ See: *The Black Box: Slaves in Yemen*, Aljazeera Arabic, 02/06/2014.

based on ancestry and one's occupation [in which] are used to determine one's social status. Traditionally those who claim descent from the Prophet Mohammed (the so-called *sada*) were at the top of the social hierarchy, followed by judges (*quda*), tribesmen (*qaba'il*) and craftsmen (*mazayyinah*). At the bottom were those considered to be descendants of former slaves (*abid*) and individuals who cannot trace their lineage (*akhdam*). The terms *abid* and *akhdam* are derogatory, respectively meaning "slaves" and "servants", and therefore have been replaced by the term *Muhamasheen* (m. sing. *Muhamash*, f. sing. *Muhamasha*), which means "the marginalized" (Aljaedy and De Regt, 2020:19)

This novel is narrated in the first-person style, providing readers with a unique perspective from within the narrative. *Ambo* narrates the story primarily through the privileged white character's perspective, while the other characters offer viewpoints from the marginalised black residents of the slums. These perspectives shift between a black and a white character offering a personal and intimate viewpoint intended to immerse readers in the events as experienced by the narrator.

al-Maqri's novel unfolds between 1975 and 1982, during a period when the ongoing division between the two parts of Yemen fuelled conflict among political parties. The strife between leftist factions originated in 1970 with the outbreak of war between South and North Yemen. Although the Arab League brokered a ceasefire in October 1972 that led to the unification of Yemen, the political rift persisted. Tensions peaked in 1978 with the assassination of key political figures, including President Ali Rabih Salmeen (Seddon, 2004:545).

2.4.1.2.2 Epidemics and Death: The Black's Destiny

Set against this backdrop of internal discord within the city of Taiz, near the *Asafra* swamp where slave slums encircle it, the narrator provides a stark portrayal of the harsh realities of the conflict. The protagonist, *Ambo* laments the tragic deaths of children like eight-year-old *Ibn Shamus* saying,

Ibn Shamus passed away after experiencing two weeks of continuous blood in his urine at the young age of eight. In the neighbouring pen, 'Kadia', the daughter of Al-Masfuh, who was likely a couple of years older than him, succumbed to a prolonged cough, with reports attributing her death to tuberculosis. This marked the onset of a sorrowful year,

as winter brought distressing reports of children's deaths, while summer ushered in outbreaks of bilharzia and malaria (al-Muqri, 2011:73)

He continues,

Death did not instil fear in them when the deceased individual was under thirty years old. They believed that reaching thirty was sufficient for a slave's life, or perhaps even preferable, considering the ongoing struggle with diseases that became increasingly challenging to endure after the age of twenty-five, and even more so after thirty (Ibid:73)

At the start of the novel, when the events unfolded, *Ambo* takes on the role of narrator, recounting the events that transpired within the Taiz Court of Appeal where *Rabash al-Abd* (Rabash the slave) faced a trial for charges of treason. *Ambo* describes how the judge promptly addressed the court clerk, stating, "Case No. 32, dating back to the year 1970. *Rabash Saad bin Salem Al-Abd* stands accused of treason, rape, and dishonouring a respected family." (Ibid:6) The enslaved individuals described by the narrator are further marginalised by the denial of access to court proceedings,

They only enter the trial sessions involving their families if they are brought in as slaves to sweep the floors and rooms and tidy up the papers left scattered by the clerks and attendees. Additionally, they are tasked with cleaning the debris from the shoes and mouths of those present (Ibid:10)

These instances underscore the subtle biases ingrained in narrator's minds towards certain groups, revealing the author's unwitting reinforcement of stereotypes associated with the black community's struggle with death, illness, and poverty – seemingly an unavoidable fate with no hope of escape.

2.4.1.2.3 The Conflict Between the Centre and the Margin

One of the recurring themes that illustrates the re-presentation of slaves and blackness in the work is the conflict between central and marginal cultures. As a crucial setting in the novel that shapes the characters' actions and interactions, *Mahawā Zain* emerges as a central motif. The marginalised community of this slum on the outskirts of Taiz defines the narrative from beginning to end. *Mahawā Zain* symbolises the squalid neighbourhoods that inhabit the fringes of urban areas. Described in the novel as a sprawling mound of filth, mud, and disease-ridden swamps, the area is plagued by outbreaks of bilharzia and malaria. *Ambo* vividly depicts it as "we glanced

over its intricate features, observing small rooms constructed from zinc sheets and slender branches, propped up by wooden pillars.” (Ibid:34)

Indeed, the enslaved individuals do not refer to their living spaces as “dwellings” as described in *Ambo*'s account. Instead of identifying their living spaces as “dwellings” which conveys a sense of permanence, security, and wealth, the enslaved people refer to their structures as *mahawā* signifying a temporary state of transition and viewing themselves as transient individuals (Ibid:35)

The interaction between *al-Doglo* and *Ambo* suggests that the location was named *Zain* in tribute to a black woman named *Zain* who once serviced clients there. The persistence in referring to it as *Zain* by the black individuals may have been a way to seek retribution or assert their own form of agency. As *al-Doglo* puts it, “she compelled the white residents of Ambo city to prostrate before her, pleading for intimacy.” (Ibid: 37) Furthermore, the portrayal of *Zain* as a symbol is solidified by the fact that her name was elevated to an anthem sung by the youngsters in the ghetto, akin to how the national anthem is performed. *Ambo* notes that “this is how we discovered the hidden meaning behind the song's lyrics, which are eerily similar to the way children at al-Rabou' School chant them, much like they would recite the national anthem.” (Ibid:37)

While “*Mahawā Zain*” may seem like a peripheral locale compared to the central area of “*Ambo*”, it holds significant meaning for the black community, serving as a focal point in the novel. This centrality aids individuals in their search for identity, helps to define their distinct characteristics, and enables them to track their movements. Essentially, this marginalised space is transformed into a pivotal centre, a platform that sheds light on the fractures within society.

2.4.1.2.4 The Dynamics Between the Oppressed and the Oppressor

The narrative delves into the dynamics between the oppressed former slaves and their masters, emphasising the power imbalance between the two groups. *Sorour* exposes the brutal “reality” of this setting by stating:

In our grim existence, death is an everyday occurrence. Personal hygiene is a luxury, as we live in filth without the luxury of bathing. We use the same spaces for eating, relieving ourselves, and children's play, creating an unhealthy environment. We only change our clothes when they are soiled beyond repair, and sometimes we are left nude without

any covering. Even if we wander through the city with minimal clothing, we go unnoticed and unclothed. This neglect is considered normal for us, known as Akhdam (Ibid: 74)

This passage reveals the recurring themes of estrangement and desolation, depicting the self's detachment from its own essence, community, and existence. The author concludes his narrative with the ominous image of bulldozers advancing towards the *Akhdam* slums, heralding the construction of concrete structures with no regard for the marginalised inhabitants. He says:

I ponder whether there will come a time when they recall the presence of Mahawā al-Khdam, once known as Mahwā Zain. Yet, I question the significance of such remembrance. Could it lead to the construction of new viable structures in anticipation of their assimilation into mainstream society, as they have suggested? (Ibid:118)

The concluding imagery of bulldozers signifies the erasure of marginalised communities, symbolising the relentless march of progress that often overlooks the humanity and history of the oppressed. The author's introspection on remembrance juxtaposes hope for future integration with scepticism about whether such recognition will translate into meaningful change or simply serve as a façade for continued neglect.

2.4.1.2.5 Fragmented Black Identity

The novel remains shrouded in uncertainty, filled with sorrow and profound queries: Who are we? Where do we fit in the world? Will we ever assimilate into society? It delves into a state of perplexity, where the self and life's essence are muddled, leading to an inner empowerment of the existential crisis. The characters grapple with feelings of confusion, disconnection, and marginalisation, striving to find reasons to endure, to stay true to their humanity, even though it seems unattainable. By rejecting the mainstream language and embracing the marginalised voices, the author uses the expressions of the oppressed to underscore their point. For instance, *Sorour* poses existential questions, wondering if they can become like nothing, and ponders the fate of 'Aisha, Shamma, al-Hartoush, Faraa's singing, and al-'Asfour, as well as the whereabouts of *Bahja* and *Rabash* amidst the chaos. His despairing declaration at the end is a haunting confession: "I am myself; I am nothing. I am a worn-out shoe, discarded like trash. I am an empty can, crushed on the side of the road." (Ibid:119)

Based on the content of the monologue, it appears that *Sorour* is grappling with feelings of identity crisis, disorientation, and despair. He seems to be questioning his sense of self and purpose in life and is struggling to come to terms with the harsh realities he is facing. The

repeated declaration “I am myself; I am nothing,” suggests that *Sorour* is struggling to reconcile his sense of identity with his perceived powerlessness or insignificance. The image of a “hanging shoe” and an “empty can” on the side of the road is a potent symbol of abandonment, neglect, and desolation.

2.4.1.2.6 The Empowerment, Strength, and Humanity of Black individuals

Besides al-Muqri presents vivid and multi-dimensional portrayals of black characters, highlighting their agency, resilience, and humanity. He focusses more on the suffering and subjugation endured by former enslaved individuals. The image of former slaves provides a comprehensive understanding of slavery as an oppressive institution that fundamentally denies freedom and equality. Despite the brutality of their imprisonment, the sham trials, and the empty promises of politicians, *Rabash* and *Sorour's* courage is exemplified in a remarkable statement made by *Rabash al-Abd* during his trial, ten years after being locked away. As he faced charges of treason, membership in the Communist Party, and his relationship with a white woman from a family he had served as a servant, he turned to the judge and addressed the packed courtroom: “We all betray our homeland in some way, for as long as it's called a homeland, it betrays us just as we do. The homeland is a betrayal, every homeland is a betrayal... We exist not because we commit betrayals, but because we betray those who betray others... Even you, Your Honour, are a traitor. You are a traitor because you daily betray people, whether you realise it or not.” (Ibid:8-9)

The statement made by *Rabash al-Abd* in the passage holds significant meaning in the context of the story and the themes explored. *Rabash's* statement is a powerful indictment of the systems that perpetuate injustice and oppression, and it highlights the importance of human dignity, freedom, and resistance in the face of adversity. He also examines the psychological aspects and the internalised oppression experienced by these individuals. Through distinct characters, narrative techniques, and storytelling devices, the work offers unique perspectives and multi-dimensional portrayals that illuminate the complexities of enslaved individuals' lives and their struggles against oppression. Although there is no explicit definition for slavery or blackness, by closely examining the author's conceptualisation of slavery, we can gain insights into their interpretation of the institution and its implications. This exploration will enrich our understanding of the power dynamics, oppressions, and complexities faced by enslaved and black individuals within the narratives. However, there are glimmers of hope in the novel, re-

presented by individuals like *Dr. al-Hakimi* who challenges the colour barrier by marrying a black individual and breaking societal norms (Ibid: 111-113).

This example symbolises an attempt to bring about a cultural revolution that challenges established perceptions of blackness. Nevertheless, the novel acknowledges that true change requires not just individual actions, but a transformation of societal structures and the dismantling of systems of oppression.

Overall, the work exposes the deep-rooted prejudices and discrimination faced by black individuals within religious and societal contexts. It prompts readers to question the cultural and historical factors that have contributed to these perceptions and calls for a fundamental shift in understanding and dismantling the structures of oppression.

2.4.1.2.7 Conclusion:

In *Ta'am Aswād, Ra'eha Swada*, readers are taken to the slums of *Mahwa al-Akhdam* in Taiz, Yemen, between 1975 and 1982, during a time when leftist parties are working to integrate former black slaves into society. The narrative highlights the ongoing marginalisation and discrimination faced by the *Akhdam* community, descendants of slaves, despite the abolition of slavery in the 1960s. The legacy of slavery, along with the effects of British colonialism and Yemen's independence, has led to persistent racism and social inequities.

The novel captures the exploitation of black issues by white Arab political leaders for gain, contrasting this with the absence of organised civil rights movements in Yemen, unlike in America. It emphasises the struggles of formerly enslaved individuals, illustrating the detrimental effects of racism and the deep-rooted nature of discrimination within Yemen's social hierarchy. The character *Rabash* exemplifies this ongoing struggle. The text reveals the power dynamics in society, highlighting how whites control laws, legislation, and cultural perceptions, indicating little progress towards modern values. The narrative reflects on historical and systemic inequalities that continue to influence social interactions and institutional practices.

Furthermore, the novel critiques societal norms and leftist and communist perspectives on equality and justice, focusing on the entrenched social class system based on racial purity and lineage as obstacles to achieving true equality. It urges readers to critically examine systemic inequalities and advocate for meaningful reform to address discrimination and marginalisation, calling for a more just and equitable society.

2.4.2 Sa'daa al-Da'as's Novel: *Li-annī aswād*, Kuwait:

2.4.2.1 Brief Historical Background⁹⁹:

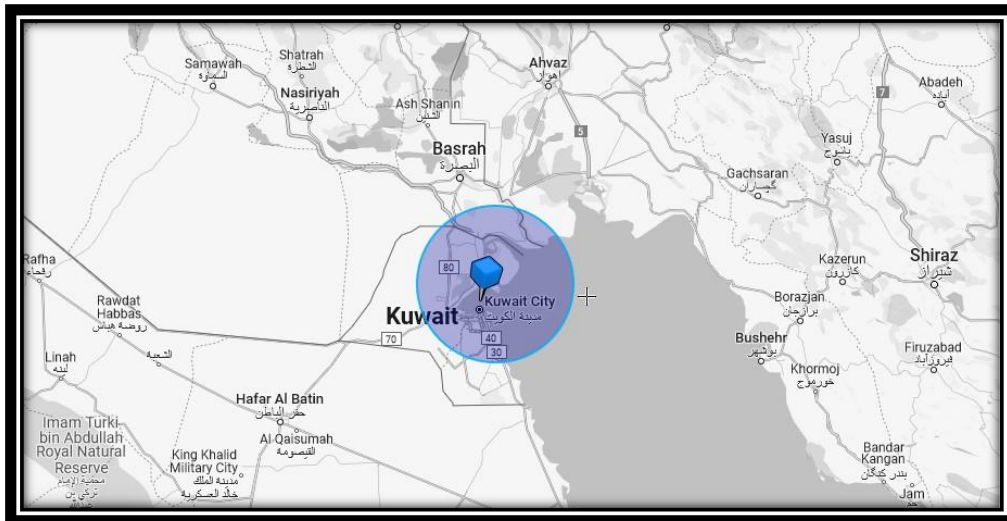
While modern Kuwait is a diverse country with a substantial expatriate population, there have been instances and reports of racism and discrimination against Black people in the country¹⁰⁰. Black individuals who descended from African origins face racial profiling, stereotyping, and unequal treatment in sectors such as employment, housing, and public services (Janahi, 2015:1-7). According to the Kuwaiti official reports¹⁰¹, the black population in 2014 numbered around 76,698 individuals out of a total population of 4.1 million. Among them are black Kuwaitis who are descendants of enslaved individuals brought to the region during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Prior to the abolishment of slavery in 1945, Kuwait was home to approximately 50,000 people, with around 37,000 residing in Kuwait City. Of this population, at least 4,000 individuals (representing 11%) were of African descent (Zdanowski, 2014 :2, al- 'Awadī, 2021:10 & Miers, 2003:340-2).

If the above census data correct and accurate, it is evident that the proportion of people of African descent in Kuwait was higher before 1945 compared to the population in 2014. As mentioned earlier in the Gulf economy context, the significant decline can be attributed to the abolition of slavery, which had a profound impact on the demographic makeup of the country. Additionally, factors such as assimilation and economic growth, driven by the discovery of oil and its subsequent export from 1946 onwards, contributed to this decline. The oil boom replaced traditional economies like pearl diving, which relied heavily on enslaved black laborers. Nguyen's research highlights how the discovery of oil led to a shift in the British colonial project's labour strategy, resulting in the use of Asian workers, known as *coolies*, to fill the labour vacuum left by the abolition of slavery. This, in turn, reduced the presence of black Africans in Kuwait (Nguyen, 2021, 43-52).

⁹⁹ While the novel's primary setting is not in America, the author briefly introduces *Jamal's* childhood there to set the stage for the major events that unfold in Kuwait, the story's central location. Consequently, this historical background will focus on the Middle East, exploring the region's significant events and cultural influences that shaped *Jamal's* experiences and identity.

¹⁰⁰ See: Owens, Lorcan. (2021). The Cruelty of Kafala: Immigrant Life in Kuwait. E-International Relations. Link accessed 03/02/2024: <https://www.e-ir.info/publication/dignity-in-movement-borders-bodies-and-rights/>

¹⁰¹ Kuwaiti Government Online. (2014). The Public Authority for Civil Information Statically Reports. [online]. Link accessed on 06/02/2024: <http://stat.paci.gov.kw/englishreports/>



2.4.2.1 The Map of Kuwait (Source: Google Map)

Historically, Kuwait played a significant role in shipbuilding in the northern Gulf and was a major supplier of boats and African labour for pearl diving. The country boasted a fleet of over four hundred boats and employed more than nine thousand pearl divers (Hopper, 2015:26-27). According to a report on the German DW website¹⁰², Hishām al- ‘Awaḍī, a professor of history and political science at the American University of Kuwait, highlights that not all Africans who resided in Kuwait were forcibly brought as slaves. Some Africans arrived voluntarily, whether for religious pilgrimage like Hajj or for trade purposes, and subsequently settled in the area on a permanent basis (Ghaedi, 2022). Yasser Khalaf, a 27-year-old black sailor from Bahrain who often travels to various coastal cities in the Gulf region, including Kuwait, expressed in the report, “We usually get along well - Blacks, Arabs, and Baluch, but if a fight breaks out, disturbing racial slurs are quickly shouted out loud. It's loud, shocking racism.” (Ibid)

In addition to what I mentioned earlier about the BBC Arabic documentary regarding the slave market scandal in Kuwait in 2019, the British newspaper *The Guardian* published a similar report in 2015¹⁰³ shedding light on the ongoing issue of enslavement of black Africans and systemic racism and discrimination against them within Kuwaiti society. The accounts of Sierra Leonean women being lured under false pretences and sold as domestic workers highlight the

¹⁰² See: Ghaedi, Monir. (2022). *How are Gulf countries dealing with slavery?*, 02/08/2022. Link accessed on 20/02/2024: <https://www.dw.com/en/how-are-gulf-countries-coming-to-terms-with-their-history-of-slavery/a-60686264>

¹⁰³ The Guardian (2015). *Women from Sierra Leone 'sold like slaves' into domestic work in Kuwait*, 02/04/2015. Link accessed 13/02/2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/apr/02/women-sierra-leone-sold-like-slaves-domestic-work-kuwait>.

exploitative practices and human rights violations that persist in the country. The personal testimonies shared in the reports depict a harrowing reality where individuals are subjected to gruelling work conditions, mistreatment, and severe restrictions on their freedom. The fact that such practices continue to exist despite international attention underscores the deep-rooted nature of slavery, racism, and discrimination in Kuwaiti society.

The statistics provided by the Global Slavery Index 2023¹⁰⁴ further underscore the prevalence of modern slavery in Kuwait, with a significant number of individuals exposed to forced labour or forced marriage. The recommendations offered by organisations like Walk Free to the Kuwaiti government emphasise the urgent need for legislative reforms to protect vulnerable workers, combat forced labour, and address human trafficking concerns (Walk Free, 2023).

In conclusion, these reports serve as a stark reminder of the persistence of slavery and discrimination facing individuals of black African descent in Kuwait.

2.4.2.2 The Setting, Themes and Perspectives:

2.4.2.2.1 Story Preview

Against this background, *Li-annī aswād* utilities the lasting impact of slavery legacies in the country, focusing on identity construction, social inequality, racism, and religious dynamics. The author skilfully blends first-person and third-person narration styles to offer readers a deeper insight into the events, characters, and themes of the narrative. Through alternating perspectives, the author delves into the inner workings of the story, capturing the thoughts and emotions of the family characters while also allowing the young protagonist, *Jamal*, to recount his own experiences. This technique, as we will see later, creates a sense of intimacy and emotional resonance, enhancing the reader's understanding of the story with a well-rounded and authentic portrayal of the events.

This novel unfolds in America and Kuwait during the late 1980s and early 1990s. While the narrator uses the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 to illustrate its impact on *Fawzi*, this event is only a backdrop, not a central socio-historical context. Throughout the narrative, the

¹⁰⁴ See: Walk Free 2023, *Global Slavery Index 2023*, Minderoo Foundation. Available from: <https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/>

social dynamics of marginalisation and centrality are prevalent in Kuwaiti society, particularly concerning Black individuals who are consistently viewed as the “Other”.

2.4.2.2.2 Black Identity Crises

The title of the novel immediately engages with themes of black identity and the struggle against societal otherness. Within the intricate world of the characters, where discrimination against black individuals is rampant and those seeking justice and equality are oppressed, he says: “I arrived in this world like others of my heritage, my genetic makeup predetermined that I would be born Black.” (al-Da’as, 2010:1)

Despite blackness is the king of colours in *Jamal's* eyes, it is often perceived as an undesirable trait, creating a tragic irony (Ibid:2). While nature bestows black with supremacy over other colours, society deprecates it, attaching inferior qualities for people of this hue. *Jamal*, feeling deeply exasperated by this contradiction, articulated blackness as:

Being confined to neighbourhoods where only fellow individuals of your background reside, having to limit your emotional connections to those who share your ethnicity, and being compelled to embrace a label of enslavement (Ibid:4)

Jamal recognises his black skin colour but remains curious about his identity:

Is black the colour that defines me? Do I wish it weren't? Am I bound by a colour ingrained in my DNA, or am I transforming into something beyond colour? Should I attempt to articulate my 'blackness' or adopt a faint shadow that bears no resemblance to me? (Ibid:2)

These lines suggest that the issue of isolating black individuals from society is complex, rooted in societal perceptions of people, their culture, and history. The novel's introduction can be interpreted as a direct critique of societal racism that ultimately drove *Jamal* to almost reject his black heritage. The significance of this passage lies in its exploration of the complex and often conflicting relationship between an individual's biological identity (in this case, being black) and their social identity. *Jamal*, the speaker, is grappling with the societal expectations and assumptions attached to his black skin colour, which are often negative and limiting.

The passage highlights the tension between the natural world, which celebrates diversity and individuality, and society, which imposes a narrow and restrictive definition of blackness. *Jamal* feels confined to a specific neighbourhood, social circle, and set of emotional connections solely

because of his race, which he perceives as a label that defines him. The passage also reveals *Jamal's* introspection and curiosity about his identity, as he questions whether his black skin colour defines him or if he can transcend it. He wonders if he should embrace his blackness or try to distance himself from it. This raises the thought-provoking query: is racism a sickness in itself, or merely a symptom of broader societal ills?

2.4.2.2.3 Racism: Symptom or Disease?

The novel's dual setting in two different countries provides a unique vantage point to explore the pervasive issue of racism and its effects on the characters. By examining the roots of racism in these distinct societies, we can assess whether they share common causes. This analysis also encompasses the characters' responses to racism in both settings, as well as the justifications offered for discriminatory practices. The pivotal role of Chicago as a focal point of racial tension emerges as the novel unfolds. The character of *Joanne*, an American protagonist, grapples with a sense of detachment and exclusion in predominantly white neighbourhoods. One poignant instance of spatial exclusion occurs when her family invests their savings to reside in a white suburb, only to face rejection based on overtly racist beliefs (Ibid:30). This rejection forces *Joanne* and her family to relocate to a predominantly black neighbourhood, highlighting the deep impact of place on the characters' lives and struggles. The narrative vividly illustrates the profound influence of location on the characters' experiences, as exemplified by the narrator's reflection:

Upon crossing the street that divides the black neighbourhood from the main road, her confidence diminishes. In pursuit of her aspirations, she seeks a saviour who will provide both love and a lighter complexion (Ibid:30-31)

However, upon their transition to Carbondale, the same sense of estrangement resurfaced. Despite their resolve to assimilate into the community, the family was met with rejection by their white neighbours. At school, their young son *Jamal* was taunted by his white peers with hurtful remarks like, "Why don't you bathe?" The echoing impact of such disparaging comments weighed heavily on the young boy, driving him to seek solace within the confines of his home, immersed in prolonged sessions in the bathroom to cleanse himself. "Each time I glanced in the mirror, I realised that it would take me multiple days to freshen up." (Ibid:108)

In another scene, the conversation between *Joanne* and her husband *Fawzi* highlights how racism in the United States has impacted *Joanne's* character. She says:

Upon entering the narrow alley that leads to our residence and finding myself surrounded by dilapidated buildings, a sense of suffocation enveloped me. Desperate for a way to reclaim my stolen breath, I frantically searched for an exit. In that moment, I pondered why my blonde colleagues reside in affluent neighbourhoods unlike ours. Why is it that we encounter wealthy and content black individuals sporadically, while encountering affluent and cheerful blonde individuals regularly? The contrasting frequency of encountering affluent and cheerful black individuals versus blonde individuals left me questioning the disparity that exists (Ibid: 65)

Joanne's visceral reaction to her environment, in this passage, underscores the psychological toll that systemic racism exerts on marginalised individuals, revealing a profound sense of alienation and despair. Her reflections on socioeconomic disparities highlight the pervasive inequalities that shape her daily experiences, prompting critical questions about social structures and the pervasive nature of privilege in American society.

Racism and discrimination are themes that have been explored in *Li-annī aswād*, reflecting the social realities and complexities of the country. As Kuwaiti society is diverse, with a significant expatriate population that includes individuals from various racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, the central focus in the novel is more on issues of the racial tensions and dynamics that exist within the country. For example, as soon as *Joanne* stepped foot in Kuwait airport, she could not help but notice the differing behaviour of the Asian workers, who greeted the arriving white passengers with smiles (Ibid:155). Meanwhile, the nine-year-old *Jamal* observed that the majority of menial jobs at the airport were carried out by dark-skinned Asian workers (Ibid:158). The narrative took a darker turn as *Jamal* and his mother faced significant challenges in grappling with the conflicting values of Kuwaiti society while trying to integrate. They both witnessed pervasive racism and discrimination in educational settings at school and university (Ibid:162). Over time, feelings of alienation began to surface, particularly as *Jamal's* mother took a job at a foreign school and *Jamal* entered his teenage years (Ibid:181). Ultimately, facing rejection from the Kuwaiti community due to their black skin, the family made the difficult decision to leave Kuwait forever.

Joanne and *Jamal's* experiences poignantly illustrate how deeply ingrained social hierarchies and racism can affect the integration of marginalised individuals within a new society. Their gradual alienation underscores the emotional toll of navigating an environment where their worth is

diminished based on skin colour, ultimately leading to their decision to leave Kuwait in search of acceptance.

Overall, themes of racism and discrimination in this novel contribute to a broader conversation about identity, power, and social justice, enriching our understanding of the complexities and nuances of the Kuwaiti experience. By engaging with these themes, the writer may provoke reflection, empathy, and dialogue, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

2.4.2.2.2 The Role of the Colour Black in Kuwait & America

The depiction of the black neighbourhood in the above passages resemble a prison, restricting the reader's view to the spatial details within the narrative framework. This setting serves as a backdrop for the psychological struggles of the protagonist, underlining the societal constructs of race and class in American society. The narrative explores the protagonist's shock at the stark divisions between the white and black worlds, delving into the systemic racial inequalities perpetuated by a white capitalist society. The spatial segregation of black individuals in the Chicago neighbourhood known as the black belt reflects deep-rooted social and cultural implications, contributing to the alienation of African American identity within the broader American context. This dual sense of alienation, as shown in the above quote, is further emphasised by the protagonist *Joanne's* disconnect from her African homeland and her experience as a foreigner in America. Conversations between *Fawzi* and his wife *Joanne* about Hollywood's perpetuation of stereotypes and the legacy of historical figures like Martin Luther King Jr. offer poignant reflections on race, identity, and belonging.

Joanne wonders “why all the servants in movies are portrayed as black?” (Ibid:68) and questions if people in Kuwait refer to *Fawzi* as a slave. *Fawzi* answers,

Every black individual in the Gulf is viewed as a slave by default, my dear. Those who refer to us in this way often append, ‘We are all servants of God’ Such attitudes and beliefs are reflective of a duplicitous nature, where individuals deceive God by asserting their equality before Him, all the while harbouring a deep-seated belief that only black people are considered God's servants, not white individuals (Ibid: 69-70)

In the following conversation, the author exposes the entrenched racism in Kuwait as a structured endeavour veiled in religious garb. *Joanne* shares her thoughts on the issue:

In the United States, we are sometimes misled in the name of humanity. When you are accepted as one of them, you are treated with respect. However, the moment you express differing opinions, you can quickly go from being a respected black friend in a Chicago suburb to a despised 'Negro' in disadvantaged and crime-ridden neighbourhoods (Ibid: 70)

To gauge *Fawzi's* understanding of how stereotypes are created, she was prompted to share her thoughts on various nationalities,

"- Chinese? –

- His English is bad

- And?

- He eats dogs

- A group of Chinese?

- A gang

- Mexican male?

- Criminal

- Mexican female?

- Maid

- Saudi? - Violent... backwards." (Ibid: 77)

On the flip side, *Fawzi* aims for objectivity by sharing the assumptions that Middle Eastern people hold about others. An example is his mother's refusal to dine in the homes of white Americans and her avoidance of mingling with Jewish people (Ibid:79).

2.4.2.2.5 Systematic Racism Against Black Individuals

The book also addresses instances of racism within Kuwaiti society, illustrated through *Fawzi's* recollections of his challenging school experiences. He vividly recalls the humiliation he felt in geography class, where he would shy away from African maps to avoid being mocked by his peers for "the physical characteristics of my poor ancestors", which he perceived as "enormous". (Ibid:143) He also felt uneasy during Arabic lessons, particularly when black people were

negatively portrayed in *al-Mutanabbī's* poetry¹⁰⁵ (Ibid:143) What troubled him even more was that his teacher would recite these verses with enthusiasm, causing *Fawzi* immense distress and embarrassment (ibid: 143). He felt this way because, in his opinion, “there was no greater offense than colleagues who believed that every black is a slave, and every slave is a black” (Ibid:144).

Interestingly, *Fawzi's* encounters with racism are echoed in his son *Jamal's* experiences in Kuwait. *Jamal* observes a troubling distinction: while all nationalities are designated by their countries, black individuals alone are described by their skin colour (Ibid:163). This racial bias extends beyond colour, with *Jamal* discovering that religious sect divisions also drive discrimination, animosity, and division in Kuwait. He is taken aback by his family's opposition to his Sunni aunt's marriage to a Shiite (Ibid:167). Furthermore, *Jamal* confronts diverse manifestations of racism from his white peers and neighbours in Kuwait, enduring daily taunts as “Black Duck kids” and suggestions to wear bright clothing for visibility at night (Ibid:169).

This prejudice extends to *Jamal's* mother, as she learns the reason behind *Fawzi's* family's objection to his aunt *Nadia* marrying a young Shiite. *Joanne* realises that America, with its legal protections against racism and discrimination, may offer a more equitable environment compared to Kuwait's pervasive and accepted racism (Ibid:183-186). The depth of racial bias becomes evident to *Jamal* when a white family rejects his proposal to marry their daughter. *Jamal* is disheartened by the collapse of two relationships with white Arab Kuwaiti girls due to his skin colour (Ibid:194-207).

The narrative underscores the pervasive impact of societal prejudice as *Jamal* and his mother confront not only familial objections but also systemic racism that permeates their lives in Kuwait. The stark contrast between the protections against discrimination in America and the ingrained bias in Kuwait highlights the emotional challenges faced by *Jamal*, particularly as he grapples with rejection in his personal relationships due to his skin colour.

¹⁰⁵ He alludes to a notorious poem penned by the renowned Arab poet Abū al-Ṭayyib Aḥmad al-Mutanabbī, which dates back to the 10th century and targets the ruler of Egypt, Abū al-Misk Kāfūr al-Akhshidi, a black African man. In this verse, one of the most infamous racial slurs in pre-modern Arabic literature, al-Mutanabbī makes a derogatory remark about black slaves, stating: “Don't buy a slave except with a stick... Slaves are unclean and evil.” See: Schine, N. Rachel. (2019). On Blackness in Arabic Popular Literature: The Black Heroes of the Siyar Sha'biyya, Their Conceptions, Contests, and Contexts. A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Division of the Humanities in Candidacy for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. (Unpublished), Chicago, Illinois. PP. 82-85

2.4.2.2.6 Conclusion:

The novel *Li-annī aswād* explores complex themes of identity, racism, and societal division, particularly focusing on the repercussions of Kuwait's history of slavery from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. Set in both America and Kuwait, it offers a distinctive perspective on the discrimination faced by black individuals in these contexts. The societal backdrop highlights entrenched racial prejudices and the marginalisation of black people, prompting reflections on the legacy of slavery and ongoing struggles for equality.

The theme of blackness in the narrative reveals how societal views equate black individuals with inferiority, perpetuating a discriminatory system. The portrayal of being “slaves of God” rationalises racist behaviour, while stereotypes lead to systemic prejudice regardless of an individual's status. The characters' shared experiences of racism underline the pervasive nature of discrimination in Kuwaiti society.

By examining blackness and exclusion, the novel reveals the societal mechanisms of race and class that shape black individuals' experiences. It encourages readers to confront systemic inequalities, urging critical reflection and social change to foster genuine inclusion and equality. The narrative addresses issues of spatial segregation and internal struggles faced by people of African descent, framing racism as a structural issue rather than isolated incidents.

Utilising first-person and second-person narratives, the author creates an intimate connection to characters' challenges, fostering empathy and inviting readers to critically engage with themes of equality and justice. The story challenges deep-rooted biases, urging active engagement against systems of inequality and oppression.

2.4.3 Idris Ali's Novel *Dongola*, Egypt:

2.4.3.1 Brief Historical Background:

The Anglo-Egyptian Declaration of January 1899 marked the end of the long-standing slave trade in Egypt, abolishing a centuries-old institution in the country (Zdanowski, 2008:41 & Clarence-Smith, 2006:114). However, its enduring legacy, including racism and marginalisation directed towards black individuals and communities, continues to reverberate in Egyptian society today. Researcher Maurita N. Poole suggests that, in modern Egypt, the Nubians are perceived as “internal others” by the rest of the Egyptian population due to a complex array of factors including the history, colour of their skin, language, geographical location, and the lingering influence of Western colonialism, which perpetuated a binary view of race and colour. (Poole, 2011: 241).

According to the scholar Shafik, whose study focused on stereotypes in popular Egyptian cinema, the re-presentation of Nubians serving the Egyptian nation in real life closely mirrors their on-screen depiction. In Egyptian cinema until the 1960s, Nubian individuals, both men and women, were frequently shown as nannies, servants, doormen, or waiters in affluent bourgeois settings such as the homes of beys and pashas. This portrayal reflected the prevalent occupation of Nubians during that period, which often involved service roles in households, hotels, and restaurants. The cinematic re-presentation often depicted Nubians as simple and naive individuals, subject to belittlement due to their perceived lack of proficiency in Arabic (Shafik, 2007:68).

Similarly, researcher Elizabeth Smith echoed these sentiments, highlighting how prevailing stereotypes positioned Nubians in subservient roles as servants and doormen, while simultaneously excluding them from the mainstream Egyptian identity. This exclusion was often achieved by associating Nubians either with their historical roots as slaves from sub-Saharan Africa or with their contemporary African heritage (Smith, 2006:400-1). According to Egyptian researcher Islam Sabry, in a 2012 Al Arabiya News poll, Egyptians identified themselves primarily as Muslims, Arabs, Egyptians, descendants of the Pharaohs, or a combination of these identities. Notably, none of the respondents identified themselves as African (Sabry, 2021:1).

Notably, the Nubians in southern Egypt bear the brunt of this history, as they were among the first to experience Arab-Islamic enslavement in the 7th century AD. This began with the triumph of Arab Muslim leader ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aas (d. 664), who, in 652 AD, negotiated the “Security Treaty”

during the rule of Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644) with the Nubians. The treaty mandated that Nubians supply a specified quota of slaves annually (360) to the Bayt al-Mal, the Islamic treasury house (Ibn Abd al-Hakam, 1994:216-17, al-Magrizi, 1997, 1:370 & Nuqd, 2003:24).



2.4.3.1 The Map of Dongola, Sudan (Source: Google Map)

Historically, ancient Nubia spanned the southern regions of Egypt and the northern areas of Sudan. However, the demarcation of the border between Egypt and Sudan in 1899 led to the division of Nubia between the two countries, leaving the Nubians as a minority in their own lands (Janmyr, 2017:717). Their challenges continued as Egypt underwent industrialisation at the start of the 20th century, with Nubians bearing the brunt of this development (Smith, 2006:400, Shafik, 2007:68 & Janmyr, 2017:718). The construction of dams along the Nile River by British colonial authorities beginning in the early 20th century, specifically near Aswan in 1902, 1912, and 1933, resulted in the flooding of Nubian lands. This forced many Nubians to abandon their homes and ancestral lands. In the 1950s, President Nasser of Egypt further marginalised the Nubian community by initiating the massive Aswan High Dam project, which ultimately led to the near complete inundation of settled Nubia (Janmyr, 2017:718).

In 1960, then-Vice President Anwar Sadāt visited the Nubians who were about to be resettled to a new area in the desert north of Aswan as part of the Aswan High Dam project. He assured the Nubians that they were leaving their ancestral homeland of Nubia for the greater good of the country and promised them stability, prosperity, and a decent life in the new district of Kom

Ombo. Sadāt's statement reflected the government's perspective at the time, emphasising the perceived benefits of the dam project while downplaying the challenges and losses faced by the Nubian community due to forced displacement (Fahim, 1983:36).

The Nubians, upon being resettled to the new district of Kom Ombo, did not find the promised stability and prosperity. Instead, they were faced with immense hardship, loss, and a stark contrast between their previous way of life and their current situation (Janmyr, 2017:718). In 1960, about half of the Nubian population was forcibly displaced from their ancestral lands (Shafik, 2007:67). This displacement continued in 1963 with the completion of the Aswan High Dam, causing around 50,000 Nubians from approximately 45 villages to be uprooted from their homes further upstream along the Nile (Janmyr, 2017:718). This wave of displacement further exacerbated the challenges faced by the already marginalised Nubian community, highlighting the painful consequences of the dam projects on their lives and culture.

Following their displacement, the Nubian community has faced ongoing political, social, and economic marginalisation in Egypt. The Egyptian state has historically denied the existence of indigenous people or ethnic minorities within the country, promoting a narrative of societal ethnic homogeneity. While Egyptian nationalism sought to be anti-imperial, anti-racist, and revolutionary, it has been criticised for reinforcing historical and racist systems of oppression, with discrimination against Nubians being a longstanding issue. Despite many Nubians achieving success in education and professional fields, a significant number of them are relegated to menial jobs.

As mentioned earlier, negative stereotypes against Nubians are prevalent in Egyptian media and entertainment, often portraying them as doormen, servants, or drivers. This perpetuation of stereotypes contributes to the marginalisation and discrimination faced by the Nubian community in Egypt. A 2009 report by the International Labour Organisation highlighted the unequal treatment of Nubians in Egyptian society, stating that they are not viewed as equal members of the community. The pervasive marginalisation and discrimination against Nubians underscore the broader societal challenges and biases that continue to impact this community in Egypt (Equal Rights Trust Country Report, 2018:224-5, Shafik, 2007:68-9 & Janmyr, 2017:718).

2.4.3.2 The Setting, Themes and Perspectives:

2.4.3.2.1 Story Preview

While slavery and colonialism served as the socio-historical background for certain novels, this particular novel *Dongola* utilises the post-colonial era as a backdrop to emphasise the impact of Egyptian nationalist policies in the second half of the 20th century in marginalising the “black Nubian society” (DiMeo, 2015:72-89). Therefore, *Dongola* in this context can be considered as Abbas points out “a Nubian counter-narrative to Arab-Egyptian nationalism framed primarily through historical memory, racial identity, and language rooted in Afro-Nubian culture and history.” (Abbas, 2014:147)

Unlike the novels previously examined, the author chose to narrate using the third-person narrative style in order to distance himself from the events of the story, presenting as an omniscient figure who connects the actions of the characters through references to their names or third person pronouns. Since the novel is considered a counter-narrative that primarily represents the author's black African Nubian background, the novel tackles the subject matter from the viewpoint of the black individual, offering insights and perspectives not typically explored in literature by writers from white cultural backgrounds. By narrating the experiences of Black Nubians from the viewpoint of the black individual author, this novel humanises the impact of slavery on individuals and communities, providing a richly textured exploration of its lasting psychological and emotional scars. Besides, the author offers a firsthand account of the realities of slavery and its lasting effects, providing a more personal and intimate glimpse into the hardships, struggles, resilience, and resistance of former enslaved people. Furthermore, he arguably challenges dominant narratives and stereotypes about slavery and blackness, offering a counter-narrative that reclaims agency, voice, and humanity for those who have been historically marginalised and silenced. Through his storytelling, he brings to light untold stories, experiences, and perspectives that are often overlooked or misrepresented in traditional accounts of history, contributing to a more inclusive and diverse re-presentation of the black experience.

Making this as a socio-historical backdrop, the novel sheds light on the Nasserist era of the 1960s, particularly ‘Awad Shalali's uprising against the Egyptian authorities' discriminatory practices, favouring “the upper Egyptian white” over “the lower Nubian black” (Ali, 2006:15-20). *Shalali's* rebellion was fuelled by the realisation that Egypt government's policies primarily benefitted the North, leaving the poverty-stricken South to endure neglect. *Shalali's* revolutionary aspirations cantered on restoring *Dongola*, the historic capital of Nubia, reflecting the collective longing for a return to their ancestral homeland. Tensions peaked when the

Egyptian government constructed a water reservoir along the Nile in the South, followed by the building of “the Aswan High Dam”, submerging Nubia beneath the floodwaters of the Nile. Consequently, the Nubians were forced to abandon their lands, leading to the disappearance of their country and civilisation (Ibid:20). The Egyptian state prioritised the preservation of Pharaonic temples and relics over the wellbeing of the Nubian people, further exacerbating their grievances (Ibid:15).

2.4.3.2.2 The Black “Otherness”¹⁰⁶

In this narrative, Nubia emerges as a forsaken, marginalised territory, while the North of Egypt thrives as the epicentre of vitality, advancement, and progress. From the opening dedication of the book, the author passionately conveys the profound sense of marginalisation endured by the land of Nubia, articulating a poignant outcry that echoes the anguish deeply embedded within their heart:

To my dear friends and cherished ones residing in the North, these writings are a reflection of my thoughts, please handle them with care. My words carry my voice, please do not mute it, and I am present here with you, so please do not cast stones my way. I have shared in your community, partaken in your meals, and admired your culture, past and present. I come to you, with heartfelt sincerity, to share some of the anguish that burdens both myself and my people (Ibid:5)

The concept of black otherness refers to the ways in which individuals of African descent are often viewed as fundamentally different or “other” compared to the dominant culture, leading to feelings of alienation, marginalisation, and a sense of being an outsider in society (Meisenhelder, 2003: 100–113).

This concept is implicated in the above excerpt as the speaker reaches out to his friends in the North, highlighting the emotional and social distance that exists despite shared experiences and interactions. The plea to “handle [the writings] with care” and not to “mute” the speaker’s voice underscores the sensitivity around the Black Nubian identity and struggles. The acknowledgment of having participated in the community while simultaneously expressing anguish about their people signifies the internal conflict of belonging versus otherness. This message emphasises a longing for recognition and understanding, challenging the prevailing narratives that may silence

¹⁰⁶ The explanation of “otherness” will come in more detail in Chapter 3.

or ignore their experiences and emotions as part of the broader struggle against marginalisation within society.

In the opening chapter of the novel, titled “Separated,” the theme of “otherness” begins to emerge as the Nubian characters, particularly the protagonist *Shalali*, his uncle *Jazouli*, and their sons and friends, grapple with and resist the systems of power that contribute to their marginalisation (Ibid:11-12). This chapter delves into the experiences of black Nubian individuals who are viewed as outsiders, subjected to exploitation, displacement, and persecution by the dominant society. In the initial scene, *Shalali* is filled with dread after being released from prison, where he spent ten years due to a presidential amnesty, and he constantly fears that the police will re-arrest him at any moment (Ibid:11). These experiences of “otherness” are echoed and further developed in the pages that follow, highlighting the social, political, and cultural dynamics within Nubian society, where black individuals are systematically marginalised and stripped of their agency, dignity, and respect (Ibid:22-26).

This marginalisation is rooted not only in their identity as descendants of enslaved people but also in their status as infidels, as exemplified by *Shalali* (Ibid:22). Additionally, the theme of black otherness in “Dongola” intertwines with issues of identity, belonging, and cultural pride as Nubian characters confront their sense of self in a world that aims to diminish and erase their heritage (ibid:26-7). The novel also showcases the resilience and agency of these individuals as they challenge stereotypes, reclaim their narratives, and affirm their humanity in the face of oppression. *Shalali* boldly declares to the investigator, “I have come to you to file a lawsuit against the builders of the reservoir and the dam and to claim my old borders from Aswan to Dongola.” (Ibid:47)

The characters' determination to reclaim their narratives, as shown in the above statement, highlights their resilience and refusal to be defined by oppression, illustrating a powerful assertion of their identity and rights. *Shalali's* bold declaration signifies a courageous challenge to systemic injustices, emphasizing a collective struggle for justice and acknowledgment of their historical grievances.

2.4.3.2.3 The Racial Division Between the “Upper White and the Lower Black”

Alongside the author's heartfelt dedication introducing the novel, the text is teeming with references to pivotal historical occurrences that have shaped Nubia's tumultuous journey, spanning from confrontations with Pharaohs leading to sabotage and exclusion, encounters with

early Muslim Arab invaders, and enduring eras under the rule of the Mamluks, Ottomans, and Nasserist nationalists. In this context, the author points to a significant event in the 7th century AD as a turning point in the strained relations between the white north and the black south, highlighting the division that stemmed from Nubia being compelled to provide slaves as tribute to Muslim rulers (Ibid:7). As mentioned earlier, this agreement¹⁰⁷ required the Nubia to give 360 slaves annually to Muslim leaders in exchange for sustenance (Ibn Abd al-Hakam, 1994: 215-17).

Since that time, the Nubia's adversaries have been identified, leading to their marginalisation, segregation, and enslavement. Drawing on Arab historical accounts, by al-Maqrizi and Haikal, which he references in the opening pages of his novel, the author delves into the Arab tribes' trade with Nubians in Egypt to underscore the geographical and cultural divide between the regions (Ibid:8). For instance, in a chapter titled 'The Separated', he uses satire to depict the disdainful attitudes of the upper white populace exemplified by his stepmother, *Ruhiyya al-Bulaqiyya*, whom he accuses of being complicit in his father's demise. The narrator continues,

After luring and tiring his father, she administered poison to him. His unsuspecting father viewed the civilisation of the North through rose-tinted lenses, envisioning it as a gentle, fair-skinned woman with ample curves and uncovered bosom. To his detriment, he fell victim to the cunning manipulations of the most devious kind of woman—a skilled seductress. Her aim was Uncle Shalali, a server at the Shepherd Hotel (Ibid: 17)

When questioned by the interrogating officer while detained, he responds about his country of origin:

In the realm that lies between the north and south, where the army of Cambyses met its demise and the Muslim forces suffered a crushing retreat, their knights left blinded.

This territory has transformed into a reservoir for waters flowing from the north (Ibid:18)

When asked about his religion, he says:

- I uphold principles of justice.
- Does that make you a pagan?

¹⁰⁷ According to Egyptian historian Ibn Abd al-Hakam (d. 870), this treaty is known in Islamic tradition as "*Baqt*" (Arabic: البقطة) which was signed in 652 C.E. between the Christian state of Nubia and the new Muslim rulers of Egypt (Ibn Abd al-Hakam, 1994:216).

- These are the beliefs I hold; interpret them as you wish.
- When were you born?
- My birth occurred during a period of vulnerability.
- Do you have any other thoughts?
- Indeed, you have sowed seeds of hatred within me (Ibid:19)

This exchange powerfully illustrates the tension between personal belief systems and societal expectations, reflecting a deep struggle for identity amidst external judgment. The protagonist's assertion of justice as a core principle, juxtaposed with the investigator's attempts to label him, encapsulates the theme of alienation and the corrosive effects of hatred in shaping individual perspectives.

2.4.3.2.4 Blackness and Slavery Are Synonyms

The novel prominently features the contrasting depictions of southern Nubian Blacks and northern Egyptian Whites. While the author lauds the “black Nubians” for their pursuit of justice, freedom, and equality, he portrays the “Upper white Egyptians” as greedy, oppressive invaders engaged in the slave trade. An interaction between *Shalali* and a policeman during a train journey back to Aswan highlights the theme, with Egyptian authorities accusing *Shalali* of involvement in a plot to overthrow the regime. The conversation goes as follows:

- “- Why are you staging a coup?
- In the name of justice!
- Who gave you this job?
- This is my duty
- Sign in here.
- I still insist on reading the investigation document. -I'm not illiterate.
- We the one who taught you, son of a Jarīyā [slave-woman].
- My mother is a free Nubian woman.
- It is better off to sign in here.

- I wanted to read the document first.
- One of the government's blunders is establishing schools for you, as if they had left you uncivilised, you would have stayed ignorant and servile to us. Take him away again and teach him a lesson." (Ibid:27)

This dialogue starkly reveals the power dynamics and deep-seated prejudices inherent in societal structures, as the protagonist's quest for justice is met with derision and disdain rooted in historical oppression. The interaction underscores the theme of identity reclamation, as the protagonist asserts his education and heritage in defiance of the oppressive beliefs held by those in authority.

In a separate instance, a white officer known as *al-Soul al-Bulaqī* is seen boasting about his grandfather, mocking *Shalali*'s black origins by saying:

- My grandfather had ten of these kinds (referring to slaves) in addition to those he freed for the sake of God. I never thought a day would come when they would turn against their masters.

'Awad Shalali defiantly responded:

- Which ancestors are you talking about? The ones who served the Mamluks or those who provided women to Napoleon's soldiers? (Ibid: 30)

The narrator in this scene depicts *Shalali*'s emotional response to the insult, portraying him in the novel as walking in agitation with anger burning inside him in response to *al-Bulaqī*'s revelation that his grandfather had been a slave owner, pointing out that "they were merely slaves owned slaves." (Ibid:31)

This exchange poignantly highlights the enduring legacy of slavery and systemic racism, emphasising how historical hierarchies continue to shape personal identities and social interactions. *Shalali*'s defiance in the face of *al-Bulaqī*'s taunts serves as a powerful reclamation of agency, challenging the narrative of inferiority imposed by his opponent while revealing the complexities of ancestry and power dynamics in a deeply stratified society.

2.4.3.2.5 Voluntary Servitude

Indeed, the author provides another illustration of the complexities of slavery by recounting *Shalali*'s romantic entanglement with the Frenchwoman named *Simone* during his final days in Europe. *Simone*, a professor of Eastern history, not only distracts *Shalali* from his Nubian cause

and struggle but also engulfs him in adoration to the extent that “he worships her while harbouring a deep disdain for slavery itself.” (Ibid:101)

In light of the above, the author elevates the concept of slavery to a Sufi dimension or a voluntary servitude that we previously referred to in Bin Shatwan’s novel, separating it from colour or race and instead defining it as a state of willingly surrendering and submitting fully to another individual's authority. This dynamic highlights the conflict between personal desire and ideological beliefs, showcasing how emotional attachment can blur the lines of autonomy and complicate one's stance on issues of freedom and oppression.

2.4.3.2.6 Freedom Between Egypt and Europe

The novel incorporates a thought-provoking exploration of the concept of freedom within the cultural context of the region, particularly in light of the intellectual challenges posed by Islamic culture and Egyptian society. The narrator skilfully navigates these complexities by shedding light on the contrasting notion of freedom prevalent in Western Europe, where individualism and autonomy are valued, offering a stark contrast to the traditional, authoritarian structures in the narrator's home country. This portrayal underscores the divergent societal norms and values that shape perceptions of freedom, highlighting the varied understandings and interpretations of liberation across different cultural landscapes. By presenting this comparative analysis, the novel invites readers to reflect on the diverse manifestations of freedom and the implications of cultural, social, and political frameworks on the pursuit of individual rights and liberties. For example, *Shalali* observes the lifestyle of Europeans during his journey in Western Europe as

residing in a dazzling world free from the harshness of traditions, authoritarian rule, or the rigidity of laws. In this society, individuals are free to believe in their own ideologies, whether they be communist, existentialist, pagan, Christian, Jewish, homosexual, or prostitutes—everyone has a voice (Ibid: 98)

By referencing Europe in the discussion of freedom within Islamic culture, the novel prompts a re-examination of the concept of freedom in this context and its implications for Egyptian society in the modern era. The comparison challenges entrenched notions of freedom and equality within the local cultural framework, prompting a larger interrogation of the political and cultural systems that have shaped contemporary Egypt.

By delving into sensitive topics such as slavery and racism from a critical intellectual perspective, the novel aims to provoke thought and scrutiny of traditionally revered concepts, encouraging a

re-evaluation of their relevance and significance in the current societal context. This approach seeks to initiate a dialogue that questions existing beliefs and practices, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding freedom, equality, and social justice in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

2.4.3.2.7 Conclusion:

In summary, the novel *Dongola* is set in postcolonial Egypt and examines the effects of Egyptian nationalist policies on the black Nubian community during the Nasserist era of the 1960s. It focuses on *Awād Shalali's* uprising against discriminatory practices favouring “Upper white Egyptians” over “Lower black Nubians,” while addressing issues of slavery, colonialism, and Arab nationalist movements that shape race and identity. The narrative reveals how nationalist leaders' false promises for independence led to the further marginalisation of black Nubians.

Central to the story is the plight of the Nubian people, who have faced historical enslavement, marginalisation, and discrimination based on their ancestry. The novel challenges existing narratives around slavery and blackness, reinstating agency, and dignity to oppressed communities. It offers an intimate exploration of identity, resistance, and resilience within marginalised black populations, revealing the psychological and emotional toll of systemic racism. The author presents slavery not only as a historical institution but also as a contemporary “reality” that influences black identities. This includes a subtle form of enslavement, where individuals may relinquish their agency due to ideologies of racial superiority. *Shalali's* submission to *Simone* embodies this idea, illustrating how romantic passion can sometimes act as a tool of control.

Ultimately, *Dongola* serves as a critical examination of the enduring impacts of slavery, advocating for justice and empowerment while showcasing the resilience of Nubian characters. Through its narrative of struggle and resistance, the novel highlights the complexities of identity and the ongoing inequalities rooted in historical injustices, underscoring the need for education and cultural awareness as agents for change.

2.5 Similarities and Differences Between the Six Novels:

Upon examining the six novels through the lens of our chapter's questions, we can now identify key similarities and differences between them as follows:

(1) Setting and Historical Context: The setting of each story plays a crucial role in understanding the historical context that shaped attitudes towards slavery and blackness in these six societies. While the time period of the events surrounding slavery in the colonial period aligns at the turn of the 20th century, when the institution of slavery had not yet been abolished in these societies, the geographical locations differ significantly. The source of slaves in Libya stemmed from the trans-Saharan trade routes, notably the caravan routes, whereas Bahrain and the Hijaz utilised slave supply networks from East and West Africa through the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. A notable observation in this comparison is that despite the vast geographical distance between Arabia in the east and Africa in the north, the source, perspective, practices, and experiences of slavery and enslavement in these societies (Libya, Bahrain, & Hejaz) are strikingly similar. The notion of slavery being permissible and divinely sanctioned resonates across these regions. The portrayal of black Muslim Africans as enslaved individuals, treated as commodities to be bought and sold in the market, contrasts with the depiction of Arabs as white masters, showcasing the significance of colour, racial purity, and notions of superiority within these societies and among Muslims themselves. This serves to underscore the shared role that these concepts play in shaping societal dynamics and power structures.

On the other hand, the same can be said for postcolonial novels in the late 20th century, as they unfolded in diverse geographical locations in close temporal proximity. Despite variances in geography and political structures – from traditional monarchies in Kuwait to leftist nationalist republics in Yemen and Egypt – these nations exhibit parallels in their treatment of black populations. Even though slavery has been formally abolished, the enduring legacy of historical injustices persists, influencing the ongoing marginalisation, racism, and discrimination faced by black residents in these regions. These entrenched practices, stemming from deep-rooted historical, cultural, and racial biases, underscore lasting social hierarchies that have systematically oppressed and marginalised Black communities based on their colour and race for generations.

(2) Socio-Historical Background: The socio-historical background plays a significant role in understanding this setting. While Libya and the Hejaz shared Ottoman occupation, Bahrain diverged as it was under British control. However, all these three societies were ultimately

united by the abolition of slavery occurring in the mid-20th century. This pivotal event was precipitated by a combination of external pressures from Western colonial powers, such as the Italian presence in Libya and the British influence in the Hejaz and Bahrain, as well as internal economic transformations, including the discovery and exploitation of oil.

The perpetuation of slavery across these regions similarly stemmed from its vital economic role. Merchants profited from the trade of slaves, while affluent local families acquired slaves for various purposes like household duties, concubines, and pearl diving, with black females being the predominant demographic, sourced from Africa through trade, abduction, or conflict. Furthermore, slavery was justified culturally and morally within these societies, with most enslaved individuals in the novels being Muslim. The political climate, economic landscape, religious doctrines, and cultural norms of slavery within these societies created a shared context that influenced the characters' experiences, motivations, and societal structures.

Although slavery has long been abolished in postcolonial Yemen, Kuwait, and Egypt, its repercussions continue to reverberate. In Egypt, Yemen, and Kuwait, discriminatory practices, and marginalisation against black communities stem from shared economic, historical, and cultural factors. The marginalisation of black populations is predominantly rooted in cultural norms and entrenched perceptions passed down through generations. When comparing the work's events in Libya, Bahrain, Hijaz, Yemen, Kuwait, and Egypt, it is evident that they all tackle the themes of slavery, blackness, racism, and discrimination, albeit within different socio-historical contexts and settings. Nevertheless, one common thread among these six novels, despite their diverse settings and historical contexts, is the shared belief among the characters and communities depicted that black individuals were deemed inferior and destined for either enslavement or racial discrimination due to their skin colour. This attitude toward black people as inherently lesser and suitable for slavery transcends time and location in these narratives.

(3) Themes of Slavery and Blackness: The theme of slavery and blackness is a central focus in all of these works, as they explore the plight of enslaved black African Muslims who were either captured or bought by Arab slave traders. This theme had a significant impact on the characters and events portrayed. In Libya, the Hijaz, and Bahrain, slavery played a crucial role in the social and economic framework of the society, where African slaves often formed their own communities. During this period, slavery had a profound influence on the social and economic structure under Ottoman and British governance, deeply affecting the lives of those enslaved by shaping their experiences, opportunities, and social status. Furthermore, it also influenced the

Arab slave owners, serving as a symbol of wealth and prestige, with the ruling Arab elite showcasing their power and affluence through their ownership of large numbers of slaves. Additionally, it contributed to the wider regional slave trade. Although slave communities were believed to have existed for up to three generations in places like Hijaz, and fewer in Libya and Bahrain, enslaved individuals were frequently marginalised and treated as outsiders. Therefore, these novels collectively explore the theme of slavery as a significant driving force, driven by common factors such as religion, trade, war, and colonialism. The issue of slavery in these societies is intricately linked to concepts of colour, lineage, and race, where limited job prospects and substandard living conditions are synonymous with slavery.

While narratives in Libya and Bahrain align in the belief that slavery is predetermined based on skin colour, the Hijaz narrative challenges this perspective, emphasising the inherent equality of all individuals, regardless of race. Nonetheless, they concur that the persistence of slavery in their societies is influenced by cultural elements such as religion and challenging environmental and economic circumstances, warranting a holistic approach to address the economic, social, and cultural underpinnings that perpetuate this institution.

In post-colonial novels, a prevalent theme is the association of blackness with the legacy of enslavement in societies like Yemen, Kuwait, and Egypt. The intertwining of blackness and slavery in these countries is informed by historical, cultural, and colonial dynamics. Yemen, Kuwait, and Egypt collectively underscore how race and colour have shaped societal structures, leading to the marginalisation of black communities and the reinforcement of the “othering” of blacks as distinct from white populations.

(4) Slavery as a Social System: Slavery is categorised not merely as a legal concern but as a complex social and economic system designed by the ruling class to uphold existing power dynamics. Persistent societal inequalities limit the choices of individuals facing these challenges. The novels from Libya, Bahrain, and the Hijaz delve into the intricate themes of slavery and blackness, conceptualising slavery as a multifaceted system deeply entwined with social, economic, and cultural structures. In these narratives, slavery is depicted as a tool devised by the white ruling class to uphold prevailing power dynamics and retain control over both society and its resources, thereby perpetuating existing inequalities and preserving their dominance. Despite legal emancipation, black individuals in Bahrain, Libya, and the Hijaz continue to be regarded as slaves solely based on the colour of their skin, underscoring the deeply embedded racial prejudices and discriminatory attitudes prevalent within these societies. The narratives

illustrate how blackness is perceived as an omnipresent and oppressive force that shapes the lived experiences of these characters, irrespective of their legal freedom or social status. Moreover, apart from conventional forms of slavery, the works from Libya, Bahrain, and to some extent Egypt also shed light on the concept of Sufi spiritual slavery, where individuals are portrayed as willingly becoming “slaves” out of profound love and devotion to another person, transcending boundaries of colour and race. Additionally, these works in Libya and Bahrain allude to the notion of “slavery to colonialism”, highlighting how the colonial rule replaced traditional forms of slavery with a new system of subjugation and exploitation, further emphasising the complex and enduring impact of slavery on society and its people.

In the context of Kuwait, Yemen, and Egypt, there is a shared conceptualisation of slavery that is intrinsically intertwined with blackness, portraying every black individual as a product of slavery and subjugation. This conceptualisation underscores the historical association between black identity and the institution of slavery in these societies. However, the Egyptian novel offers a distinctive perspective on slavery by introducing the notion of surrender to the allure of Western ideology. The narrative explores how Eastern liberal individuals, including black ones like *Shalali*, may be entranced by the promise of liberal ideals espoused by Western powers. This surrender to Western ideologies re-presents a form of mental subjugation and enslavement, where individuals from the East become captivated by the perceived brilliance and appeal of Western concepts, potentially relinquishing their own cultural values and autonomy in the process. By introducing this dimension to the discourse on slavery, the Egyptian novel challenges conventional understandings of enslavement and exploitation, highlighting how mental and ideological forms of subjugation can contribute to the perpetuation of power imbalances and domination within societies. This nuanced exploration adds a layer of complexity to discussions of slavery and sheds light on the multifaceted ways in which individuals can be enslaved, both physically and mentally, in a colonial or postcolonial context.

(5) Values of Freedom and Emancipation: In the novels from Libya, Bahrain, and the Hijaz, the themes of freedom, justice, and equality are woven into the fabric of Islamic culture. However, these works tend to overlook the potential for these values to perpetuate slavery. The traditional approaches used in these novels typically eschew innovative, modernist ideas that might challenge long-standing societal norms. Notably, the Libyan novel stands out by critiquing traditional perceptions that supported slavery and instead advocates for modernist notions of freedom, justice, and equality as secular values rather than divine ones. While all of these novels

depict enslaved individuals striving for freedom from bondage, there are divergent approaches to the concept of emancipation. In Bahrain and Libya, the formal recognition of emancipation certificates for freed slaves is lacking, leading to challenges for liberated individuals who may prefer to remain in a state of slavery due to the absence of viable economic and social opportunities that would allow them to lead dignified lives. The Hijazi novel introduces a different dynamic, where harsh economic conditions prompt enslaved individuals to resort to kidnapping others like themselves in order to place them into slavery, highlighting the complexities and moral ambiguities surrounding the practice of emancipation in these societies. Furthermore, these works focus on the processes of emancipation, where the granting of freedom to slaves is depicted as a discretionary decision of the owner, while the concept of abolition - the formal, legal end of slavery - is notably absent from the discourse. The avoidance of discussing abolition may stem from the societal emphasis on sacred values and the criticism that secular notions of abolition may provoke in these religiously influenced communities.

On the other hand, the Egyptian and Yemeni novels presented the issues of freedom and equality from other, unconventional perspectives and discussed them more boldly as a major reason for the practice of enslavement and marginalisation against blacks. As for the Kuwaiti story, the shock of the *Fawzi's* family revealed the inadequacy of these values in Kuwaiti society, which forced the family to prefer returning to the liberal society in the United States of America, where the first black president of African descent was elected to assume power in the White House.

(6) Narrative Perspectives: The work is told from various perspectives, including those of black and white individuals, as well as slaves and free individuals. In Libya, the novel unfolds through the first-person accounts of a slave and an absent white figure, providing readers with a distinctive vantage point to observe the narrative through the eyes of both the narrator and the enslaved black characters. These divergent viewpoints influence the characters' sense of self and their understanding of the society around them, giving rise to internal conflicts and struggles with identity. Similar narrative devices are employed in Bahrain, where the author employs a blend of first-person and third-person narration to present varying perspectives.

In the context of the Hijaz, the novel takes shape from the first-person viewpoint of grandmother *Maymūna*, who recounts the story through a series of recollections from the past. This narrative technique offers a unique window into the experiences of slavery and the historical practices of Arabs enslaving black African Muslims from the standpoint of African society. What sets this

particular work apart is its characterization as a black counter-narrative in contrast to prevailing white narratives. Here, blackness is exalted, with a focus on the preservation of black individuals and their culture, the celebration of their valour in history, and the elevation of their status to counter any disparaging narratives.

In the other three novels, a variety of narrative techniques were employed to depict the perspectives of both black and white characters. In Kuwait, the narrative was predominantly told from the first-person perspective of the black character *Jamal*. In Yemen and Egypt, the narrative style alternated between the first and third person, allowing for the exploration of diverse viewpoints re-presenting both black and white community members. *Dongola* and *Maymūna*, as counter-narratives that advocate for the re-presentation and empowerment of blacks and their communities, shared similarities in their narratives. Both novels extensively featured and celebrated the black point of view, offering a nuanced portrayal of black characters and their experiences.

Overall, these works together contribute to a nuanced exploration of the complexities of slavery, blackness, and societal hierarchies in different historical contexts, inviting readers to engage with themes of resilience, identity, freedom, and the enduring struggle against oppression. By examining the themes, perspectives, and implications presented in these novels, readers are prompted to critically reflect on the deep-rooted impacts of history on individuals and communities and consider the ongoing relevance of these themes in contemporary society.

In the next chapter, we delve into the intricate and multifaceted ways in which characters are portrayed and their roles are defined in these literary works. Through a critical examination of characterisation, narrative, and thematic elements, we seek to uncover the underlying power dynamics of race, identity, and re-presentation that shape the depiction and vision of characters' experiences, particularly those of Black individuals. We will investigate how societal standards of beauty, skin tone, and aesthetic norms impact the re-presentation of Black aesthetics, desire, and self-worth, influencing the ways in which Black individuals navigate and resist dominant narratives of beauty, value, and identity within Arab literary re-presentations.

CHAPTER THREE

The Re-presentation of Characters

3. Theoretical Introduction: Re-presentational Discourse and Practices

One might think that re-presentation simply involves stating, depicting, imagining, or reflecting “reality” or fantasy. However, re-presentation entails presenting and depicting someone or something to an audience, suggesting that the subject already existed and is being re-represented through language or media. The prefix “re” is attached to the verb “present” or the noun “presentation” to indicate a shift in the position or state of something that was previously known. Thus, to re-present something means to present it anew in a different manner (Sinclair, 1992: 1193 & 1228). Nonetheless, re-presentation is far more intricate than this straightforward dictionary definition suggests.

In Hall’s perspective, a developed definition of re-presentation transcends the mere reflection of objects or events that occurs after they have taken place. Instead, re-presentation involves the act of ascribing meaning, akin to Hall’s assertion that it is “the process by which members of a culture use language to produce meaning” (Hall, 2003: 61).

This re-definition emphasises that re-presentation is an integral part of the event itself, wherein meaning is actively assigned to the subjects illustrated through various images or mediums. Meaning plays a central role in the concept of re-presentation, as it allows individuals to perceive what is deemed as “reality,” thereby enabling them to interpret and make sense of the world around them.

Consequently, Stuart Hall, a key figure in “re-presentation theory,” understands literary re-presentation as a complex and multifaceted concept, particularly regarding themes of “difference” or “otherness.” He posits that re-presentation elicits feelings, attitudes, and anxieties that can be challenging to articulate or fully rationalise (Hall, 2003: 226). This nuanced understanding highlights how re-presentation is not merely about depicting “reality” but is also interwoven with cultural tensions and subjective experiences, shaping, and reflecting societal perceptions of identity, difference, and belonging.

Despite the complexities inherent in the concept of re-presentation, Hall’s earlier definition serves as a useful foundation for exploring the re-representation of slaves and Black individuals in selected novels. Hall suggests that re-representation is a method of “re-representing” ideas for audiences, utilising cultural and linguistic raw materials that construct meaning and subsequently shape the reader’s perception of the subject and the text at hand. In this sense, re-representation functions as a tool of power aimed at influencing readers’ perceptions and

ideas, often employing a dichotomy of group identities (Us versus Them) along with their corresponding ideologies.

Within this framework, the re-representation of the “Other” becomes a potent instrument that, in its Marxist understanding, depends on the silence or perceived inability of the “Other” to articulate or re-present themselves. This aligns with Edward Said’s assertion in his seminal work *Orientalism*, where he cites Karl Marx renowned line, “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (Said, 2003: xxvi).

However, the re-representation of “Others” is not necessarily an inevitable result of the combination of political predominance and cognitive power, but because most cultures were eager to categorise “Others”, to assert that they have power and domination over them. Accordingly, re-representation is an indicator of power, dominance, and supremacy. Culture is capable of re-representation when it possesses the means of power and imposition of domination. Or as Hall puts it,

power...always operates in condition of unequal relations...for Gramsci, as for Foucault, power also involves knowledge, representation, ideas, cultural leadership and authority, as well as economic constraint and physical coercion. Both would have agreed that power cannot be captured by thinking exclusively in terms of force or coercion: power also seduces, solicits, induces, wins consent. It cannot be thought of in terms of one group having a monopoly of power, simply radiating power downwards on a subordinate group by an exercise of simple domination from above. It includes the dominant and dominated within its circuits (Hall, 2003:261)

The dominant culture, in other words, wants to say through the process of re-representation to the “Other” that, “we are dominant because we have the power (industrial, technological, military, moral), and they don’t, because of which they are not dominant; they are inferior, we are superior.” (Said, 1994:106) And when such re-presentations are circulated about the “Others”, these “Others” may be convinced of the truthfulness of what they have been described by and the certainty of these re-presentations about them.

This perspective underscores how narratives about marginalised groups often emerge from frameworks dominated by those in power, thereby limiting the agency of the re-presented to define their own identities and experiences.

Given that the re-representation of events, characters, and ideas is central to the selected novels—particularly concerning the re-representation of the “Other”—it is crucial for this chapter to engage with key theoretical concepts. This involves a thorough understanding of how re-

presentation is constructed and what its key components. To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of re-presentation in the selected novels, this chapter aims to analyse the author's choices concerning language, meaning, culture, perceptions, and stereotypes. By examining and comparing the re-presentations of Black and White characters, we seek to reveal the underlying power dynamics related to race and colour and to understand how re-presentation influences the experiences of Black individuals within the novel's communities in particular. To accomplish this, our analysis will centre around the following framing questions:

3.1 The Chapter's Questions:

3.1.1 Do Black Characters/Community Get Re-presented as Majority or Minority?

The re-presentation of Black characters in literature often reflects systemic biases and inequalities that have historically marginalised Black voices and perspectives. Black characters are frequently depicted as a minority in comparison to their White counterparts, with limited visibility, agency, and diversity in the stories being told. This under re-presentation can perpetuate stereotypes, reinforce racial hierarchies, and exclude Black experiences from mainstream narratives.

3.1.2 Do Black Characters Play Central Figures or Supporting Roles?

Black characters in literature are often relegated to supporting or secondary roles, serving as foils, sidekicks, villains, or comedic relief for White protagonists. This marginalisation of Black characters as peripheral figures can reinforce narratives of White centrality and Black inferiority, limiting the opportunities for Black actors, writers, and creators to explore complex, nuanced, and central roles that reflect the diversity and richness of Black experiences.

3.1.3 How They Measure Up to 'Standards of Beauty'?

Standards of beauty in literature often centre on whiteness features and ideals, perpetuating narrow definitions of attractiveness and desirability that marginalise and exclude Black individuals. Black characters may be subjected to colourism, stereotyping, and objectification that devalue their unique beauty, heritage, and identity. Challenging conventional beauty norms and celebrating diverse aesthetics can empower Black individuals to embrace their natural features, skin tones, and cultural expressions authentically.

3.1.4 To What Extent is the Black Community Re-represented in Terms of Quality of Life?

The portrayal of the Black community in literary re-presentations can vary in terms of complexity, richness, and authenticity. Black communities are often depicted as monolithic, homogenous, or underdeveloped, reinforcing stereotypes of poverty, crime, and dysfunction that overlook the diversity, resilience, and vibrancy of Black experiences. Centring Black narratives, histories, and achievements can provide a more nuanced and accurate portrayal of the multifaceted and dynamic Black community.

3.1.5 Are Black People Re-presented as Engaged in Struggles for Justice, Freedom, and Equality in Society?

Black characters in literature are frequently depicted as engaged in struggles for justice, freedom, and equality in society, reflecting the long-standing histories of resistance, activism, and resilience within the Black community. These portrayals can challenge dominant narratives of passivity, victimhood, or subordination by showcasing the agency, courage, and resilience of Black individuals in confronting systemic oppression, discrimination, and injustice.

3.1.6 How are Characters Implicitly or Explicitly Affected by Their Race/Colour?

The racial identity of Black characters often shapes their experiences, opportunities, and interactions within various cultural contexts. Black individuals may face discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes based on their race/colour, impacting their social status, economic prospects, and sense of belonging. Exploring how characters are affected by their race/colour can illuminate the ways in which systemic racism, bias, and privilege intersect with individual identities, choices, and aspirations in shaping diverse and complex narratives of Blackness.

By examining these questions, we hope to shed light on the complex and often subtle ways black and white characters are re-presented in literary works, revealing the power dynamics that shape these re-presentations.

3.2 The Chapter's Structure:

This chapter is structured into two parts: theoretical and practical, which will examine the key elements of re-presentation and their application in analysing six selected novels. The first part focuses on essential components of re-presentation, such as language, meaning, culture, perception, and stereotyping, within what we refer to as “The Circuit of Re-presentation”. We will start with brief conceptual introductions relevant to re-presentation, addressing critical areas such as: (1) the role of culture in producing meaning and its effect on our perceptions of

the “other,” and (2) the true meaning of re-presentation and its relationship with stereotypes, particularly how they shape readers' viewpoints. This foundational discussion sets the stage for exploring the key factors that affect re-presentation production: culture and creation of meaning. The chapter then transitions to an examination of the concept and practice of re-presentation, including its connection to the idea of the “other” under the heading “Making the ‘Other’ in Society.” This section investigates theories related to stereotyping, difference, power, knowledge, ideology, perceptions, and imagination.

The second part of the chapter is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on works by authors of Black cultural backgrounds, specifically Idris Ali’s novel *Dongola* and Maḥmūd Trāwī’s novel *Maymūna*, under the title “Authors from a Black Background.” This section features subheadings that analyse both the negative and positive portrayals of Black and White characters, as well as the fundamental elements (or raw materials) that shape these re-presentations. The second section addresses works by the remaining authors of White cultural backgrounds, titled “Authors from a White Background,” which similarly includes subheadings and analyses. Finally, the concluding section draws comparisons and contrasts between the six novels, highlighting the similarities and differences in light of the theories and practices discussed throughout the chapter.

This division enables us to explore whether contemporary Arabic novels, irrespective of the author's background, engage with colonial discourse, which has traditionally hinged on the notion of “white superiority” over the colonised local populace. By analysing the re-presentations of enslaved/Black characters in these two categories of novels, we can uncover voices that challenge and reinterpret official histories, question established historical assumptions, and contest dominant narratives that prioritise the white centre over the Black margin. This analysis also prompts us to examine how narratives surrounding the re-representation of enslaved communities are crafted, acknowledging that history is frequently narrated from the perspective of the victors. A comparison of these two sets of novels may offer insights into whether writers are actively seeking to question and subvert prevailing narratives while reinterpreting the past. Ultimately, by examining the re-presentation of enslaved/Black characters in these works, we can develop a more nuanced understanding of how these characters are constructed and perceived within the framework of colonialism and its enduring effects. Additionally, this investigation may reveal any differences in perspectives between authors from Black and White backgrounds.

3.3 The Circuit of Re-presentation: Language, Meaning, Culture, Perception, and Stereotype

As human society evolves, language¹⁰⁸ - both verbal and non-verbal - becomes the primary means by which we produce meaning and communicate our thoughts, feelings, and emotions to one another (Fitch, 2010:1-10). As Webb points out:

Language is, in the opinion of many theorists, what makes us human. It makes us – that is, constructs us – in a very real sense because to be a member of society, and hence recognized as a person, you must have access to language. The language we speak, how we speak it, with what accent, what fluency and what content, determines who we can be in the world, and sets in motion a series of ideas, knowledges and attitudes about and for us. Do we use it, or does it use us? (Webb, 2009:39)

From this vantage point, language plays a crucial role in making meanings accessible and available as a social fact, allowing us to form and share our understanding of the world through a process of communication. According to Hall, objects are inherently meaningless, and it is humans who assign meaning to them. This process of meaning-making allows us to create “maps of meaning” - a set of codes that are essential for re-presentation. These codes are not inherent in nature, but rather are a product of social convention, which enables us to construct re-presentational discourses and practices (Hall, 2003:13-15). In other words, it is through social agreements and norms that we create the codes and symbols that underlie our representations of the world (Webb, 2009:2-7).

Based on the above, the meaning we assign to objects is constructed through shared conceptual maps that make the world meaningful. This implies that meaning is socially constructed, as objects do not have inherent meaning. Instead, we impose meaning on them. The emphasis on the production of meaning is closely tied to language, which is the primary tool for creating meaning.

¹⁰⁸ The evolution of human language is a complex and still-unfolding process that spans millions of years. It is believed that language evolved in Africa, where the earliest evidence of language dates back to around 200,000 years ago. To learn more about evolution of language and its connection to meaning, see, for example: (1) Dessalles, J.-L. (2007). *Why We Talk: The Evolutionary Origins of Language*. Oxford University Press. (2) Birner, J. Betty. (2018). *Language and Meaning*. Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group.

In essence, the fundamental purpose of language is to create meaning, enabling us to convey and share our thoughts, feelings, and concepts with others. According to Stuart Hall, meaning is what gives us a sense of identity, belonging, self-awareness, and a sense of our place in the world (Hall, 2003:3).

Given its deep connection to meaning, language has become a vital component of society, shaping our collective understanding and social interactions. As a system of re-presentation, language enables members of a particular culture to produce meaning and frame their understanding of the world. As James Webb notes, language “frames the world so that in particular ways the world becomes available or visible to us.” (Ibid:40)

However, it is essential to recognise that language is not a neutral or innocent phenomenon, and its influence can be deceptive. Language can impose a specific view of the world on a culture, potentially disconnecting us from the world. As James Duncan and David Ley argue, language “locks us into particular modes of understanding and separates us from the world.” (Duncan & Ley, 1993:4) To understand why language plays such a crucial role, they point out the following:

The opacity of these media, it is argued, stems from the fact that there is no neutral, univocal, visible world out there to match our vision against. Put slightly different, there is no vision without purpose...the innocent eye is blind for the world is already clothed in our system of representation. As such, our representation of the world cannot be other than partial truths ...what is seen is not a given, objective reality, but an epistemological field constructed as much linguistically as visually (Ibid, 4)

Of course, this leads us to the question of culture and its role in understanding how meaning is produced, as it is through cultural practices and signifying systems that meaning is constructed. In this connection, we need to explore the relationship between culture and meaning, as well as the role of culture in the process of re-presentation. According to Hall, what is central to the process of re-presentation is the recognition that meaning does not inherently exist in things or the world, but rather is constructed through a signifying practice that produces meaning and makes things meaningful (Hall, 2003:24). Webb also emphasises the significance of culture in this process, suggesting that re-presentation is not merely about creating connections or reinforcing existing identities, but rather about constituting them – making them real and tangible. In other words, re-presentation is not just about substituting one term for another or repeating existing narratives, but about actively creating and shaping our understanding of the

world and our place within it (Webb, 2009:10). This highlights the importance of culture in shaping our perceptions, identities, and relationships with others.

3.3.1 Culture and the Production of Meaning: What is Culture?

Raymond Williams famously noted that “culture” is one of the most complex words in the English language (Williams, 1976:87). The advent of new technologies in the early 20th century expanded the range of media through which communication was possible, including cinema, radio, television, and music equipment. Additionally, compulsory universal education led to an increasingly literate audience and readership. However, this growth of mass media and commercial cultural production for a growing market of consumers raised concerns among those who believed in the civilising effects of “high” art (Du Gay et al., 2013:5).

Williams proposed a definition of culture as “a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general.” (Williams, 1976:80). He referred to this in his book *The Long Revolution* as a “social definition of culture”, which emphasises that:

culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture (Williams, 1961:57)

Williams’s above definition proposes that culture is a system that produces and expresses meanings and ideas, not only in art and learning, but also in everyday behaviour. The purpose of cultural analysis, as Williams sees it, is to clarify and identify the meanings embedded in various aspects of society, including ordinary behaviour, the structure of the family, and institutions. Recent developments in sociology and cultural studies have built upon Williams' emphasis on the connections between culture, language, and meaning (Du Gay et al., 2013:5).

However, whereas Williams tended to view culture as a reflection of economic and social conditions, contemporary cultural theorists have emphasised the ways in which culture itself shapes and constructs social relationships. According to Du Gay, recent theorists in social theory and cultural studies have emphasised the importance and relative autonomy of culture. This perspective challenges the idea that culture can be simply “read off” from societal conditions. Instead, it requires an analysis of the symbolic sphere in its own terms, without relying solely on social context. This critique places a significant emphasis on the production of meaning through language, also known as signification. Recent critics argue that “all social practices are organised

through meanings”, which means they are inherently “signifying practices”. As such, they must be studied by giving greater weight to their cultural dimension (Ibid:5).

In addition, recent advances in the disciplines that focus on cultural analysis, including social sciences, cultural studies, literary studies, and history, have led to a shift in focus towards understanding how meanings are produced, disseminated, and contested. Questions are now being asked about which meanings are shared by which groups, and what happens when different groups contest meaning. This has led to a more nuanced understanding of culture as a dynamic process. One contemporary definition of culture is that it is the production and circulation of meaning – the processes by which culture is created and the forms it takes. This perspective moves beyond Williams' notion of culture as simply a “way of life” (Crane, 1992:4-5 & Jackson, 2003:23). Instead, it emphasises the agency of culture in shaping our understanding of the world and our relationships with others. This perspective highlights the importance of examining the cultural context in which meaning is produced and shared.

Regardless of how we define culture, whether as “the production and circulation of meaning” or as “a particular way of life”, it is crucial to consider its role in constructing, sustaining, and reproducing power structures and relationships. Both definitions can have significant political implications and consequences for how individuals within a society or group interact with others, both within and outside their group. For example, a “way of life” that is based on certain beliefs about the nature and roles of women and men, or on concepts of “racial” difference, can lead to practices and behaviours that perpetuate oppression and discrimination. The ways in which societies or groups define and talk about gender, race, and other differences create the conditions in which individuals experience their lives. If we view culture as the production and circulation of meaning, then culture is a significant site where one social group or community legitimizes its power over another.

However, according to Jackson, culture can also be seen as the way:

in which groups “handle” the raw material of their social and material existence’...
Elaborating slightly on this, ‘culture’ refers to the codes with which meaning is constructed, conveyed, and understood... cultures are maps of meaning through which the world is made intelligible. Cultures are not simply systems of meaning and value carried around in the head. They are made concrete through patterns of social organization. Culture is ‘the way the social relations of a group are structured and

shaped: but it is also the way those shapes are experienced, understood and interpreted (Jackson, 2003: 2)

In this sense, cultures are not simply internalised systems of meaning that are carried around in our heads. Rather, they are shaped by the social relations within a group and are experienced, understood, and interpreted through those patterns of social organisation. Culture is both the way in which social relations are structured and shaped, and also the way those shapes are experienced and understood by individuals. Jackson, therefore, sees culture a powerful tool that requires an ideology to shape and control society. He emphasises that “the concepts of ideology and hegemony are central to cultural studies, referring to the process through which dominant meanings are imposed, negotiated, and registered.” (Ibid, 3).

Given the strong relationship between culture and ideology, ruling authorities or dominant groups seek to exploit and manipulate the ideas and meanings that culture produces to influence how people perceive and interpret the world. The ultimate goal is to create a re-presentation of a single definition of “reality” that shapes people's attitudes, thinking, behaviour, and values. Moreover, this fabricated “reality” is used to define who “We” are and who “Others” are in relation to us. This is why the author of *Understanding Representation* stresses the importance of culture for authorities, arguing that it is “because it is the signifying, or symbolic, systems that provide us with the means for understanding the world, and the mediums by which we communicate these understandings and their meanings.” (Webb, 2009:117)

A significant concern, according to Duncan and Ley, is that “for a society to maintain the illusion that its representation is natural representation, it must conceal their historic specificity.” (Duncan & Ley, 1993:4). This implies that the dominant culture seeks to present itself as timeless and ahistorical, rather than acknowledging its own historical and cultural context. The authors further argue that this concern is rooted in the concept of habitus, developed by Bourdieu, which refers to a set of values and orientations that shape an individual's worldview. According to Bryson, as cited in Duncan and Ley, culture produces itself around a habitus that is disconnected from the natural world, yet seamlessly merges with it. This creates an order that appears natural and necessary, without any visible seams or breaks between the cultural construct and the natural world (Ibid:4).

This role becomes clearer when human perceptions find their way through language, meaning and culture into communication, which then completes the circle of re-presentation. It is at this point that power can exert its influence through ideology or stereotyping, closing the circle of

re-presentation. When re-presentation becomes a powerful force, it raises important questions, such as: "who is performing the representation; what does it mean; and what effects does it have?" (Webb, 2009:2). Given the connection between language and meaning, and the connection between meaning and culture and society, re-presentation in a broader sense is:

fundamental to everyday life. People practice representation all the time because we live immersed in representation: it is how we understand our environments and each other... each of us is produced through a complex mix of background, tastes, concerns, training, tendencies, experiences – all made real to us through the principles and processes of representation that frame and govern our experiences of being in the world... What we see is not what is there, but what our social and cultural traditions and their contexts give us (Ibid:2).

At this point, re-presentation, fuelled by power and ideology through stereotyping, gains momentum and completes the cycle of re-presentation. This highlights the essential interdependence between meaning and language, as well as the impossibility of one without the other. Without language, it is not possible to convey or exchange meaning in the world. Ultimately, the relationship between re-presentation and language is one of mutual dependence: there is no re-presentation without language, and no language without re-presentation (Hall, 2003:1-24).

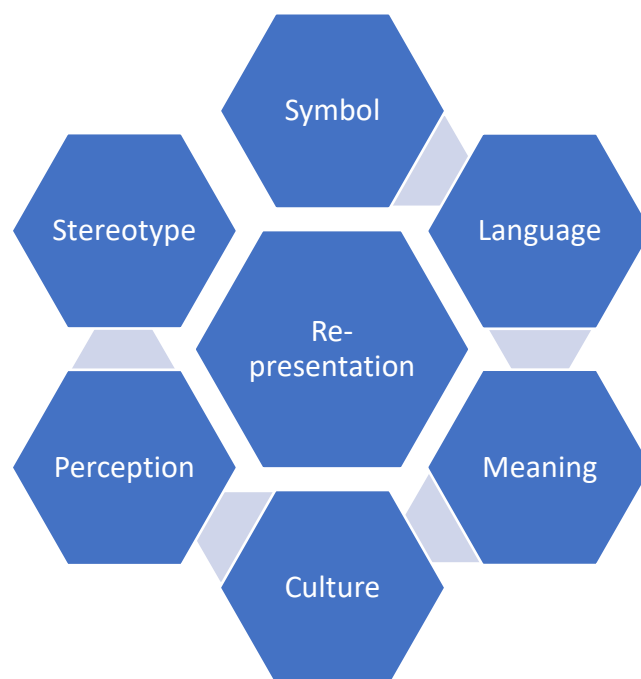


Figure 3.4.1.1 The Circuit of Re-presentation

Religion has been a fundamental aspect of human civilisation for centuries, significantly contributing to the creation of meaning and the formation of cultures, values, and social structures across diverse societies. It offers individuals a framework for comprehending the world, articulating their beliefs, and guiding their actions. Considering the impact of religion on cultural development, it is essential to explore this dynamic relationship in the following section, where religion itself emerges as a cultural system.

3.3.2 Religion as a Cultural System

To understand how religion shapes culture, we must first break down the definition of religion. In his 1966 essay, *Religion as a Cultural System*, Clifford Geertz presented an anthropological theory defining religion as:

A system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz, 1973:90)

Geertz (Ibid: 91-4) identifies four key components in this definition.

1. **Symbolism:** Religion, as a symbol system, evokes transcendent meaning. Symbols—objects, acts, or events—serve as vehicles for meaning and establish concrete embodiments. For example, a white flag symbolizes surrender, while religious icons and texts convey deeper meanings. These symbols act as “models for reality,” guiding human behaviour and responses.
2. **Moods and Motivations:** Sacred symbols create enduring moods and motivations, influencing how individuals interpret their world. Often, these religious narratives manifest through myths that abstract human qualities onto the cosmos.
3. **Worldview:** Geertz posits that religion shapes conceptions of a general order of existence, creating a worldview that defines an individual's place in the universe. This worldview helps adherents navigate suffering, as seen in Judeo-Christian-Islamic narratives that explain human woes as stemming from the Fall in Eden.
4. **Authority of Religious Explanation:** Symbol systems generate ethos and render conceptions believable, often cloaking ideas in a sense of factuality. By presenting perceptions persuasively,

symbols feel intensely real to believers, forging social consensus around these interpretations through rituals and shared myths.

Geertz's definition emphasises that religion fundamentally shapes perceptions of "reality".

In summary, as we build perceptions, we add meaning to information, shaped by our cultural context. This highlights the importance of examining how religion influences perceptions of "reality". Understanding this dynamic is increasingly relevant as we seek to incorporate "divine truth" into our cultural vocabulary. So, what is re-presentation, and how does it function? What connection does it have to power, and who is the "Other"? Who are "we" and who are "they"?

From these questions and what has been discussed so far, the concept of "difference" is fundamental to re-presentation, yet it is also a dangerous game in society. To better comprehend how re-presentations work in the selected novels, we will delve into theories surrounding stereotyping, difference, otherness, power, knowledge, ideology, perceptions, and the imaginary.

To achieve a deeper understanding of re-presentation, we will build upon scholars' arguments about its signifying practice and develop critical concepts to explain its operations. We will then explore re-presentation as a concept and practice, highlighting its significance as the initial moment in the "culture circuit". By the end of this discussion and analysis, we will be equipped to apply these arguments and analytical approaches to contemporary Arabic novels that address "race" and "colour" as significant themes in the re-presentation of dark-skinned people as the "Other" of racial inferiority. This second section will then examine the cultural roots of character re-presentation, as culture plays a significant role in shaping societal perceptions, beliefs, and ideas.

3.3.3 What is Re-presentation and How this Research Uses It?

Stephen Spencer argues that re-presentations are not static truths but rather products influenced by historical context (Spencer, 2006:1). The true meaning of any ongoing event is often uncertain and subjective, shaped by those in power such as political elites who manipulate resources like media, money, and influence to dictate a singular "true" narrative to the masses. Re-presentation then acts as the embellishment of this metaphorical imagery that fragments the consumer's perception. The consumer, in turn, ingests distorted meanings, the interpretation of

which is contingent upon how they are re-presented. As a result, re-presentation transitions from a secondary force to a primary one, assuming a central role within the event itself.

Stuart Hall from his end emphasises that re-presentation operates on the premise that objects, individuals, events lack inherent fixed or definitive meanings, with societal and cultural influences determining their significance. Meaning, therefore, is fluid and subject to evolution across different cultures and eras (Ibid: 61).

Webb further delves into the concept of re-presentation by highlighting that it is not “reality” that is manifested through re-presentations, but rather the unveiling of meaning. Individuals meld the boundaries between re-presentations and actualities to give rise to meaning and imbue it with a sense of realism. Meaning is synthesised from the raw materials of the world and statements about it. In essence, the processes of re-presentation do not merely reveal meaning; they actively construct it. There exists a strong inclination to infuse the world with significance (Webb, 2009:30).

Chomsky further sheds light on the mechanisms of meaning formation and fixation in his book *Propaganda and the Public Mind: Conversations with Noam Chomsky*, pointing out instances worldwide where information is deliberately withheld from the public. This deliberate omission stems from the awareness that the public would fiercely oppose it (Chomsky, 2001:4). Chomsky underscores the need to view media, for instance, not as impartial tools for re-presenting “reality”, but as entities that shape and interpret the perceived “reality” while delivering news to the public. This stance underscores the understanding that the act of re-presentation is a distinct process, one that unfolds not solely after an event but concurrently within it.

From this vantage point, we understand that re-presentation is a complex process that involves various essential elements working together to create meaning. These fundamental components include language, culture, meaning, power, and society, without which re-presentation cannot occur. To grasp how re-presentation functions, we must comprehend the roles of each element and their interconnectedness. Culture, often described as a “map of meaning” or a framework of intelligibility, is pivotal in making sense of the world, thus playing a central role in the production of meaning and re-presentation. Culture operates as a “system of re-presentation” serving as our method of re-presenting the world. When the given meaning differs from the true significance, re-presentation aims to bridge the gap between the actual meaning of an event or object and its representation. In essence, re-presentation practices involve embodying concepts, ideas, and emotions in symbolic forms that can be transmitted and interpreted meaningfully,

emphasising the importance of meaning circulating effectively within culture. The process remains incomplete until the meaning is decoded or received intelligibly within the cultural framework (Hall, 2003:10). This is why re-presentation transcends mere rendering and delegation, extending to the organisation and arrangement of knowledge and ideas (Webb: 2009:10).

Overall, it is important to understand that discussions about re-presentation do not imply the existence of a genuine and accurate re-presentation versus a false and misleading one. There will always be some degree of scepticism regarding the authenticity of re-presentation because, fundamentally, re-presentation inherently involves misrepresentation. No re-presentation can accurately capture the “reality” or essence of what it re-presents; thus, the key focus in this research will be on analysing the effects and implications of such re-presentations.

As Michael Richardson explains, an examination of the impact of images must start with the acknowledgment that there is no such thing as an “accurate” re-presentation. Every re-presentation distorts “reality” for at least three main reasons: first, by omission, as it is impossible to showcase every aspect of what is being re-presented; second, by appearance, since each individual perceives the same phenomenon differently; and third, through the re-presentation itself, which involves a process of translation that incorporates the re-presented object into a set of codes that define the re-presentation. All of these factors occur prior to any conscious or unconscious ideological bias. Nevertheless, political correctness is not merely a trend; it serves as a genuine response to the manipulations inherent in re-presentation (Richardson, 2010: 8-9).

3.3.4 The Making of “Otherness” in Society:

The concept of “other” begins with the notion of difference, as Beauvoir suggests: “no group ever defines itself as One without immediately setting up the “Other” opposite itself.” (Beauvoir, 2010:26) Okolie expands on this idea by explaining that “groups define themselves in relation to others”, Because he continues, “identity has little meaning without the ‘Other’.” (Okolie, 2003:2). This raises the question of what meaning can be derived from the dichotomy between “us” and “them”, “ourselves” and “others”. According to Hall, the key argument is that “difference” is crucial “because it is essential for creating meaning; without it, meaning cannot exist.” (Hall, 2003:234) As Saussure noted, Hall continues, the concept of “black” does not derive its meaning from an inherent essence of blackness, but rather from its contrast with its opposite, “white” (Ibid:234). This relational understanding of meaning suggests that meaning is not

inherent in a particular concept or term, but rather emerges from the differences between concepts or terms. In other words, it is the difference between white and black that carries meaning and gives significance to these terms.

Notably, the above discussion highlights the significant role that identity difference plays in the creation of the “Other”. Furthermore, according to Spencer, the construction of a group as “Other” is deeply tied to the social and historical context of the nation and is influenced by developments in science, social theory, and belief systems that shape our understanding of identity and nationhood. Specifically, Spencer argues that the construction of a group as “Other” is parasitic on these developments, suggesting that it relies on and is shaped by these broader cultural and intellectual forces (Spencer, 2006:11). In this context, it can be argued that the tendency to establish rules and boundaries between the majority and minority groups is a natural consequence of their differences. However, this raises the question of whether this dichotomy is more than just a simplistic distinction between two groups, and whether it can be used to create meaningful relationships, understandings between individuals, or antagonisms that seek to marginalise the other.

Spencer argues that human societies often tend to create a “them” rather than a “us” by emphasising qualities and characteristics that are deemed natural and essential to the group's identity. In many cases, these distinctions take on formal and legal status, and individuals who deviate from the norms are stigmatised as “criminals”, “crazy”, “deviants”, or “antisocial”. These individuals often reside on the periphery of mainstream society, forming marginalised groups or underclasses, and are frequently associated with racial or ethnic groups. These boundaries, by their very nature, have political implications and challenge fundamental aspects of personal and social identity (Spencer, 2006:8).

As such, power can significantly influence the process of creating and re-presenting the “Other” as long as binary oppositions exist. Hall insists on the role of power, in this context, as central to the binary oppositions, referring to Derrida and Foucault's arguments, that,

between binary oppositions like Us/Them, we are not dealing with peaceful coexistence, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other or has the upper hand...in short, stereotyping is what Foucault called a ‘power/knowledge’ sort of game (Ibid, 258-9)

The image of the “Other” tends to be amplified when they are silenced or unable to re-present themselves. In this sense, silencing the voice of the “Other” is a significant demand on systems of re-presentation. As a result, the dominant group's power seeks to enhance its existence through various means, not only through physical coercion and violence, but also through “symbolic violence”. This is because, “for in the routine flow of day-to-day life, power is seldom exercised as overt physical force: instead, it is transmuted into a symbolic form, and thereby endowed with a kind of legitimacy that it would not otherwise have.” (Bourdieu, 1991:23) Therefore, authority tends to turn into a symbolic form, which is characterised by Louis Althusser as the “ideological state apparatus” that exercises control, surveillance, punishment, and subjugation over individuals and groups. This “ideological state apparatus” is a powerful tool that shapes our perceptions, beliefs, and actions, and reinforces the dominant group's power and status quo (Althusser, 2014:103-39).

In fact, Louis Althusser distinguishes between two types of state apparatus: “the repressive state apparatus” and “the ideological state apparatus”. The first one refers to the tools of authority used to exercise control and domination over individuals through violence, repression, and force, including the police, army, and criminal laws. In contrast, the second one encompasses the ideology and social unconscious that is reproduced in various institutions of society, such as the family, school, church, college, political parties, and media. The key difference between these two apparatuses is that “the repressive state apparatus” exercises power through physical violence and overt repression, while “the ideological state apparatus” performs a similar role using soft, gentle, and invisible tools. Both apparatuses are crucial for maintaining power and control over individuals and for reproducing domination and power to ensure continuity (Ibid).

According to Ricoeur, whenever there is a dominant authority, there is a need to claim legitimacy, and this claim is often achieved through public discourse and rhetoric. The aim is to convince dominated groups of their inferiority and make them believe that the dominant culture is the supreme universal culture (Ricoeur, 1991: 308-24). As Parenti notes, the elite class has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and securing its politico-economic power. To achieve this, they devote significant attention to persuasion and propaganda (Parenti, 1986:6).

It is crucial here to recognise that knowing the “Other” is not always a neutral or unbiased endeavour. As Jean-François Staszak points out, the concept of “Otherness” arises not solely from the differences of the “Other” but rather from the perspective and discourse of the observer who perceives the “Other” in that light. By contrasting “Us” (the Self) with “Them” (the

Other), a dichotomy is created that divides humanity into two categories: one that re-presents the norm and is valued, and another that is defined by its flaws, devalued, and subject to discrimination (Staszak, 2009: 1).

Consequently, our desire to know and re-present the “Others” is driven not just by the pursuit of knowledge or innocent curiosity, but often by a motive to control and dominate, thereby reinforcing a sense of superiority. As Edward Said puts it, “All cultures tend to make representations of foreign cultures the better to master or in some way control them.” (Said, 1994: 100) When these re-presentations become widespread within society, they manifest physically through practices and institutions. This is evident in the concept of “Orientalism” in modern times, where “the Orient that appears ...[in] a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire.” (Said, 2003: 202-3).

In conclusion, as Webb argues, “representational systems are, from this perspective, first and foremost about politics, or the relations of power between individuals and groups.” (Webb, 2009:60) This perspective highlights the importance of understanding how power (physically and symbolically) operates through re-presentation, ideology, and control over communication.

3.3.5 Stereotypes and Re-presentations: How They Function and Shape Our Perception?

The concept of stereotypes is closely linked to re-presentation, as they influence and are shaped by the ways in which individuals and groups are portrayed. By understanding what stereotypes are and how they function, we can see that they are deeply intertwined with the various forms of re-presentation, including physical appearance, personality traits, behaviour, and cultural standards.

So, a stereotype can be defined as a fixed or oversimplified notion society hold about a particular group of people, often based on characteristics such as race, colour, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or other identifying factors. Unfortunately, stereotypes can have harmful consequences because they simplify complex individuals to a single characteristic or trait, perpetuating negative attitudes, prejudices, and biases (Hinton, 2000:6-8 & Hall, 2003:258).

Based on the above definition, four key points about stereotypes can be summarised as follows:

(1) Mental laziness: Stereotypes can be seen as a mental shortcut, allowing us to bypass the complexity of the world and instead rely on simplified and familiar notions. This can lead to

mental laziness, as we no longer feel the need to engage with the world in a more nuanced way (Heilbroner, 2002: 34).

(2) Ideology: The creation of stereotypes is often an ideological act, as it involves assuming that certain characteristics are inherent to a particular group of people. According to Hall, "It is a kind of generalisation constructed through a discriminatory ideology, with the attempt "to fashion the whole of society according to their own world view, value system, sensibility and ideology." (Hall, 2003:259)

(3) The role of imagination: Stereotypes are also closely tied to our imagination and how we represent "others" in our minds. According to Hall and Bhabha, our imagination plays a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the world and its inhabitants. Hall points to the crucial hidden element, the image of the "Other" in the imaginary. Without it, re-presentation would not work. In this regard, he argues,

the important point is that stereotypes refer as much to what is imagined in fantasy as to what is perceived as 'real' And, what is visually produced by the practices of representation, is only half the story. The other half-the deeper meaning-lies in what is not being said, but is being fantasized, what is implied but cannot be shown (Ibid, 263)

Bhabha also refers to the essential role of the imaginary in the re-presentation process. He says,

the imaginary is the transformation that takes place in the subject at the formative mirror phase, when it assumes a discrete image which allows it to postulate a series of equivalences, samenesses, identities, between the objects of the surrounding world (Bhabha, 1994:110)

(4) Controlling the "Other": Stereotyping can be seen as a strategy for controlling and excluding those who are perceived as "Other". By creating and perpetuating stereotypes, we can maintain social and symbolic order by separating what is normal from what is deviant, and by creating boundaries between different groups. As Hall puts it, "stereotyping deploys a strategy of 'splitting'. It divides the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and the unacceptable. It then excludes or expels everything which does not fit, which is different." (Ibid,258) The ultimate aim of stereotyping as an effective "discursive strategy" based on fixity and repetition is to control the "Other" (Bhabha, 1994:94-5).

For example, stereotypes functioned to legitimise colonial authority by building the notion that the coloniser ruled over the colonised because of an innate superiority. In this context, Hall, in his argument, highlights the ultimate goal of stereotyping,

Stereotyping is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order. It sets up a symbolic frontier between the normal and the deviant the normal and the pathological the acceptable and the unacceptable, what belongs and what does not, between insider and outsider, us and them. It facilitates the binding or bonding together of all of us who are normal into one imagined community, and it sends into symbolic exile all of Them, 'the Others', who are in some way different- beyond the pale...The third points is that stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power is usually directed against the subordinate or excluded group ... [this is why according to Derrida's argument] we are not dealing with peaceful coexistence ...the other or has the upper hand (Hall, 2003:258)

Drawing on the above, stereotypes can be problematic because they perpetuate harmful biases and prejudices, reducing individuals to a single trait or characteristic. Moreover, they often ignore the diversity and complexity of individuals within a group, leading to discrimination and unfair treatment. These negative attitudes are often rooted in ideology and are based on imaginary prejudices and biases. By understanding the concept of stereotypes and their relationship with re-presentation, we can analyse the six selected novels to identify whether they perpetuate or challenge these stereotypes. This can help us uncover the origins of these stereotypes and whether they reinforce or combat harmful notions about individuals from different backgrounds and identities. By examining these stereotypes, we can gain insight into how they contribute to the perpetuation of negative concepts and images in society.

3.4 Authors From a Black Background:

3.4.1 Idris Ali's novel "Dongola"

3.4.1.1 Preview:

The author of the counter-narrative *Dongola*, which aims to disrupt the dominant "white narrative" by offering alternative perspectives and experiences, takes a deliberate approach to elevate the significance of black characters. To achieve this, he employs various techniques, including in-depth explorations of the characters' experiences with suffering and pain. The text is replete with references to the historical and ongoing injustices faced by black people, including slavery, oppression, and systemic racism.

In contrast, the author highlights the crucial contributions of black Nubian figures to civilisation, showcasing their achievements in building prosperous kingdoms and their bravery in defending against white invaders. By weaving together narrative and historical perspectives, the author delves into the roots of this suffering, its various forms, and the lingering effects of racist practices on society today. Through this approach, the author seeks to emphasise the enduring impact of racism on black individuals and communities and challenge prevailing stereotypes to present a more nuanced portrayal of black Nubians.

The novel features a diverse cast of 78 characters, with 38 black males, 5 black females, 32 white males, and 3 white females, as illustrated in the first figure below. The ratio of Black to white characters is illustrated in the second figures below.

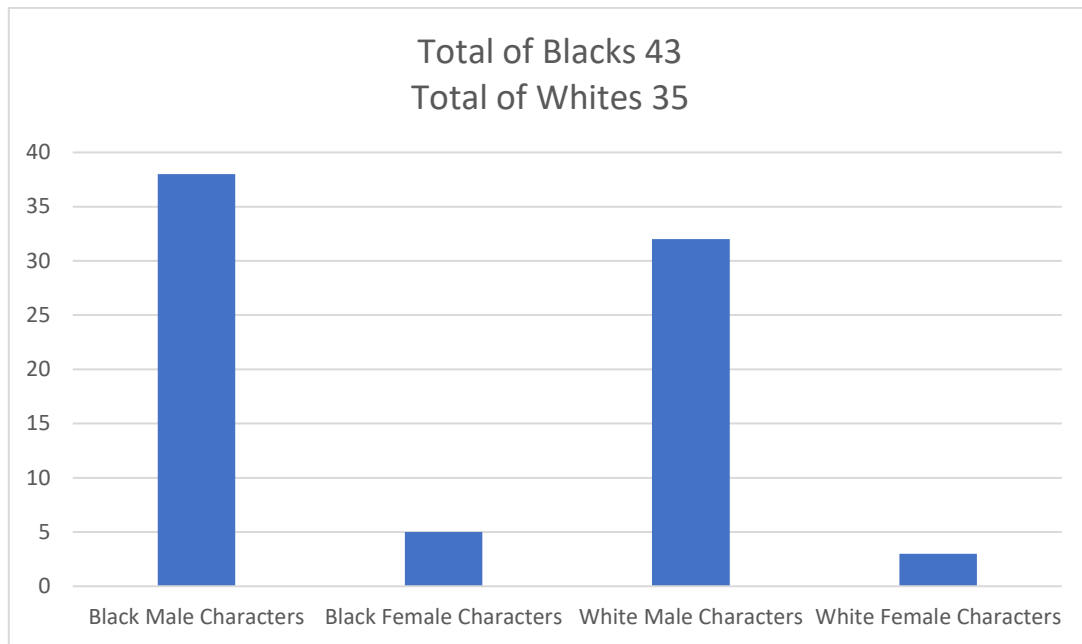


Figure 3.4.1.1 (a): The Total Number of Black and White Characters of *Dongola*

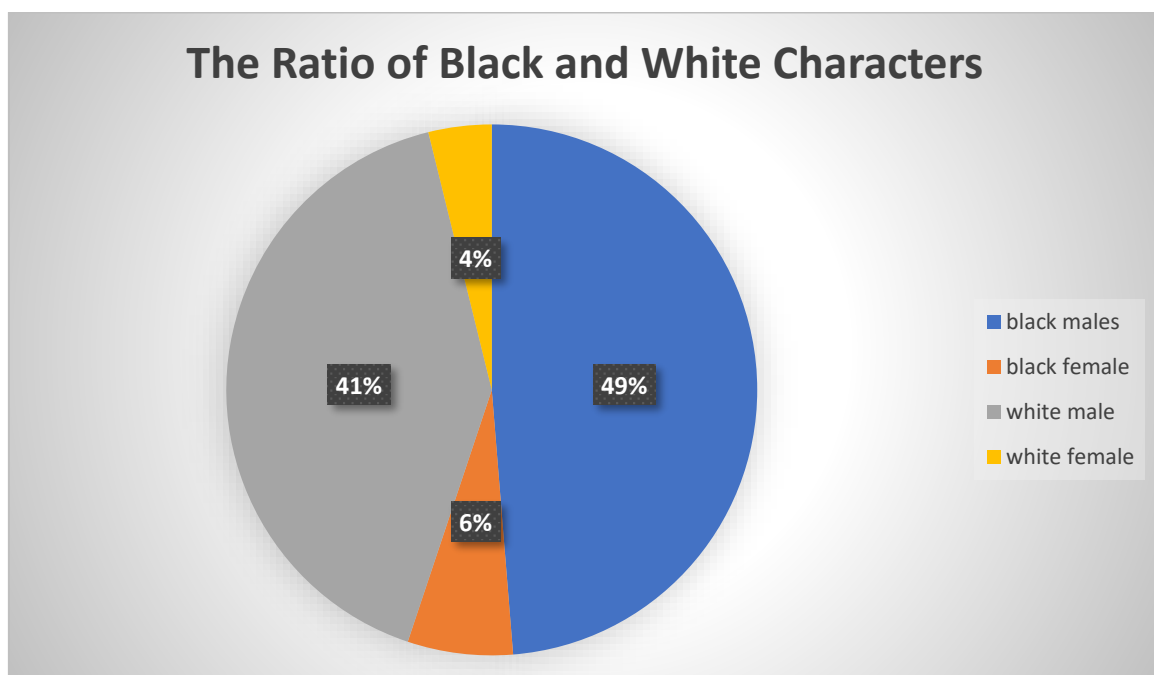


Figure 3.4.4.1 (b): The Ratio of Black and White Characters of *Dongola*

The above data clearly shows that Black male characters, particularly in contrast to their white counterparts, prevail throughout the novel. This character distribution likely highlights the author's narrative priorities and themes. The emphasis on Black male characters suggests a deliberate intention to delve into particular cultural experiences and social issues pertinent to

this demographic, potentially resulting in a more nuanced narrative cantered on their journeys, challenges, and hardships. This is the focus of our exploration in this section.

3.4.2.1 Black Characters' Suffering Experiences

Let us now begin by introducing the tragic story of the narrator's uncle's family. In a poignant summary scene at the start of the novel, the narrator describes their fate, saying:

This is the house of sorrow, where tragedy has struck. The eldest son went to defend the northern borders, only to be consumed by the sands of Sinai. The youngest son was imprisoned, falsely accused of escape, and ultimately killed. The uncle's wife was driven to madness by her grief, and the uncle himself is preparing to embark on a journey south with 'Awād. (Ali, 2006:12)

The narrator provides additional insight into the uncle's life, revealing that he held the position of a “cook for the English ambassador in Cairo” (ibid:38), one of the few opportunities available to Nubians in the white north. The narrator also briefly recounts the life of his short uncle, who upon returning to Nubia, took care of his sister (Shalali's mother) after her husband's passing. The uncle's story comes to a close with a poignant scene, where he announces his own death after a long illness, leaving the family to an uncertain fate (Ibid:109).

The passage sets the tone for a story of tragedy and loss, highlighting the devastating consequences of war, false accusations, and societal injustices. The use of symbols such as the “house of sorrow” and the “sands of Sinai” serve to underscore the themes of suffering and pain. The 'Awād's uncle's family has been ravaged by death, imprisonment, and madness, leaving them with an uncertain future. The imprisonment and execution of the youngest son, falsely accused of escape, is a stark example of the injustices faced by Nubians in a dominant white society.

This highlights the systemic racism and oppression that perpetuates suffering. As a result of this tragedy, the narrator's family is plagued by the legacy of loss and trauma. The uncle's wife is driven to madness by her grief, and the uncle himself prepares to embark on a journey south with 'Awād, suggesting a sense of desperation and hopelessness. The fact that the uncle held a position as a “cook for the English ambassador in Cairo” serves as a reminder of the limited economic opportunities available to Nubians in the dominant society. This underscores the themes of marginalisation and exploitation. On the other hand, the passage humanises the Nubian people by showcasing their vulnerabilities, struggles, and pain. This portrayal challenges

dominant narratives that often erase or marginalise non-white experiences. Besides, the passage hints at themes that will be explored throughout the novel, such as identity, belonging, and the struggle for justice in a predominantly white society. In a nutshell, this passage establishes a sense of sorrow, pain, and injustice as a backdrop for the rest of the novel. It introduces themes of tragic loss, systemic oppression, economic exploitation, and vulnerability, setting the stage for a powerful exploration of Nubian experiences in a dominant society.

The character of 'Awād's uncle, who dies after a long illness, serves as a symbol for the fragility of life and the uncertainty of fate. During his re-presentation of this Nubian family, the only black character who receives significant attention is *Bahr Jazouli*, the son of his cousin. The narrator shares his story through a series of vignettes, highlighting his struggles for the Nubian cause. For example, we learn about the circumstances surrounding his arrest by Egyptian authorities, including his "fanatic" opinions about the south and an article he wrote criticising the forced displacement of Nubians to the mountainous regions. He was arrested and never returned (Ibid:20-21). The narrator also describes *Bahr Jazouli* as a man who, although Egyptian by birth, died as a Nubian, his extreme separatist ideas having been shaped by his experiences in prison cells, where he was subjected to physical abuse and daily insults (Ibid:39). The narrator also notes that *Bahr Jazouli* was a knowledgeable and well-read individual, aware of the intentionally erased Nubian history (Ibid:39).

It becomes clear that *Bahr Jazouli's* sudden disappearance has a profound impact on the hero of the story, 'Awād *Shalali*, as he takes up the mantle of advocating for an independent and united Nubia, with Dongola as its capital, despite the opposition from his Communist comrades who reject his separatist aspirations (Ibid:21).

3.4.1.3 Black Struggle for Freedom, Justice, and Equality

The narrator sheds light on the significant role *Bahr Jazouli* played in shaping 'Awād's life, revealing that his ideas about justice and fairness had a profound effect on 'Awād's worldview. As 'Awād grew up and began to read, he became enamoured with his cousin's ideas and developed a strong dislike for those who deceive people with false promises of heaven (Ibid:37). This influence is evident in the sorrow and tears that overwhelm the entire family when they gather to pay their respects to *Bahr Jazouli's* memory at his official funeral in the village, accepting condolences from those who mourn his loss (Ibid:42).

The characterisation of *Bahr Jazouli* is particularly noteworthy. His struggles for the Nubian cause are highlighted through a series of vignettes, which serve to humanise and dignify his experiences. The narrator's description of *Bahr Jazouli* as a knowledgeable and well-read individual, aware of intentionally erased Nubian history, serves to emphasise his importance as a character (Ibid: 19-21). The characterisation of 'Awād *Shalali* is also significant, as he takes up the mantle of advocating for an independent and united Nubia. The narrator's description of 'Awād's growth and development, influenced by his cousin's ideas about justice and fairness, serves to emphasise his role as a protagonist.

In addition to the character *Bahr Jazouli*, who played a significant role in the hero's life, the narrator also highlights the importance of another black Nubian character, *al-Demerdash*, who was a close friend and fierce defender of 'Awād *Shalali*. When *Shalali* was accused by his village of being a separatist and promoting communist ideas, *al-Demerdash* stood up for him and protected him from being arrested by the government (Ibid:59). The narrator notes that *al-Demerdash* even went to great lengths to help *Shalali* escape to Sudan, ensuring his safety and preventing him from being caught by the authorities (Ibid:59-75).

However, *al-Demerdash* later paid the price for his loyalty and sacrifices, as he was arrested and imprisoned by the government after being caught smuggling *Shalali* out of the country (Ibid:107). Despite his efforts, *Shalali* seems to forget his friend's sacrifices and pays little heed to his fate. In stark contrast, when *Shalali* flees to Europe and becomes acquainted with his white French mistress, *Simone*, he becomes oblivious to his Nubian heritage and replaces it with a more comfortable and familiar relationship with Simone. The narrator says: "For years he has seen nothing else in the vast universe except Simone. He forgot all the past, the comrades, the South, his mother, his uncle, Shendi, al-Damradash... a coma from which he never woke up." (Ibid: 101). The narrator also notes that Europe's influence has replaced *Shalali's* Nubian heart with a new, comfortable face - that of Simone (Ibid:121).

The above quote suggests that the narrator's life has been drastically altered by his love for Simone. He has become so consumed by his feelings for *Simone* that everything else in his life, including his past, relationships with others, and even his sense of identity, has faded into the background. The use of the word "coma" is striking, as it implies a state of suspended animation or a loss of consciousness. This metaphor suggests that the narrator's experience of the world has been effectively halted, and he is now existing solely in a state of reverie or fantasy focused on *Simone*. This quote is significant in the context of the story because it: (a) Highlights the

intense nature of the narrator's emotions. The quote emphasises the overwhelming power of the narrator's love for *Simone*, implying that it has taken over his life. (b) Raises questions about identity. The narrator's inability to recall his past, relationships, and sense of self suggests that his love for Simone has become an all-encompassing part of his identity. (d) Suggests a possible loss of reality. The comparison to a coma implies that the narrator's experience of "reality" may have become distorted or fragmented, with *Simone* being the only thing that remains present in his consciousness. Overall, this quote provides insight into the narrator's psyche and sets the stage for further exploration of the complex emotional dynamics between him and *Simone*.

'*Awād Shalali's* forgetfulness about his friend *al-Demerdash's* sacrifices is motivated by his own disillusionment with the cause he fought for in Nubia. By the end of the story, *Shalali* comes to realise that the justice he fought for alongside his comrades was just a "dream" (Ibid:119). This realisation leads him to become disenchanted and adapt to the southern environment, which is characterised by its sun, restrictions, and rigid traditions (Ibid:119). This adaptation ultimately leads to *Shalali's* assimilation into the new culture, causing him to forget about his past and the sacrifices made by his friend *al-Demerdash*.

3.4.1.4 The Adverse Re-presentation of Black Characters

The negative portrayals of black characters are often cantered around their living conditions, occupations, and outlook on life. For example, the narrator describes the poor living conditions of *Othman Al-Kanzi*, a son of *Shalali's* Nubian village, when he visits him in Cairo. The narrator describes the house as "being in a state of disrepair, with foul odours emanating from the bathroom, bloodstains on the walls, and worn-out furniture." (Ibid:20) *Shalali* is described as being overwhelmed by the squalid conditions and dreaming of a future where everyone has access to clean and healthy living spaces (Ibid:20).

The narrator also describes the neighbourhoods of Nubia and its people, highlighting the neglect and abandonment they suffered at the hands of the government. The train, which is described as "a third-class service, is overcrowded and dirty, with passengers struggling to make their way amidst chaos and filth." (Ibid:35) Moreover, the narrator notes that the people of Nubia are plagued by poor living conditions, including mouldy food and diseases, while the people of the north (the dominant white population) "enjoy luxuries like fresh fruits, bread, and meat." (Ibid:37)

This stark contrast between the living conditions of Nubia's people and those of the north serves to highlight the widespread neglect and marginalisation of Nubia by the government. The narrator's description paints a vivid picture of a forgotten and abandoned region, which has fallen off the map of the country. The narrator's opinion is that Nubia is a "miserable country" and its homes are "abandoned" - a testament to the devastating effects of neglect and exploitation (Ibid:39-40).

This portrayal can be seen as a negative re-presentation of black characters, emphasising their struggles and hardships. However, it can also be interpreted as a critique of the societal and economic conditions that contribute to these struggles. The narrator's description serves to highlight the injustices and inequalities faced by black characters in the story.

3.4.1.5 Negativity of the Nubian Black Community Towards Their Cause

Yet the narrator presents a conflicting view of the Nubian people, with *Shalali*, the new mayor, expressing pride in their abilities and accomplishments. However, *Shalali* himself, for example, has a negative opinion of the Nubian people, viewing them as "ignorant and uninformed about their own history." (Ibid:57) He believes that none of them are aware of or enthusiastic about their forgotten past (Ibid:57).

This negative view of the Nubian people is further emphasised by *Shalali's* descriptions of their lives as being characterised by constant waiting and searching for a better future. According to *Shalali*, "the Nubian people are stuck in a state of longing for something or someone that is absent, and they are scattered throughout the world in search of a means of survival." (Ibid:85). Even when *Shalali* fled to Dongola and interacted with Sudanese Nubians, his opinions about them did not change. According to the narrator, *Shalali* was unable to convince his companions of the idea of an independent Nubia because "they were unaware of their ancient history and believed that he was an agent of the Northern Intelligence working to undermine the unity of Sudan." (Ibid:97).

More interestingly, the narrator's depiction of *Shalali's* father is scathing, with *Shalali* describing him as "subservient and deferential to adults and children, constantly responding to the whims of insignificant women." (Ibid:20) This portrayal suggests that *Shalali's* father was seen as weak and lacking in authority.

This passage is interesting for several points. First, the depiction of *Shalali's* father provides a glimpse into *Shalali's* personality and worldview. *Shalali's* description of his father as

“subservient and deferential” suggests that he may have grown up with a negative impression of white female authority figures, which could have shaped his own self-perception and relationships. Second, the passage offers a critique of societal expectations around gender roles and power dynamics. The fact that *Shalali's* father is described as “constantly responding to the whims of insignificant women” implies that white women held significant power in Cairo’s society, which may reinforce whites’ superior standards over blacks. This commentary adds depth to the narrative, suggesting that the story explores themes related to power, gender, and social hierarchy. Third, the narrator’s description of *Shalali's* father serves as a foil to his own relationship with *Simone*. While *Simone* is portrayed as a dominant figure in the narrator’s life, *Shalali's* father is depicted as weak and deferential. This contrast highlights the complexities of the narrator’s emotions and relationships, suggesting that he may be drawn to people who embody qualities he lacks or desires. Fourth, the passage reveals the narrator’s critical eye and ability to analyse the people around him. His scathing portrayal of *Shalali's* father demonstrates his capacity for judgment and his willingness to challenge societal norms. This insight into the narrator’s character helps readers better understand his motivations and perspectives throughout the story. Overall, this passage adds nuance to the narrative by introducing complex characters, exploring societal themes, and providing insight into the narrator’s psyche.

Furthermore, *Shalali's* own Nubian communist comrades are also criticised, with him describing them as “traders who don’t believe in their ideals and including opportunists and slanderers among their ranks.” (Ibid:22) Additionally, *Shalali* accuses some of his comrades of “reconciling with the Egyptian prince [before 1952] and dissolving the party.” (Ibid:24), implying that they were traitors to the Nubian cause. *Shalali's* hatred for the military regime that came to power through a coup in 1952 is evident in his disdain for those who support the regime, including the Nubian band that sings for the dam and the revolution. He sees them as being disconnected from their heritage and legacy, stating that they are “not the descendants of the sharpshooters” but rather those who have “wasted Nubia, their past and their present.” (Ibid:31).

This passage highlights the depth of *Shalali's* disillusionment with his own people and the Nubian community. His criticisms are not limited to individuals, but also extend to the broader community, which he sees as complicit in the erosion of Nubian identity and autonomy. The passage also underscores the theme of internal conflict and divisions within the Nubian community, with some members being seen as traitors or sellouts to the cause of Nubian independence.

3.4.1.6 Nubian Women Between Oppression and Exploitation

The narrator's portrayal of *Shalali's* mother and wife is stark and bleak. His mother, for example, is depicted as a lonely and impoverished figure, who has become blind and spends most of her time crying over the loss of her son and her own misfortune (Ibid:85-94). The narrator notes that she has never experienced happiness or joy, except for one brief moment when she received news of her husband's death (Ibid:94). *Shalali's* marriage to his Nubian wife, *Halima*, is portrayed as a forced and oppressive arrangement. According to *Shalali*, *Halima* is simply a "paid servant" who was sold by her father to his mother in order to secure the marriage (Ibid: 111 & 117). The narrator notes that neither *Shalali* nor *Halima* chose each other, and that *Halima's* sole duty is to care for *Shalali's* mother, while *Shalali* himself spends his best years away from her in Europe with his white mistress, *Simone* (Ibid:101).

In the end, *Shalali* makes the decision not to return to *Halima* forever, opting instead to settle in Europe with *Simone*. The narrator describes this situation as a tragic outcome, noting that "Halima's father is foolish, her husband is unjust, and no one understands her plight or the plight of women in the land of waiting." (Ibid:127). In desperation, *Halima* eventually betrays her husband by committing adultery with Madool." (Ibid:145). This act serves as a protest against her miserable circumstances.

The passage ends with a sense of tragedy and loss, as *Shalali's* mother dies after this incident, and the "lonely, silent night of the Land of Treasures [Nubia] becomes a funeral procession." (Ibid:152).

The above passages are interesting too for several reasons. First, the narrator's portrayal of *Shalali's* mother and wife serves as a commentary on the societal issues of poverty, oppression, and exploitation. The mother's bleak existence, marked by loneliness and despair, highlights the struggles faced by marginalised communities. *Halima's* situation, trapped in a forced marriage with a husband who neglects her, is a powerful critique of patriarchal societies. Second, the contrast between *Shalali's* mother and wife is striking. While his mother is depicted as a victim of circumstance, *Halima* is shown to be strong and resilient, resorting to adultery as a form of protest against her miserable marriage. This contrast emphasises the complexities of female characters in the story and challenges traditional notions of femininity. Third, the presence of *Shalali* in Europe with his white mistress, *Simone*, raises questions about colonialism and imperialism. The fact that *Shalali* chooses to settle in Europe with *Simone* rather than returning to *Halima* suggests that he has been influenced by Western values and culture. This could be

seen as a commentary on the effects of colonialism on African cultures and societies. The tragic fate of *Halima*, who is left alone after *Shalali's* departure, serves as a powerful commentary on the consequences of exploitation and oppression. The narrator's description of the "lonely, silent night" as a "funeral procession" emphasises the sense of loss and tragedy that pervades the story. Fifth, the passage reinforces the themes of oppression, exploitation, and tragedy that are present throughout the text. The characterisations of *Shalali's* mother and wife serve as a powerful reminder of the struggles faced by marginalised communities, highlighting the importance of empathy and understanding. Overall, this passage adds depth and complexity to the narrative, offering insights into the lives of marginalised characters and challenging readers to consider the societal issues that affect them.

3.4.1.7 Positive Re-presentation of Black Characters:

Despite the negative re-presentations of black characters throughout the novel, the narrator occasionally highlights the achievements and dignity of certain black historical figures. For example, the narrator describes the ancient Nubians as "throwers" (Ibid:7 & 21), emphasising their strength and power. Additionally, the narrator notes that Abū al-Misk Kāfūr al-Akhshidi, a black ruler from the Mamluk era, "sat on the throne of Egypt" (Ibid:34). The narrator also describes the Nubians as "peaceful people who do not carry guns and swords." (Ibid: 119), emphasising their peaceful nature.

In terms of characters who lived through the events in the novel, the narrator describes *Shalali's* mother, *Hoshiya*, is a "free Nubian woman" (Ibid:27), and as having "the patience of camels and the sturdiness of mountains for nineteen years of waiting, chasing the mail carrier and the telegraph operator." (Ibid: 95). This portrayal suggests that *Hoshiya* is a resilient and strong individual who has endured hardship. As for *Shalali*, the narrator describes his life in Europe as "he lived a life like a dream. He eats delicious food, drinks the finest wines, and accompanies the most elegant women." (Ibid:97).

This portrayal suggests that *Shalali* has experienced, in the second part of his life, a life of luxury and pleasure, which is in stark contrast to the hardships and struggles faced by his mother *Hoshiya* and others in the novel.

What can be observed from the above passages is noteworthy as follows: (1) The narrator's occasional positive portrayals of black historical figures and characters serve as a contrast to the negative views of *Shalali* and the dominant narrative. This contrast highlights the complexity of

the narrator's character and his ability to recognise the achievements and dignity of marginalised groups. The narrator's descriptions of *Hoshiya's* resilience and strength, as well as the peaceful nature of the Nubians, emphasise the importance of these qualities in the face of adversity. These portrayals humanise the marginalised characters and challenge readers to reevaluate their perceptions of them. The narrator's nuanced portrayal of the Nubian people, highlighting both positive and negative aspects, acknowledges the complexity of identity and culture. This approach encourages readers to consider the multifaceted nature of human experience and challenges dominant narratives. (2) *Shalali's* negative views of the Nubian people serve as a commentary on how dominant narratives can shape our perceptions of marginalised groups. His life in Europe, marked by luxury and pleasure, is juxtaposed with the hardships faced by his mother and others in the novel, highlighting the consequences of privilege and power. The passage explores themes of identity, power, and perception, encouraging readers to question their own biases and assumptions. The complex portrayal of the Nubian people challenges readers to reevaluate their understanding of marginalised groups and consider the ways in which dominant narratives can shape our perceptions.

Overall, this passage is interesting because it presents a nuanced and complex portrayal of marginalised groups, highlighting both positive and negative aspects of their culture and identity. It also serves as a commentary on the ways in which dominant narratives can shape our perceptions and understanding of marginalised groups.

3.4.1.8 The Adverse Re-presentation of White Characters

On the other hand, the narrator's portrayal of white characters is largely negative. For example, he often views the “people of the North” as spies who betrayed *Shilali* and tainted his innocence (Ibid: 13). He also describes their city of Cairo as “a city filled with spies, where every complaining citizen is followed by a spy (Ibid:14). This perspective is reflected in his own experiences, as he describes his period of living in Cairo as “a stranger in a strange country.” (Ibid:14). The narrator also uses negative language to describe the white people, characterising them as hypocritical, saying that “they all say the opposite of what they think.” (Ibid:14) and that they “cheat each other.” (Ibid:15).

The narrator's negative view of white people is not limited to *Shalali's* experiences. His mother, *Hoshiya*, also holds similar stereotypes about white people, warning *Shalali* not to go to the “land of snakes.” (Ibid:19). Additionally, the narrator describes *Shalali's* white stepmother, *Ruhiyya al-*

Bulaqiyya, as “the killer...the dog's daughter.” (Ibid:17), citing her role in poisoning his father “after she colonised him.” (Ibid:17).

Shalali's intense hostility towards whites has led to a proliferation of negative emotions in his heart, causing him to view the entire North as corrupt (Ibid:19). He expresses his disdain through mocking statements, saying “Glory to the traitors, and the scoundrels, and death to the original... Where is the balance and where is the place of God?” (Ibid:19). He also declares that due to the presence of informants and spies everywhere in the city of Cairo, he hates the Arabs, Mamluks, and Pharaohs, including his stepmother *al-Bulaqiyya* and the prince (Ibid: 22-23). In his opinion, these individuals “give birth to children who master applauding the victor, the oppressor, the king, the authority, and the president.” (Ibid:24). This sentiment leads him to describe them as “slaves owning slaves.” (Ibid:31), implying that they are perpetuating a cycle of oppression.

When Ramesses II is mentioned, *Shalali* expresses disdain and mockery towards the sight of the statue installed in the heart of Cairo, as “he does not like Ramesses II or any other pharaoh because they are invaders.” (Ibid:15). This sentiment reflects the *Shalali's* anger towards the occupation and subjugation of Nubia by white invaders. *Shalali* also directs his anger towards those who contributed to this historical injustice, such as Kanz al-Dawla Hibat Allah Abu al-Makarem, whom he describes as “one of the expatriate Arab brats.” (Ibid:20). According to the narrator, this individual conspired against the security of the south on behalf of the Ayyubids, who were “invaders from various religions who left their own country to conquer others in search of wealth and power.” (Ibid:20). This passage highlights the narrator's strong anti-colonial and anti-imperialist sentiments, as well as his disdain for those who collaborated with foreign powers to exploit and dominate Nubia.

3.4.1.9 The Positive Re-presentations of White Characters

A paradox is evident in *Shalali's* story: despite his deep-seated hatred towards the white people of the North, neither he nor his father were able to resist the allure of white women. For instance, *Shalali's* father, while living in Cairo, married a white woman named *Rawhiyya al-Bulaqiyya* abandoning his first Nubian wife, *Hoshiya*. Similarly, *Shalali* himself followed suit, marrying a white Frenchwoman named *Simone* and choosing her over his black Nubian wife, *Halima* (Ibid:19). This contradictory behaviour highlights the complexities of *Shalali's* feelings towards white people and his own desires, which are torn between hatred and attraction.

What is more interesting is *Shalali's* perception of Europeans. According to the narrator, Europeans are seen as beautiful and their countries are depicted as symbols of freedom and equality, with the narrator himself stating that "Despite *Shalali's* homelessness and loss, he was happy with freedom." (Ibid:98). This idealised image of whites also perpetuates the notion of the "white saviour" archetype, as seen in the wealthy Greek who rescued *Shalali* from being lost in Europe by hiring him on his large cruise ship (Ibid:98). Additionally, *Shalali's* Nubian friends demonstrate their fascination with white standards of beauty by asking about "white meat" when *Shalali* returns to his village in Nubia (Ibid:100). Furthermore, the hero's own infatuation with *Simone*, the French woman who "changed his life" (Ibid:100), reinforces the notion that white people are perceived as having a certain allure and power.

These positive images of European whites reach their peak when *Shalali* issues his final verdict, saying: "What is permissible and what is forbidden are the values of the South, and love and frankness are the values of the West." (Ibid:103) This pronouncement suggests that *Shalali* has come to adopt a dichotomous view of the world, where the values of the South (presumably referring to his African heritage) are associated with restriction and tradition, while the values of the West (European culture) are linked to freedom, love, and openness. This binary framework highlights the complex and contradictory nature of *Shalali's* views on European whites, which oscillate between admiration and rejection.

Overall, the narrator's language is characterised by strong emotions and a sense of injustice, as he seeks to condemn those who he perceives as being responsible for perpetuating inequality and oppression. Moreover, the narrator's portrayal of white people is characterised by negative stereotypes and distrust, with a focus on their perceived deceitful and manipulative nature.

3.4.1.10 Conclusion:

In this counter-narrative work, it is evident that black characters comprised the majority and played leading roles that embodied the essence of resistance and the struggle for freedom, equality, and justice. However, the novel's depiction of Nubians in the 1960s reflects the harsh reality of their lives, portraying them as a society struggling with poverty, deprivation, and limited access to basic services. Notably, the protagonist's black skin and Nubian heritage did not hinder him; instead, they served as a source of inspiration and motivation for him to cling to his African roots and proudly assert his black identity, drawing strength from the ancient civilisation that had shaped him. The work highlights the significance of the author's counter-narrative in elevating the significance of black characters. The use of in-depth explorations of the

characters' experiences with suffering and pain serves to humanise and dignify their experiences. The characterisation of *Bahr Jazouli* and *'Awād Shalali* is significant, highlighting their roles as protagonists in the story. Overall, this close reading highlights the novel's innovative approach to re-presenting black Nubians, moving beyond binary depictions to showcase their complexity and multifaceted nature.

3.4.2 Maḥmūd Trāwī's Novel *Maymūna*:

3.4.2.1 Preview:

In the novel *Maymūna*, the author of the second counter-narrative, an African writer of African descent, also intentionally elevates the significance of black Muslim characters, moving them from the margins to the centre. By centring the narrative around *Maymūna*'s recollections of her African Muslim family's journey from West Africa to the Holy Land in the early 20th century, the story employs memory as a powerful tool. *Maymūna*'s narrative is woven from the tales her father, uncle, and mother shared with her, as she seeks to preserve the memories of great African figures and civilisations throughout history. Through this oral tradition, *Maymūna* passes down these memories to future generations, using them as a lens to illuminate two pivotal scenes. The first is the traumatic experience of her family's forced departure from their homeland due to Western colonisation, their subsequent settlement in Hijaz as a new home, and their capture and enslavement by Muslims while en route to perform the Hajj pilgrimage. The second is the rich legacy of black African characters and civilisations that left behind a trail of glory, heroism, and wealth. By blending historical recollections with vivid and creative language, *Maymūna* crafts a narrative that not only captivates readers but also deepens its impact through its aesthetic appeal.

To develop the power of the narrative, the author employs a range of techniques, including in-depth examinations of the characters' experiences with suffering, pain, and historical marginalisation. The novel shines a light on the pivotal role of black Muslim figures in shaping civilisation, highlighting their crucial contributions and accumulated achievements in building prosperous kingdoms throughout history. Additionally, the text emphasises the characters' involvement in resistance and the struggle for freedom. The author's use of vivid language and imagery vividly portrays the historical injustices faced by black slaves in Hijazi society, as well as the brutal treatment they received at the hands of white figures, whether Arab Muslims or Western Christians. The author's descriptions of these events are graphic and explicit, conveying the sense of brutality, barbarism, backwardness, and colonialism that characterised this era. By confronting these dark aspects of history head-on, the author creates a narrative that is both powerful and thought-provoking.

Through a nuanced blend of storytelling and historical exploration, the author delves into the roots and manifestations of suffering, as well as its lingering impacts on society today. The author's objective appears to be multifaceted, aiming to highlight the authenticity, innocence,

and cultural heritage of the black race. By doing so, the author seeks to counter prevailing stereotypes and present a more positive and empowering image of black Muslims, particularly. The author's approach is noteworthy for its attention to the complexities of racism and its far-reaching effects, acknowledging that the consequences of historical injustices continue to shape contemporary society. By examining the intersection of racism, colonialism, and slavery, the author creates a narrative that not only sheds light on the past but also offers a vision for a more equitable future.

The novel features approximately 77 characters in total, irrespective of their roles. Among these, the majority of Black characters consist of 37 males and 7 females. In contrast, there are 29 white males and just 4 white females, as illustrated in the first figure. The second figure displays the ratio of Black to white characters in the novel.

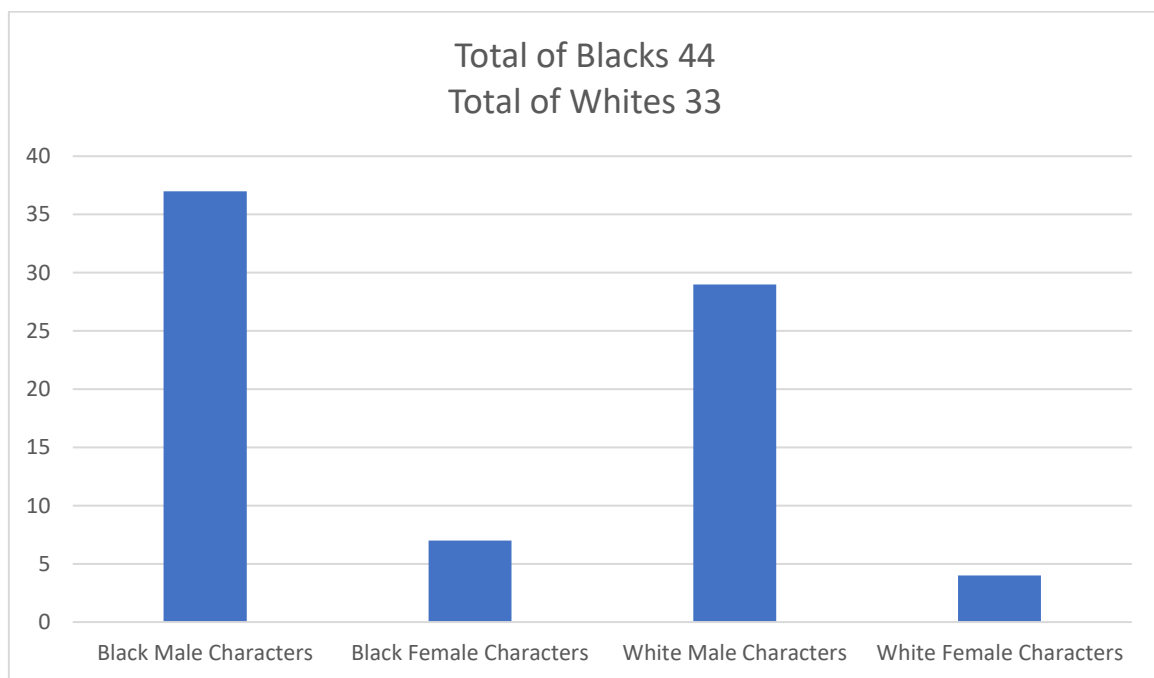


Figure 3.4.2.1 (a): The Total Number of Black and White Characters of *Maymūna*

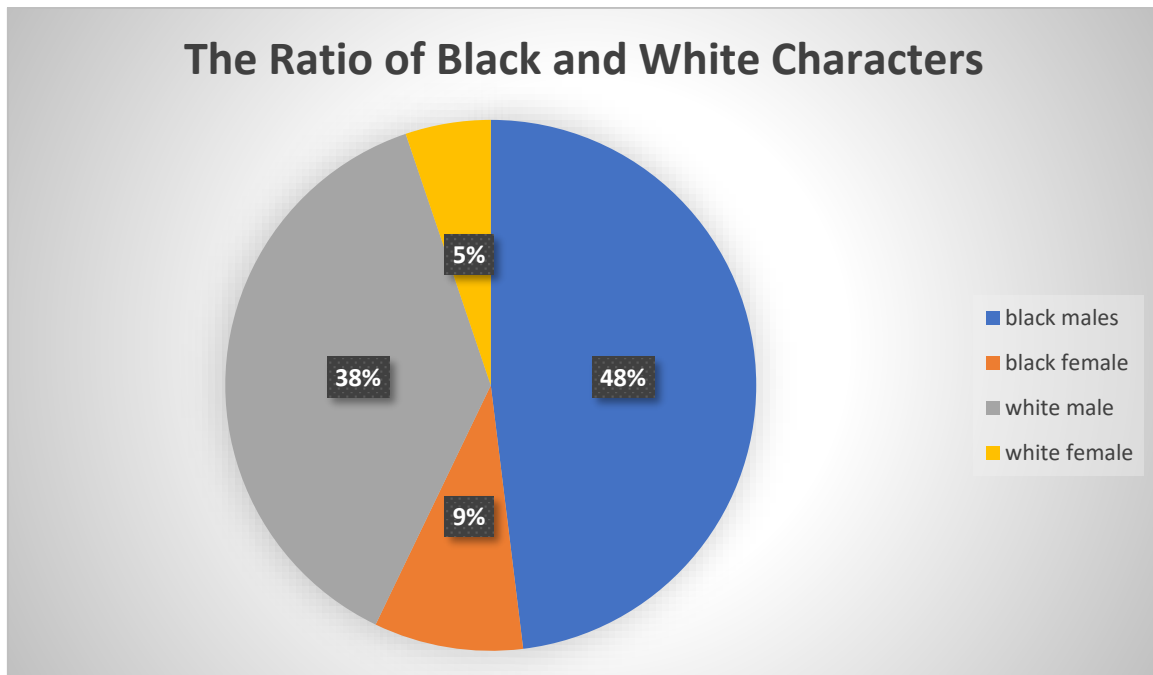


Figure 3.4.2.1 (b): The Ratio of Black and White Characters of *Maymūna*

The figures above reveal a predominance of Black male characters over others, suggesting that the author is likely prioritising male experiences and narratives, despite having a female narrator in the story. Similar to the author's previous work, this distribution of characters seems to underscore the author's narrative priorities and themes. The emphasis on Black male characters reflects a conscious intention to explore cultural experiences and social issues pertinent to this demographic, which will be the focus of our analysis in this section.

As previously discussed, the counter-narrative employs a dual approach in its characterisation, focusing on two distinct aspects. On one hand, it highlights the substantial achievements and struggles of black characters, both historical and fictional, in their resistance against Western and Eastern slavery. These characters are showcased as brave and resilient individuals who fought against overwhelming odds to reclaim their dignity and agency.

On the other hand, the narrative presents a stark contrast by exploring the reprehensible actions of white characters, who perpetrated heinous acts of enslavement, plundered African wealth, and stripped their victims of their humanity. This portrayal serves as a powerful critique of the systemic injustices that were perpetuated against black people throughout history. By juxtaposing these two perspectives, the narrative seeks to create a more nuanced understanding of the complex and painful legacy of slavery.

3.4.2.2 Slavery Between the West and the East:

To illustrate the experience of enslavement between the West and the East, let us first examine the narrative of *Maymūna*, who shares a powerful story about her father's accounts of their ancestral past. She recalls his tales of their origins in the jungle and the ancient practice of mining, which her family had thrived upon for generations. *Maymūna* also remembers conversations with her father about the brutal actions of white colonisers who forcibly took their ancestors from their homeland, transporting them on ships under the guise of spreading Christianity:

My father originated from the depths of the forest jungles and the mineral-rich mines where gold, copper, phosphate, and diamonds were extracted... I remember overhearing his discussions with my uncle while still nestled within the safety of my mother's womb (Trāwrī, 2007:11-12).

This passage evokes a powerful connection to the speaker's heritage, illustrating a deep-seated relationship with the natural wealth and resources of their homeland. The juxtaposition of the father's roots in the “depths of the forest jungles” and “mineral-rich mines” alongside the intimate memory of overhearing discussions from within the womb symbolises the profound influence of ancestry and environment on identity, suggesting that the speaker's sense of self is intricately woven into the fabric of their family's history and the land.

Maymūna continues,

They recounted stories of white individuals, labelled as Christians, who forcibly took their forebears, cramming them into ships bound for faraway lands, all while chanting praises to God. However, these individuals were stripped of their dignity, bloodied and bare, with only a fortunate few surviving the harrowing journey - the sea transforming into a burial ground for countless souls (Ibid:11-12)

This poignant passage starkly illuminates the brutal history of colonialism and the dehumanisation faced by individuals labelled as Christians, showcasing a chilling contrast between pious proclamations and the horrific realities of their actions. The imagery of the sea as a “burial ground for countless souls” powerfully underscores the tragic loss of dignity and life, emphasising the generational trauma that lingers long after such atrocities, and serves as a haunting reminder of the cost of greed and oppression.

Nevertheless, in the above passages, as in the entire novel, there is no prominent Christian figure explicitly credited with the enslavement of Africans in the 19th century where the event took place. Instead, the narrator speaks in general terms, avoiding specifics. This might be attributed to two factors. Firstly, the narrative is presented in a non-linear, flashback style, with memories passed down through generations, which can lead to the loss of details. Secondly, the narrator's goal is perhaps to provide a broader historical context, explaining the factors that led his ancestors to migrate from Africa to Mecca, while also drawing a comparison between the Christian West and the Muslim East's treatment of black Africans.

Therefore, the narrative of memories in the novel focuses on highlighting the role of Arab Muslim figures, particularly the “Bedouins” in enslaving their black African Muslim brothers. The narrator does not excuse some black individuals for their own involvement in enslaving black Africans, instead emphasising the betrayal of African tribal leaders who participated in enslaving their own people. In this context, the narrator states, “War gives birth to slavery and justifies it. The strong enslaves the weak, and the victor enslaves the captive. The more the war expanded, the number of prisoners increased. The Arabs were not the only ones hunting, the heads of the Ebony clans were with them, giving up goods and commodities, and sacrificing their own people.” (Ibid:137)

In contrast to the lack of mention of specific white Christian characters involved in the enslavement of Africans, the narrator chooses *Omar al-Musk* as a main character, showcasing his dual role as both an enslaved person and a participant in enslavement. Omar's journey begins with a moment of weakness, where he agrees to help a Bedouin named *Manawar* kidnap and sell 10 black children to Arab brokers (Ibid:39). However, the Bedouins ultimately sell *Omar* along with the children, turning him into a slave. He faces a difficult path to regain his freedom and seek redemption for his lapse in judgment, as he experiences the bitter taste of enslavement firsthand (Ibid:109).

3.4.2.3 The Positive Re-presentation of Black Muslim Characters

Contrary to the only above dark spot, the story predominantly focuses on highlighting the prosperity and abundance of African cultures, as well as their deep desire for spiritual and moral values. The internal narrator affirms this with a strong assertion: “My father originated from the forests, gold mines, and rich sources of copper, phosphate, diamonds, ivory, rubber, coffee, cocoa, and palm oil. He came as one of the hearts of the people longing for salvation, eagerly awaiting a response to the powerful call that resounds through the universe, uttered by a man

[Bilal ibn Rabah, the first muezzin in Islam] standing on a mountain, beckoning to the people, and unsettling ghosts and offering sacrifices.” (Ibid:11-12)

The narrative extensively discusses renowned African kings like *Mansa Musa* the Mali Emperor during its prosperous Islamic period. Within this context, the narrator delves into the elaborate details of his well-known pilgrimage to Mecca, a journey that had captivated the attention of individuals in Egypt and the Hijaz for many years (Ibid:81). The account highlights the generosity of *Mansa Musa*, whose wealth and valuable gifts were distributed to people and tribes from Mali to Mecca. Additionally, the narrative notes the efforts of African Muslim ruler Askia Muhammad, “who attempted to dispel the myth of Mansa Musa's grandeur by exaggerating his own generosity and making massive donations to the Haramain [Mecca and Medina] and buying orchards in Madina to benefit the people of Takrur¹⁰⁹, with a reported 100,000 metric tonnes of gold being donated.” (Ibid:28)

Like the novelist Ali, who challenged negative stereotypes by showcasing educated Nubian characters in his work, the internal narrator in *Maymūna* also employs a similar strategy. The narrator highlights the efforts of African historical figures in rebuilding their nation, and emphasises their joy in creating vibrant, colourful clothing. The narrator's description of the African characters' attire is particularly striking, as it showcases their creativity and resilience. The narrator recalls a memorable experience:

My father's eyes widened in remembrance, recalling the awe they felt as they approached the coast, greeted by the sight of shaded spaces lined with mango and cocoa trees. They beheld blooming fields and villages bustling with men dressed in vivid attire. Remember that, Omar? My uncle responded, yes, I was young, and you were the elder. Yet, I can vividly picture our people adorned in silk and velvet. I envision mighty rulers, flourishing craftsmanship, and fierce warriors bellowing out their anger (Ibid:13)

This reflection captures a vibrant tapestry of cultural memory, where the narrator and his father reminisce about a seemingly idyllic past filled with lush landscapes and rich traditions, painting

¹⁰⁹ “Takrur” is a medieval kingdom in West Africa, specifically located in the modern-day region of Senegal, The Gambia, and Mali. It was a powerful and influential empire that flourished from the 8th to the 13th centuries. “Takrur” was known for its rich trade networks, its control of the trans-Saharan trade route, and its strong cultural and religious traditions. The kingdom was founded by the Berber people, who were originally from North Africa, but over time it was influenced by various African cultures, including the Soninke, the Wolof, and the Mandinka. See: Fyle, C. M. (1999). *Introduction to the History of African Civilization*. University Press of America. P.37.

a picture of beauty and communal pride. The contrast between the vivid imagery of their ancestors adorned in “silk and velvet” and the presence of “fierce warriors” evokes a sense of both reverence and nostalgia, highlighting the complexities of heritage that encompasses strength, artistry, and the spirit of a once-thriving community.

3.4.2.4 The Positive Re-presentation of Black Muslim Community

Beyond celebrating African achievements in their own lands, the narrative takes a significant step by depicting their gatherings in the Hijaz region, where they sought spiritual fulfilment and prosperity near the revered Two Holy Mosques. This portrayal presents a straightforward and affirmative re-presentation of Africans, challenging common stereotypes and misconceptions about the *Takarna*. For example, the narrator describes the *Takarna* as “a naive and innocent people, free from the flaws and vices of scoundrels.” (Ibid:107) Furthermore, the text highlights their commitment to moral values, showcasing their restraint from theft and immorality. The narrator continues characterising them by their lack of curiosity and non-intrusive nature, not meddling in matters that do not concern them (Ibid: 107). The narrator also portrays them as “good people who do not harbour grudges, covet wealth, or engage in theft or immorality.” (Ibid:107) In fact, the *Takarna* are “primarily driven by their desire to worship and seek a comfortable livelihood, and they are content with simple pleasures.” (Ibid: 107)

This characterisation presents a positive and admirable image of the *Takarna*, highlighting their virtues and moral integrity. To prove her point, the narrator, on the other hand, employs nature's influence on their emotions and characteristics to highlight an often-overlooked aspect of their culture: their love of music and dance. She notes that:

the forest bestowed upon them the secrets of the dance, guiding them to the drums, which they beat in rhythm with the sun's descent into the horizon, as if their cracked fingers could open the dawn's eyes, sealed by blood... With the drums' melody, they understood nature's harmony. According to my mother, the songs grow louder during harvest time, as they sing all day to release their despair and carry their youthful aspirations, as if the branches would not reach for the light unless they hear the drums' beat. We have always believed that life resides in the voice. (Ibid:31)

This passage beautifully intertwines the themes of nature and cultural expression, illustrating how the forest serves as both a source of wisdom and a catalyst for communal identity through music and dance. The evocative imagery of cracked fingers awakening the dawn and the

powerful connection between the drums and the cycles of life emphasises the belief that harmony with nature is essential for nurturing hope and resilience in the face of despair.

3.4.2.5 Protecting Black Characters from Negative Stereotypes

Nonetheless, certain behaviours described above have been misconstrued by some, implying that they indicate mental instability or disorder in various historical narratives. For example, according to the historian Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), a renowned historian, described Africans as “closer to animals, they live in jungles and caves, and eat grass and grains, and perhaps they eat each other, and they are not among humans.” (Ibn Khaldun, 1981:70) Similarly, the Arab geographer and traveller Ibn Jubair (d. 1217) stated that Africans are “closer to a beast than a human.” (Ibn Jubair, 1986:42)

These accounts, which date back to the Middle Ages, perpetuate the image of a happy, obedient, and simple-minded black man. In fact, the notion of the “happy slave” is the core of the slave caricature. Ibn Khaldun, for example, writes:

We have seen from the creation of Sudan, in general, lightness and recklessness and a lot of joy, so you find them fond of dancing on every occasion and being described as fools in every country. The correct reason for this is that the nature of joy and happiness is the spread of the animal spirit (Ibn Khaldun, 1981:108)

Ibn Khaldun attributed the love of dancing to the hot weather and the weakness of black brains, rather than any inherent cultural or natural inclination. In contrast, the historian al-Mas’oūdi believed that the weakness of black brains was the cause of their love of dancing (Ibn Khaldun, 1981: 108-9).

In this context, the narrator deliberately references the famous traveller Ibn Battuta (d. 1369) to counter and debunk harmful stereotypes about black Africans. The narrator aims to highlight some of the negative portrayals of Black individuals mentioned by Ibn Battuta during his renowned journey, including accusations of cannibalism against certain tribes (Ibid:76). The narrator dismisses these allegations as contradictory and denounces Ibn Battuta as a hypocrite, echoing the sentiments of one of the characters in the narrative (Ibid:77).

Maymūna’s monologue is a powerful and emotional expression of her frustration and disappointment with the legacy of Ibn Battuta. She begins by questioning her father's opinion about Ibn Battuta, wondering if he is one of the travellers who misunderstood and

misrepresented African cultures. She notes that Ibn Battuta's voice is lost and fragmented, and that his accounts are often overshadowed by the power and influence of those who had kissed the hands of sultans (Ibid:76).

As she continues to express her thoughts, *Maymūna* cites specific words from Ibn Battuta's writings, which she reads as accusations against black Africans of eating human flesh. Her tone is one of shock and incredulity, as she addresses her father with a series of rhetorical questions. "Did your ancestors eat people's flesh, my father?" she asks, her voice filled with astonishment and outrage. The final question, "How can you read the Qur'an and eat human flesh and spread corruption on earth, my father?" is a poignant expression of *Maymūna*'s deep-seated anger and disillusionment with the contradictions and injustices that have been perpetuated throughout history (Ibid:77).

By citing Battuta's accounts, the narrator aims to verify and refute the negative perceptions that have been perpetuated throughout history. Ibn Battuta's descriptions of African culture and people are often cited as examples of the negative stereotypes that were prevalent during the medieval period (Lewis, 1992:92). However, by referencing these accounts, the narrator challenges these notions by citing the perspectives of renowned Black figures who elucidate this natural inclination as a response to instinctual calls and an expression of harmony with their surroundings. In this vein, he references Leopold Senghor¹¹⁰, who articulates:

Black is a human of nature, living in harmony with the land. Sensual and attuned to the senses, he eschews intermediaries between subject and object, embracing all stimuli - sounds, scents, rhythms, shapes, and colours. He perceives the world through feeling rather than sight (Ibid:31)

A pervasive and enduring stereotype perpetuates the notion that black individuals are excessively lustful, hyper-sexualised, and impulsive in romantic encounters. This damaging image has persisted across Arab cultural narratives, including the famous collection of stories, *One Thousand and One Nights*. Within this context, black characters frequently appear in tales of sexual intimacy. For instance, the character of "Mas'ud", a slave, and his relationship with "Shahrazad", the wife of King "Shahriyar", serve as examples. Additionally, other slaves are

¹¹⁰ Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001) was a Senegalese poet, politician, and statesman who served as the first President of Senegal from 1960 to 1980. He was a key figure in the Negritude movement, a cultural and literary movement that sought to promote African culture and identity. See: Collins, G. (2006). *Man of Destiny: The Life of Leopold Sedar Senghor*. Sights Productions.

depicted as engaging in physical affection, such as kissing, hugging, fornicating, and drinking alcohol, until the end of the day¹¹¹.

In the novel *Maymūna*, the narrative seeks to challenge and debunk the negative stereotypes associated with race. This is evident in the portrayal of *Lubabah*, a white concubine woman who is the mistress of the Pasha, being tempted to betray her husband and satisfy her desires with the help of *Omar al-Misk*, a black slave (Ibid:116). However, the narrative takes a different turn as it presents *Omar* rebelling against his stereotypical image and asserting his true self, drawing parallels to the story of *Yusuf* (Joseph) from the Qur'an¹¹², Chapter 12. Rather than succumbing to his mistress's advances, *Omar* douses himself in a pungent scent that not only extinguishes her lustful desires but also enhances his perceived fragrance in the eyes of those around him (Ibid:124-127).

After his narrow escape from the concubine's trap, *Omar* experienced a remarkable turn of events. As he recounts, "I began to exude a pleasant fragrance, and whenever someone drew near me, they were irresistibly drawn to it. From that day on, I was known as Omar al-Misk, a name that preceded me wherever I went...I noticed that when I touched my body, the dirt would be swept away, and others would catch the scent of fragrance on me. I recalled the concubine's words: Not everyone who smells a rose can pick it." (Ibid:129)

This paragraph is highlighting the importance of inner beauty, which is reflected in one's moral character, self-control, and ability to resist temptation. The narrator is arguing that true beauty is not about physical appearance, such as skin colour, but about the strength of one's character. The narrator is emphasising that *Omar's* blackness is not a physical characteristic, but a moral one, as he overcomes his desires and remains chaste. The narrator is also suggesting that freedom lies not in external circumstances, but in one's ability to overcome internal restrictions

¹¹¹ See: Tarek Shamma. (2017). Women and Slaves: Gender Politics in the *Arabian Nights*. *Marvels & Tales*, 31(2), 239–260. <https://doi.org/10.13110/marvelstaes.31.2.0239>.

¹¹² In Surah Yusuf (Chapter 12), verses 23-24, a description of the temptation of Yusuf a noble woman who attempted to seduce him. In these verses, the woman tries to entice Yusuf: "She in whose house he was living tried to seduce him. She shut the doors, and said, I am yours." (Qur'an 12:23) However, Yusuf refuses her advances, declaring his devotion to God and his commitment to remaining chaste. He rebukes her, saying: "Allah forbid! He is my Lord. He has given me a good home. Sinners never succeed." (Qur'an 12:23) In Islamic scholarship, this narrative has been interpreted by esteemed commentators such as Ibn Kathir (d. 1373) as an exemplar of the significance of moral integrity, self-discipline, and devotion to one's faith. Additionally, it serves as a warning against the dangers of temptation and moral transgression (Ibn Kathir, 1999, 4:25-28).

and temptations. This is illustrated by the example of *Omar al-Musk*, who is able to break free from his materialistic chains only after he has overcome his own internal struggles and desires.

3.4.2.6 The Negative Re-presentation of White Characters:

While *Maymūna* portrays black characters in positive terms, she is scathing in her depiction of white characters. In the context of Western colonialism's brutal treatment of Africa during the colonial era, she recounts the atrocities committed by colonisers through her father's memories: "They razed villages and fields, spread epidemics, and launched brutal hunting raids on humans and animals, effectively halting civilisation and disrupting agriculture... These were the dregs of society who came to our lands, comprising failed lawyers and bankrupt merchants." (Ibid:13)

In contrast, when describing Bedouin Arabs who preyed on their fellow Muslims in pilgrim caravans between Mecca and Medina, *Maymūna* shares a memory passed down from another black woman: "These Bedouin Arabs, abandoned by history, saw the pilgrim caravans as an opportunity to satisfy their hunger... They would plunder the caravan, slaughtering men and capturing women... Ignorance and hunger can corrupt even the soul and faith. They were both ignorant and vicious." (Ibid:27)

The passages demonstrate *Maymūna*'s stark portrayal of the destructive forces of Western colonialism and Bedouin Arab banditry, two seemingly disparate entities that are united by their tendency to enslave and exploit others. Despite their differences in culture, religion, and language, these groups are linked by their capacity for cruelty and oppression. The significance of these passages lies in their exposure of the common thread that runs through these dark chapters in history: the dehumanising practice of enslavement.

Specifically, the significance of these passages can be interpreted as: (1) Critique of colonialism: The passage about the white colonisers' brutal treatment of African villages and people is a scathing critique of colonialism and its devastating impact on African societies. It emphasises the violent and destructive nature of colonialism, which is often sanitised or ignored in dominant narratives. (2) Counter-narrative: By juxtaposing the positive re-presentation of black characters with the negative depiction of white characters, *Maymūna* is creating a counter-narrative that challenges dominant Eurocentric and colonialist perspectives. She is reclaiming the stories and experiences of African people, which are often marginalized or erased from mainstream history. (3) Complex re-presentation: The passage about the Bedouin Arabs highlights the complexity of cultural conflicts and the need for nuanced re-presentations. By sharing a memory passed down

from another black woman, *Maymūna* avoids simplifying or romanticising the conflict, instead presenting a more multifaceted view of historical events. (4) Re-presentation and empowerment: By giving voice to African experiences and perspectives, *Maymūna* is empowering African people to reclaim their own stories and histories. This challenges dominant narratives that have often been imposed upon them by colonisers and other outsiders. (5) Contextualisation: The passages provide historical context for contemporary struggles, emphasising the ongoing impact of colonialism and cultural conflicts on African societies. This encourages readers to consider the legacies of colonialism and their continued relevance in modern times.

Overall, these passages demonstrate *Maymūna*'s commitment to challenging dominant narratives, reclaiming African histories, and promoting nuanced representations of complex cultural conflicts.

2.4.2.7 Conclusion:

The second counter-narrative seeks to highlight the importance of Black Muslim figures in history, challenging the dominant Arab-influenced narrative that shapes our understanding of the world. To counter this, it is crucial to amplify Black voices. *Maymūna* suggests that by reframing “reality,” Black individuals can reclaim their agency and redefine their community and identity. Grounded in historical evidence, this narrative aims to reshape societal attitudes and foster a more nuanced collective identity. *Maymūna*'s character plays a vital role as a Black woman who narrates her story, recounting her African Muslim family's journey from West Africa to the Holy Land in the early 20th century. Her narrative seeks to restore respect for gender roles and the fight for reclaimed rights while preserving the legacies of significant African figures and civilizations by challenging negative stereotypes.

She dismantles harmful classifications that label Whites as normal and Blacks as abnormal, a tactic used for social control. In her novel, *Maymūna* strives to reclaim dignity for Black characters, shifting focus from superficial beauty standards to celebrating African heritage and culture. She critiques the shameful actions of white characters responsible for atrocities like slavery, emphasising systemic injustices against Black people.

Ultimately, *Maymūna* honours the “Black” man not by romanticising suffering, but by providing an authentic re-presentation of lived experiences. This act of respect connects historical

struggles to contemporary injustices, empowering today's fight for equality as part of a larger tradition that links past and present resistance.

3.5 Authors with White Background:

3.5.1 Sa'dā' al-Da'as's Novel *Li-annī Aswād*:

3.5.1.1 Preview:

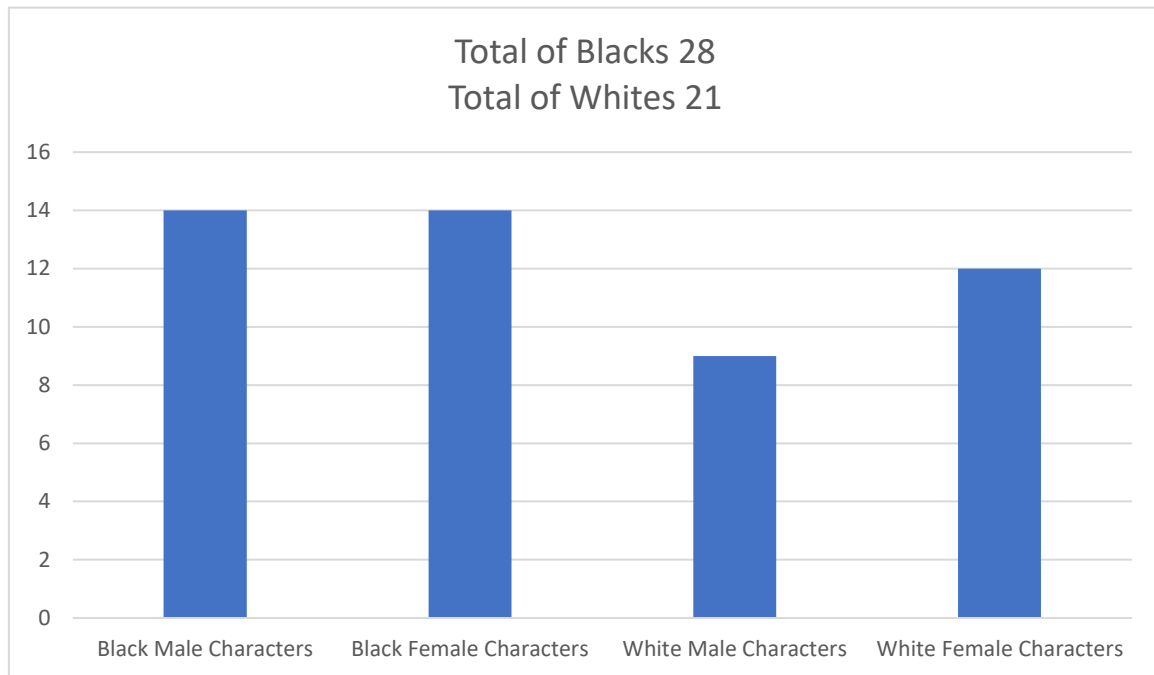
In this novel, black characters take centre stage, with *Jamal*, his mother, and his father playing crucial roles. In the absence of seeking assistance from leading white figures, the black characters are left to navigate and resolve their own problems and challenges. The author's decision to have the black characters address the issues of racism and discrimination themselves is significant, as it highlights the severity of these problems in Kuwaiti society. Unfortunately, the black characters are unable to find a solution that guarantees them peace and security, leading to the family's decision to return to America permanently.

However, throughout the narrative, the struggles of the black characters are explored in two main ways. The first strand of the narrative examines the impact of racism on the characters' sense of identity, including the societal standards of beauty that pose a significant challenge to their self-image. The second strand highlights the black characters' involvement in the struggle for equality and justice in a society dominated by a white narrative that perpetuates harmful stereotypes and biases.

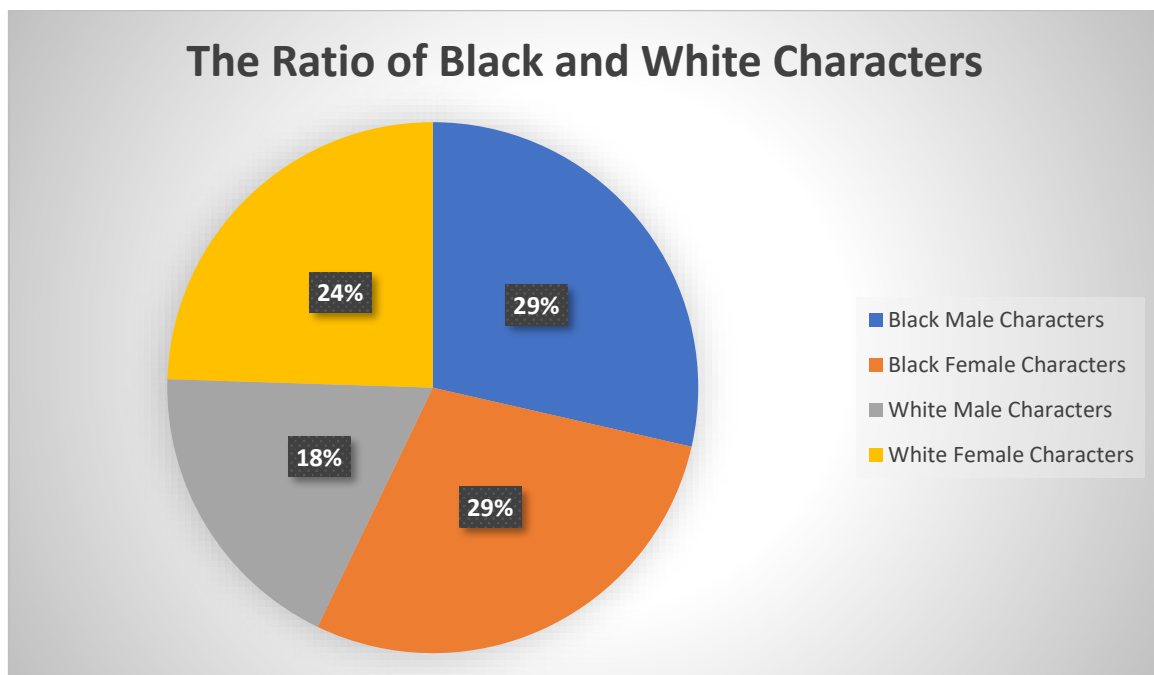
Through the integration of these two approaches, the author delves into the roots and manifestations of racial suffering, as well as the far-reaching consequences of racist practices on contemporary society. Ultimately, the author's goal, as seen from the narrative is to suggest that the black race is a victim of systematic racism, which is perpetuated through a complex web of cultural norms, societal attitudes, and individual beliefs. By confronting these pervasive stereotypes, the author seeks to challenge the collective mindset that has perpetuated slavery and its devastating effects on both individuals and society as a whole.

Out of the 49 characters mentioned in the novel, regardless of their involvement in the events, the majority were Black, totalling 28 individuals of both genders. In comparison, there were 21 white characters, as illustrated in the figures below, highlighting the ratio of Black to white

characters.



5.3.1 Figure (1): The Total Number of Black and White Characters of *Li-annī Aswād*



5.3.1 Figure (2): The Ratio of Black and White Characters of *Li-annī Aswād*

The figures reflect the demographic composition of characters in the novel, illustrating that Black characters make up a significant majority compared to white characters. This re-presentation suggests a focus on Black experiences and narratives within the story, highlighting their

importance and prominence in the narrative. The ratio could also indicate a challenge to traditional narratives that often marginalise or underrepresent Black voices, signalling an effort to provide a more diverse and inclusive depiction of characters in literature.

3.5.1.2 The Identity Crisis of Black Characters in America

The novel begins with the first strand which explores the black characters' arduous struggle with the colour of their skin and its profound impact on their self-perception, as well as their experiences in American and Kuwaiti society. The narrative sets the stage by referencing the colour problem that plagued the mother *Joanne* even before her relationship with *Fawzi al-Kuwaiti* and the birth of their son, *Jamal*. As a young woman, *Joanne* realised that her chances of finding a white partner were non-existent, and she became fixated on meeting a man with less dark skin to ensure her children would have a better chance at avoiding racism. According to the narrator,

Joanne never desired a white partner, as she believed that people of a certain colour had never been able to move her emotions, particularly those with blonde hair whom she saw as having a contrast between their exterior appearance and inner nature. Instead, she longed for a hybrid family that would bring her and her children the fate she felt they deserved (al-Da'as, 2010:18).

This sense of dissatisfaction was further solidified by the failure of her first romantic experience with her colleague, *Touchie* (Ibid:17) After more than a year, *Joanne* made the decision to end the relationship, which was influenced by a quote she heard Oprah Winfrey utter on one of her television programmes: "We are the ones who create our own destiny and the destiny of our children as well." (Ibid:18) The narrator's deliberate choice to reference a renowned black broadcaster, rather than a white woman, serves as a subtle commentary on the fact that *Joanne's* characters do not seek guidance or validation from white individuals. Following this experience, *Joanne* became "resolute in her pursuit of a hybrid partner who shared some characteristics with her own black identity but differed from her in having a lighter complexion." (Ibid:18)

Therefore, the author dedicates her novel at the beginning of the novel under the title "Apology," in which she says: "To a black woman who did not submit to our standards and lived beautifully. And to another who was surrounded by our standards and died before she could live. I know that our ugliness cannot be ignored. I only apologise." (Ibid:1)

The author's dedication sets a poignant tone for the novel, acknowledging the struggles of black women who defy societal expectations while simultaneously highlighting the tragic impact of those very standards. This heartfelt apology not only confronts the prevailing ugliness of systemic oppression but also honours the resilience and beauty of those who navigate such challenges.

3.5.1.3 Black Characters vs White Beauty Standards

Unfortunately, *Joanne McClain's* desire for a fulfilling life did not come to fruition after her marriage to *Fawzi*, as fate, in *Jamal's* view, seemed to have no logical reason for *Fawzi* to be less black, despite his father's name being Fawzi Al-Kuwaiti (Ibid:11). Despite her decision to take control of her destiny, *Joanne* struggled to overcome the persistent inferiority complex that plagued her throughout the story, holding her captive to her negative thoughts. Her perspective was limited to a black-and-white worldview, even though she came from an educated family. For instance, her father was a lawyer and her mother a science teacher, but she still felt inferior to white people, as she "always felt inferior to those white blondes." (Ibid:35). This crippling feeling led her to perceive everything black as ugly and everything white as beautiful. As a result, she hesitated to form a friendship with her white colleague *Melissa*, seeing *Melissa* as "an image of American beauty" (Ibid:35) and herself as "an image of its ugliness." (Ibid:35) This perception prevented her from forming connections with others who didn't fit her narrow definition of beauty.

The examples presented above suggest that *Joanne* has been shaped by the centuries-old stereotypes perpetuated by whites about black people. These stereotypes have a profound impact on her, reaching a peak when she begins to fantasise about *Melissa's* life as being romantic and beautiful (Ibid:34). However, in reality, *Melissa* lives in a small, unsanitary apartment with no running water, yet *Joanne* continues to believe the opposite (Ibid:39). Her exposure to American magazines has only reinforced these stereotypes, showcasing the beauty of white women, reminiscent of Hollywood movies. As a result, *Joanne* is unable to help but view these images as a privilege reserved for whites, simply "because they are blonde." (Ibid:46)

3.5.1.4 Black Characters and Their Experiences of Inferiority

This further reinforces her own sense of inferiority and highlights her deep-seated internalisation of racist ideologies. *Joanne*, the protagonist, appears to suffer from a form of cultural and social conditioning that perpetuates racist attitudes and stereotypes. *Joanne's* beliefs and fantasies about *Melissa's* life are shaped by her exposure to American media and societal norms, which

reinforce the notion that white women are more beautiful and privileged. This exposure has led her to internalise racist ideologies, viewing blonde hair as a characteristic exclusive to whites and associating it with beauty. This internalisation of racism has contributed to her sense of inferiority and perpetuates her own biases. In this context, *Joanne's* condition can be characterised as a form of ideological or cognitive bias.

The first instance of spatial exclusion occurs when her parents, despite their efforts to integrate into a respectable white neighbourhood, are rejected due to crude racist arguments (Ibid:30). As a result, *Joanne* and her family are forced to relocate to a black neighbourhood, which is deemed unsuitable for humans. The novel, in this respect, illustrates the significant impact of the environment on its characters, as demonstrated through the narrator's lens: "as soon as she crosses the street that separates the black neighbourhood from the main road, she begins to lose her self-confidence... To live out her dreams by looking for a knight who will give her love and light-skin colour." (Ibid:30-31).

The novel continues to highlight the effects of spatial transitions on the characters, particularly in their experiences of alienation. In Carbondale, despite their efforts to integrate into society, they are met with rejection by their white neighbours. *Jamal*, their young son, as we showed in the previous chapter, is subjected to humiliation at school, with his white classmates asking him why he doesn't take a bath (Ibid:108). This experience has a profound impact on *Jamal*, who spends hours in the bathroom trying to clean himself (Ibid:108). She confesses that she feels suffocated in their black neighbourhood, surrounded by rusty houses, and longs to escape (Ibid:65). She wonders why her blonde colleagues do not live in a neighbourhood like theirs, and why she only sees wealthy and happy black people once a year, while wealthy and happy white people are seen every day (Ibid:65).

3.5.1.5 Black Neighbourhoods in America: A Parallel to Prisons

The black neighbourhood in the novel is depicted as a prison, with limited spatial details. Instead, the narrative focuses on *Joanne's* psychological struggles and her connection to the place. The narrative highlights the severe differences between the white and black worlds, emphasising the protagonist's shock and sense of inferiority. The novel also references the politics of white capitalist society, where racial abuse is perpetuated and disseminated. The narrative highlights the issue of spatial segregation in American society, particularly in the context of Chicago's South Side black belt. This segregation has significant social and cultural repercussions, perpetuating the alienation of African Americans from American society. As a result, African Americans

experience a double alienation: they are strangers in their new place in America and strangers in their own homeland in Africa. Overall, the novel portrays the complex and multifaceted nature of racism in American society, highlighting its impact on individuals' lives and its perpetuation through spatial segregation.

3.5.1.6 The Identity Crisis of Black Characters in Kuwait

Turning to the second trajectory in which black characters participated in the struggle for equality and justice in Kuwaiti Muslim society, *Jamal* recounts a poignant story about the differences between black characters' experiences in the struggle for equality and justice. This is a nice clear change in direction. For example, he draws a comparison between his own experiences in the United States and those in Kuwait, highlighting the stark contrasts between the two cultures. In the US, *Jamal* fondly recalls attending church with his mother, where they would dance and sing without being accused of engaging in activities related to jinn or magic (Ibid:215). In contrast, *Jamal* believes that in Kuwait, there is a widespread belief that "every black man is a slave, and every slave is possessed by jinn." (Ibid:215). He recognises that these stereotypes are false constructs created by white individuals to assert dominance and control over black individuals. *Jamal* uses the depiction of Christ in white and black cultures to illustrate his point. While Jesus is typically depicted with white features such as blonde hair and blue eyes in white culture, he is often depicted with curly hair and dark eyes in black culture. *Jamal* argues that these images are mere illusions, designed to reinforce racial stereotypes (Ibid:218).

3.5.1.7 Suicidal Thoughts as a Means of Escaping Racism in Kuwait

Indeed, *Jamal's* experiences with racism led to a profound crisis, causing him to contemplate suicide as a means of escape from the immense psychological distress he was enduring. At one point, he reached out to his white friend *Sara*, confiding in her about his feelings of despair and shame. He asked her, "Should I be proud of my colour, which I am so proud of, or should I end my life before I become a laughingstock for white people to share via text messages?" (Ibid:241).

This admission reveals the depth of *Jamal's* emotional pain and the devastating impact of racism on his sense of self-worth. As he navigates this darkness, he comes to a profound realisation: even those closest to him, including his friend *Sara*, are unwilling to form a romantic relationship with him because of the colour of his skin. This rejection is a crushing blow, and *Jamal* reflects on the magnitude of this betrayal, noting that "all the racist incidents I've faced in my life pale in

comparison to the fact that white people refuse to have children with me because of my colour.” (Ibid:253).

This passage highlights the traumatic effects of racism on individuals, particularly in their most intimate relationships. The rejection and marginalisation that *Jamal* experiences serve as a stark reminder of the systemic and structural nature of racism, which can be devastating to individuals who are already vulnerable.

In the end, *Jamal's* traumatic experiences with racism in Kuwait lead him to return to America, a country where he hopes to find acceptance and belonging. He believes that he no longer belongs in a country that rejects him solely because of his race, and instead, he will return to a land that values diversity and equality. He says, “I no longer belong to a country that refuses to love me just because of my race... Today I return to a land that does not call me a slave but tries to deceive God by asking for forgiveness. They say that we are all slaves of God... Yes, today I will return to a nation where black people reside in the White House.” (Ibid:255).

3.5.1.7 Conclusion:

The struggles of Black characters with their identity are explored in two primary ways. Firstly, the narrative delves into the profound impact of racism on their sense of self in America, including the societal beauty standards that threaten their self-image. Secondly, it highlights the exacerbation of their identity crisis in Kuwaiti society, as well as their involvement in the fight for equality and justice in a society dominated by a White narrative that perpetuates harmful stereotypes and prejudices.

While Kuwaiti and American societies differ in their expressions of racism and identity crises, the novel makes the point that the common thread between them is the destructive impact of biased preconceptions on black individuals. These preconceptions are rooted in a struggle between two narratives, each vying for dominance over the other. Despite the fact that black characters outnumber white characters in the novel and play significant roles, the story suggests that individual efforts alone are insufficient to overcome systemic racism. The white narrative is deeply ingrained and requires a collective effort to dismantle it and bring about radical change to cultural and economic structures. The novel highlights how cultural stereotypes embedded in society shape the worldview of the black community, obscuring their understanding of racism as a deeply ingrained structural issue.

Ultimately, the novel underscores the notion that racism is a deeply entrenched systemic issue that necessitates comprehensive and systemic solutions, rather than isolated incidents or individual actions. While the family's decision to return to America may be disappointing in the Kuwaiti context, the novel's larger message lies in the idea that individuals can transcend societal standards and fantasies, which are ultimately just fictionalised narratives created by one group to dominate and exploit another. As the author so eloquently opens her novel, it is possible to break free from these narratives and forge one's own identity, untethered from the constraints of societal expectations.

3.5.2 Ali al-Muqri's Novel *Ta'am Aswād, Ra'eha Swada*:

3.5.2.1 Preview:

The novel shines a spotlight on the *Akhdam* community, Yemen's former black slaves, and their arduous journey towards freedom, equality, and justice. By centering the experiences of black characters, the novel seeks to illuminate the obstacles they face and the cultural clashes they encounter with the dominant societal norms, which are rooted in the pernicious ideology of "white supremacy". The novel challenges the notion that this ideology, touted as a means of "liberation of slaves" by Yemeni authorities during that era, is nothing more than a false narrative. The novel's central theme, in this context, is the black community's reliance on white saviours, which is exemplified by the Yemeni president who promised to rescue former black slaves from destruction.

The novel attains this goal through two distinct paths. Firstly, the narrative provides a platform for marginalised voices to express their frustrations towards the racist system, which is deeply ingrained in society's structures, stereotypes, and legal and educational systems. This approach gives voice to the often-overlooked experiences of the *Akhdam* community. Secondly, the novel introduces an educated figure from the white community called "Ambo" who chooses to side with the black community and sacrifices himself to defend their rights. This character's actions serve as a symbol of solidarity and a testament to the importance of challenging systemic racism. The novel's portrayal of this character's sacrifice serves as a powerful reminder that true change can only be achieved through collective efforts and a commitment to creating a more just society.

By combining these two approaches, the author delves deeper into the trauma and frustration faced by the black community, revealing the devastating impact of systemic racism on their lives. The narrative ultimately conveys a sense of hopelessness and despair, as the black community feels that their efforts to reform society are futile. The author's ultimate goal is to empower the black community by moving them from the margins to the centre of the narrative. This means dismantling the dominant white narrative and the structures that underpin it. The novel suggests that without achieving this, the sacrifices made by black individuals, no matter how significant, will ultimately be in vain. The author's aim is to break down the barriers that have prevented the black community from achieving true equality and justice, and to create a more just and equitable society.

The novel features a total of 60 characters, regardless of their significance to the plot, as illustrated in the figure below. Among these, 39 are Black individuals, encompassing both males

and females, making up the majority, while there are 21 white characters. The second figure demonstrates the ratio of Black to white characters.

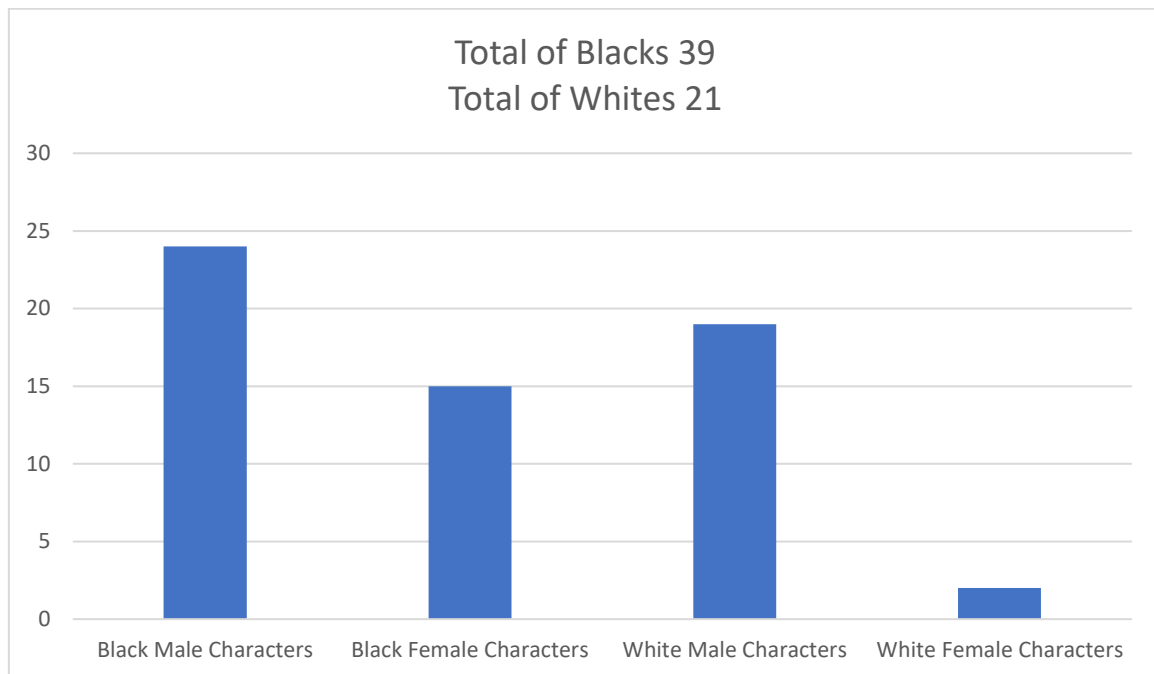


**Figure 3.5.2.1 (a): The Total Number of Black and White Characters of *Ta'am Aswād*,
*Ra'eha Swada***

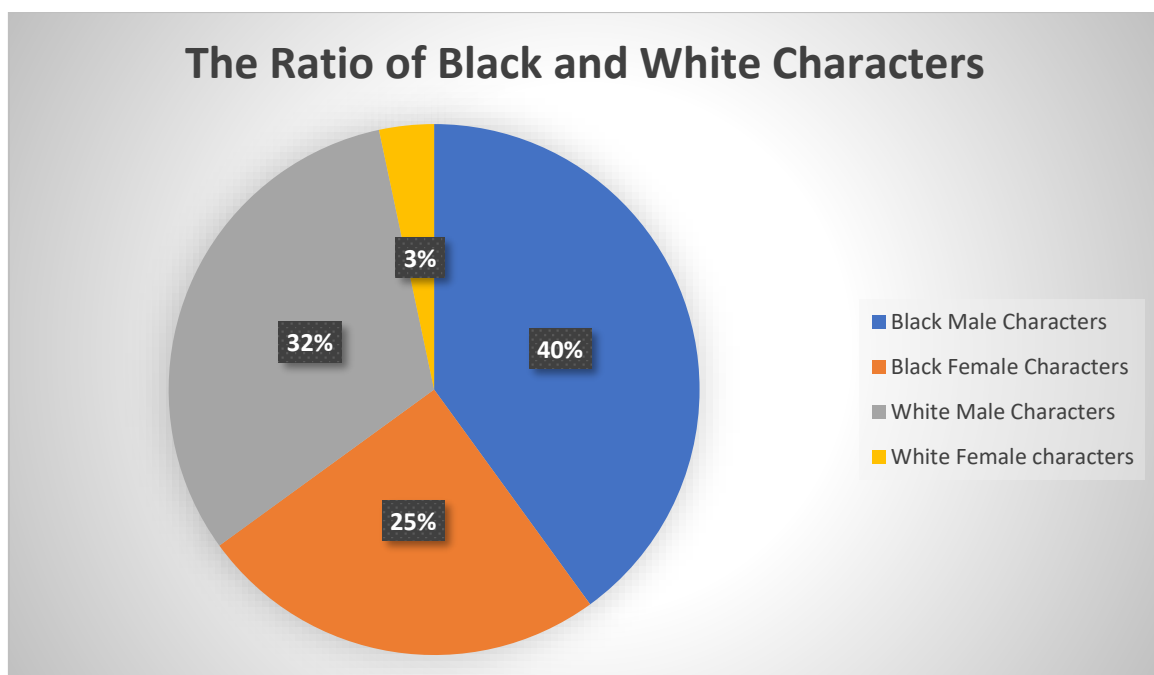


Figure 3.5.2.1 (b): The Ratio of Black and White Characters of *Ta'am Aswād, Ra'eha Swada*

The figures presented reflect the diversity of the characters in the novel, particularly highlighting the predominance of Black characters, who make up a significant majority at 39 out of 60. This suggests an emphasis on Black experiences and perspectives within the narrative. The second figure, showing the ratio of Black to white characters, further emphasises this disparity and indicates themes related to racial dynamics in the story. Overall, the figures provide insight into the re-presentation of race and the potential focus on racial issues within the novel.

3.5.2.2 Black Characters split on Notions of “White Ideology”

If we start with the first approach in which black characters played a role in exposing and refuting the idea of “white supremacy” and the white narrative behind it, the story takes us directly to the heart of the battle. For example, *Sorour*, in his heroic cultural role, addresses the discussion of the ideology of “white supremacy” with the aim of refuting it in many situations, as he says in the context of exposing the plans of the authorities: “This is the talk of an Ambo [white]... They say this and disagree about whether we are of African or Yemeni origin... Or were we created from mankind or jinn... Did God create us or Satan... Let them say what they want to say... Let them say that we were created or even came from the hole of this donkey. It does not matter to us; we do not care if we are of gold or disgusting origins.” (al-Muqri, 2011:83)

Sorour's initial optimism is shattered when he realises that “white supremacy” has ultimately prevailed over the black struggle. He expresses his resignation with a tone of defeat, saying, “We slaves, even if we want to own something, it is as if we are trying to own our right to slavery. We have documents and contracts that give us the right to serve Ambo. We fight among ourselves over who will have the lead to receive this honour.” (Ibid:84)

In a poignant moment, *Bahja*, a left-wing black figure, laments the passing of President Salem Rabie, known as “Salmeen” who was revered as the “liberator of slaves” *Bahja* mourns the president's death, remembering how he brought dignity to the black community during his reign: “Salem freed the slaves and raised their heads for the first time. During his reign, no one treated us as imperfect slaves. If someone insulted us, we would report him, and they would put him in prison immediately.” (Ibid:88)

However, *Sorour* intervenes to correct *Bahja's* naivety, revealing the harsh reality of their situation. He says, “They employ us and then leave us with nothing for hundreds of years and

then easily say that they will integrate us into society. Should we applaud the state while we live in filth? Why should we? We follow these Ambo even if we want to be free? Don't we have the right to choose the form of our freedom?" (Ibid: 88-9)

As shown in the above passages, the novel's re-presentation of the white community, as embodied by the Yemeni president offers a biting critique of the ideology of "white supremacy" and its detrimental consequences for black individuals. The negative depiction of this community and its characters serves to underscore the pervasive nature of racism, which perpetuates systems of oppression and dehumanises black people. *Sorour's* character exemplifies this critique, as his initial confidence and sense of empowerment are brutally shattered when he comes to realise that "white supremacy" has ultimately prevailed over the black struggle. His statement, "We are slaves, even if we want to own something, it is as if we are trying to own our right to slavery," powerfully illustrates how racism can reduce black people to a state of powerlessness and hopelessness, stripping them of their agency and dignity.

These passages highlight the deep-seated conflict that can arise among black individuals when it comes to the actions and policies of white leaders, as seen in the contrasting views of *Sorour* and *Bahja*. While *Sorour* perceives the Yemeni president's regime as an example of exploitation at its worst, *Bahja*, a black leftist, sees it as a potential source of liberation. Her lament over the death of President Salem Rabie serves as a poignant reminder of how even well-intentioned efforts at reform can ultimately be co-opted by the dominant power structure. *Bahja's* words, "We want someone who respects us like us, respects our culture, respects our colour, and respects our black taste. And our black smell," (Ibid:88) show her profound faith in the president's promises and policies towards black people.

However, *Sorour's* intervention serves as a harsh correction to *Bahja's* naivety, revealing the brutal reality of their situation. He argues that even when integrated into society, blacks are still treated as inferior and expected to be grateful for scraps from the table. His statement, "Should we applaud the state while we live in filth? Why should we?", is a powerful indictment of the systems of oppression that perpetuate racism and highlights the need for radical change.

The disagreement between *Bahja* and *Sorour* exemplifies the divisions that can arise among black individuals when it comes to their leaders and the promises they make. Despite living in the same environment, they hold vastly different views based on their individual experiences and perspectives. However, *Sorour's* depiction of the harsh reality of black life ultimately

outweighs *Bahja's* more optimistic outlook, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of racism and oppression.

3.5.2.3 The Hypocrisy of White Characters

Following the internal conflict among blacks, the author employs another scene to satirically expose the hypocrisy of white figures, as exemplified by clerics. A sheikh visits the black slum, delivering a lecture on the importance of equality, while the community struggles to access basic necessities such as clean water. The hypocrisy is palpable, and *Aisha*, another black character, is quick to point out the absurdity of the situation. She sarcastically remarks, "He didn't tell them how to clean themselves when they don't have water, soap, or bathrooms, or how not to steal or beg when they don't have anything to eat?" (Ibid:96-7)

Aisha's words are a scathing critique of the sheikh's superficial moralising, highlighting the fact that empty words about equality are meaningless without tangible actions to support the community's basic needs. Her statement serves as a powerful indictment of the classist and racist systems that perpetuate poverty and oppression. The sheikh's visit is a stark reminder that even those who claim to advocate for social justice often ignore or downplay the most pressing issues faced by marginalised communities. This stark contrast between the sheikh's words and the harsh reality of the black community serves as a powerful commentary on the empty rhetoric of white leaders. The scene is a masterful critique of the performative nature of moral platitudes, where white figures use grandiose language to mask their complicity in maintaining systems of oppression. The sheikh's visit is a symbolic reminder that even those who claim to advocate for equality often fail to acknowledge or address the tangible struggles faced by black people. The juxtaposition of his words with the community's desperate need for basic amenities such as clean water highlights the profound disconnect between rhetoric and reality and serves as a scathing indictment of the systemic injustices that perpetuate racial inequality.

The author further dissects the facade of white characters, this time targeting the notion of the "white saviour" complex. According to *Sorour*, these individuals present themselves as liberators, rescuing the oppressed from the suffering of history, geography, and injustice (Ibid:101). However, *Sorour* reveals the game played by white politicians: "They delayed this until the proletarian class realised that its interests were linked to the conditions of transformation... But what is the role of slaves in the political game if their class interests in the future were conditional on achieving almost impossible conditions?" (Ibid: 101).

By juxtaposing the clergy's empty rhetoric with the community's struggles and exposing the ulterior motives behind white politicians' actions, the author masterfully exposes the hypocrisy and manipulation that perpetuates racial oppression. The "white saviour" complex is revealed as a tool of control, where white figures present themselves as benevolent benefactors while exploiting and maintaining the status quo. The author's critique highlights the ways in which this narrative silences and erases the agency and experiences of marginalised communities, reinforcing systemic racism and inequality.

3.5.2.4 White Character Supporting Black Causes

To complicate the narrative and challenge dominant narratives of racial power, the author skilfully employs the character of *Ambo*, a white intellectual with a deep understanding of the black experience, to subvert the conventional "white saviour" trope. This narrative choice not only adds depth to the story but also amplifies the credibility of the black characters' perspectives, allowing their voices to be heard more effectively. By presenting a white character who actively advocates for black issues, the author challenges readers to confront the ways in which systemic racism and exclusion are perpetuated by white people, ultimately encouraging a more nuanced understanding of the complex power dynamics at play. Instead, *Ambo* becomes intimately connected with the black community through his relationship with *al-Doglu*, a black woman, and they flee together to the *Akhdam* Ghetto. By merging with the community, *Ambo* becomes a defender of their rights, alongside his black wife, and encourages the slave community to resist marginalisation. For example, during Rabash's trial, the crowd begins to chant against the *Akhdam*, accusing them of being traitors to their country, religion, and traditions. One of the onlookers' shouts, pointing to *Sorour*: "This is a traitor! The servant is a traitor! Sentence him to death." (Ibid:8) However, *Ambo* intervenes to defend the *Akhdam*, revealing that the courts system in Taiz do not recognise them as human beings. He says, "The court doesn't usually allow the *Akhdam* to enter unless it's to attend sessions held to try their families. They enter it only when they accept as servants there, sweeping the halls and rooms." (Ibid:10)

In another example, *Ambo's* words convey his frustration and worry about the deplorable living conditions of black people who are forced to dwell in squalor and neglect. He points out that white authorities do not bother to seek permission from the *Akhdam* before razing their homes and clearing the land for construction projects. *Ambo* questions the legitimacy of these actions,

asking: "Will they compensate them with other habitable buildings in preparation for their integration into society, as is often claimed?" (Ibid: 118).

Ambo's statement highlights the stark power imbalance between the dominant white population and the marginalised *Akhdam* community. The fact that whites feel entitled to demolish *Akhdam* homes without permission or consultation underscores the systemic oppression and disregard for the well-being of black people. The question about compensation and integration is a poignant critique of the empty promises made by those in power, who claim to be working towards a more equitable society while perpetuating policies that further marginalise and dispossess already vulnerable communities.

3.5.2.5 The Adverse Re-presentation of Black Characters

Despite *Ambo's* significant role as a symbol of white solidarity with the black community in the fight for freedom, the novel perpetuates harmful stereotypes through his numerous sexual relationships with black women. The narrator portrays the black community's supposed obsession with lust, implying that they have no agency beyond their sexual desires and are prone to betraying their families. This is evident in *Ambo's* relationships with multiple black women, including *Jamala*, *al-Duglo*, and *'Aisha*. The narrative begins with *Ambo's* relationship with *Jamala*, who becomes pregnant with his child when he is just nine years old. After she is accused of adultery and stoned to death under Sharia law, *Ambo* then turns to *Jamala's* sister *al-Duglo*, with whom he lives in a black slum neighbourhood. Meanwhile, he is married to *al-Duglo*, yet continues to engage in a sexual relationship with the sister of his comrade *Sorour*.

The novel's depiction of these relationships is problematic, as *Ambo's* narration objectifies and fetishizes the women he encounters. In one particularly disturbing passage, *Ambo* describes *Aisha* as "she led me to her house, where she seemed to have complete control over me... Despite my attempts to resist her intense passion, I soon found myself succumbing to her temptations. She quickly undressed, consumed by insatiable lust. Her kisses were fervent so intense that I felt like he was trying to eat my face (Ibid: 65-6).

This re-presentation reinforces harmful stereotypes about black women's sexuality and agency, reducing them to mere objects of desire rather than complex individuals. Overall, the novel's portrayal of *Ambo's* relationships with black women perpetuates damaging stereotypes and reinforces harmful power dynamics.

One pervasive and problematic trope in the narrative is the depiction of Black people as being excessively fond of drinking and consuming heavy local brews. This stereotype is problematic because it reinforces harmful and inaccurate assumptions about Black people's relationship with substance use, reducing their agency and cultural practices to a singular characteristic. By perpetuating this stereotype, the narrative risks reinforcing harmful biases and reinforcing negative stereotypes about Black people, which can contribute to systemic racism and discrimination. It also overlooks the diversity and complexity of Black cultures and experiences, instead relying on tired and overused tropes. The author reinforces this stereotype with a scene that portrays a gathering of black neighbours celebrating Ambo's new home, where they indulge in large quantities of local alcohol, "fasakh" accompanied by traditional music, dancing, and drugs. The scene describes a crowded area in front of *Ambo's* house, filled with people from the slum, including women, men, and children, gathered around a lantern lit by kerosene. Some are seated near the DJ playing music, while others are leisurely sipping local alcohol from plastic cups (Ibid:58).

The re-presentation of Black people's excessive drinking habits in the narrative can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and reinforce negative attitudes towards the Black community in several ways: (1) Reinforcing harmful racial biases: This stereotype perpetuates the notion that Black people are inherently prone to excessive drinking, which is a damaging and inaccurate representation. It reinforces harmful racial biases and stereotypes, contributing to systemic racism and discrimination. (2) Promoting pity and condescension: By portraying Black people as excessively fond of drinking, the narrative may encourage readers to feel sorry for them, rather than understanding and respecting their agency and autonomy. This can lead to patronising attitudes towards Black people, reinforcing harmful paternalism. (3) Reducing complex issues to a single characteristic: The stereotype oversimplifies the experiences and struggles of Black people, reducing their complexity to a single trait (excessive drinking). This ignores the systemic issues facing the Black community, such as poverty, racism, and lack of opportunities, and instead focuses on a perceived personal failing. (4) Exoticizing and othering: The stereotype can also exoticize and other Black people, reducing them to a caricature or a "type" rather than recognising their humanity and individuality. This can contribute to a sense of separation and distance between the reader and the Black characters, rather than promoting empathy and understanding. (5) Ignoring historical trauma: The portrayal of excessive drinking as a problem unique to the Black community ignores the historical trauma and stressors that many Black

people have faced due to systemic racism, slavery, and ongoing discrimination. This can be seen as dismissive of the very real struggles faced by Black people.

The novel also reinforces the stereotype surrounding the relationship between black individuals and jinn, a mythical notion often utilised to justify racist and discriminatory views toward people of African descent. This novel contributes to the belief in this connection. Folklore, such as the tale of King Shamsan and barber Margan, suggests that slaves originated from relationships between jinn and humans (Ibid:13-18). In one of these tales recounted by *Ambo* to his girlfriend *Jamalah*, a black boy falls in love with a fairy girl. Despite their mutual recognition and desire to marry, their parents refuse their union. After years of disapproval, they flee to a distant land where their identities remain unknown. There, they have children, but both the human and fairy communities reject them, viewing them as inferior and relegating them to roles as barbers and cleaners (Ibid:16). In another scene, *Jamalah* articulates her belief that, due to her black identity, she is akin to a jinni. During an intimate moment with *Ambo*, her initial question to him is, "Aren't you afraid of jinn?" (Ibid: 17). This concern stems from the belief that any white person who engages with a black woman will have their body transformed into worms (Ibid:18).

The perpetuation of the stereotype of the relationship between blacks and jinn in the narrative has far-reaching consequences, perpetuating harmful racist beliefs about black inferiority, their supposed connection to evil forces, and their association with the supernatural. This reinforces negative attitudes towards black people, contributes to systemic racism, and justifies discriminatory treatment towards people of African descent throughout history. Moreover, the novel's depiction of *Jamalah* as possibly supernatural or otherworldly reinforces the notion that blacks are fundamentally "different" from whites, creating a sense of separation and distance between the reader and black characters.

This can undermine empathy and understanding, instead promoting harmful stereotypes. By reducing black experiences and identities to a single trope (association with jinn), the novel ignores the complexity and diversity of black cultures, histories, and experiences. This perpetuates harmful power dynamics, as *Ambo's* fear of being turned into a worm can be seen as a metaphor for the historical and ongoing power imbalance between whites and blacks, where white concerns are prioritised over black ones. Furthermore, the narrow range of models represented in the novel (excessive sex, heavy drinking, and association with evil or supernatural forces) contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes and reinforces harmful attitudes towards black people. By re-presenting these limited re-presentations as re-presentative of black

experiences and identities, the novel inadvertently reinforces harmful stereotypes and perpetuates racist beliefs.

3.5.2.6 The Positive Re-presentation of Black Characters

In stark contrast to the novel's problematic re-presentation of black characters, there are moments of redemption where they are portrayed in a positive light. The narrative shines a spotlight on the resilience and determination of the black community and its members as they confront and challenge racist and discriminatory treatment, as well as the underlying societal structures that perpetuate inequality. One notable example is the character of *Sorour*, dubbed “the most cultured black in the slum.” (Ibid:100). His impressive literacy, familiarity with Marxist theory, and experience in the Communist Party enable him to dismantle the “white saviour” narrative intellectually and culturally.

In a powerful conversation about the dire fate of former black slaves in Yemen, *Sorour* delivers a biting commentary: “Taxidermy a model of a slave, put it in a glass in a museum, and then let the rest of them go extinct.” (Ibid:118) He sarcastically suggests that instead of being forced to adapt to a white dominant narrative, they should be allowed to evolve into something more fitting, such as insects or rodents (pp. 118-119).

The significance of this passage lies in *Sorour's* scathing commentary and biting sarcasm, which exposes the absurdity and injustice of the situation. By proposing to “mummify” black people and display them in a museum as a testament to their marginalised past, present, and future, *Sorour* critiques the empty promises made by whites to blacks, suggesting that they are simply trying to absolve themselves of their responsibility for perpetuating oppression. He argues that instead of being forced to conform to the dominant white narrative, the black community should be allowed to forge its own identity and culture. Through his use of dark humour, *Sorour* conveys the deep-seated frustration and anger that arises from centuries of oppression and marginalisation. However, he also offers a powerful message of empowerment, insisting that the black community has the agency to choose its own path and refuse to be bound by the norms imposed upon them. Moreover, *Sorour's* suggestion that “evolving” into something like insects or rodents might be a more liberating option than being trapped in a system that seeks to erase their identity subverts the traditional notion of progress and development. This commentary not only highlights *Sorour's* intellectual prowess but also showcases his resilience and resistance to oppressive systems, making him a compelling and complex character in the novel.

3.5.2.7 Conclusion:

In conclusion, the novel presents a stark contrast between black and white representations, highlighting the pervasive nature of racism and its detrimental consequences for black individuals. The re-presentation of white characters serves to critique the ideology of “white supremacy” and its role in perpetuating systems of oppression. The negative depiction of white characters, such as the sheikh and politicians, exposes their hypocrisy and manipulation, revealing the empty rhetoric and ulterior motives behind their words.

In contrast, the novel's portrayal of black characters is problematic, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reinforcing negative attitudes towards the black community. The depiction of black women as objects of desire, the emphasis on their supposed lustful nature, and the reinforcement of stereotypes about excessive drinking habits all contribute to a narrative that is damaging and inaccurate. These re-presentations risk reinforcing harmful biases and stereotypes, contributing to systemic racism and discrimination. The novel's use of *Ambo*, a white intellectual who advocates for black rights, serves to challenge dominant narratives of racial power, and encourage a more nuanced understanding of the complex power dynamics at play. However, this character's numerous sexual relationships with black women reinforce harmful stereotypes about black women's agency and sexuality.

Ultimately, the novel presents a complex and multifaceted portrayal of racism, highlighting both the devastating consequences of systemic oppression and the need for change. While it falls short in its representation of black characters, it serves as a powerful critique of white privilege and its role in perpetuating inequality. The novel encourages readers to confront the ways in which racism is perpetuated by white people and to work towards creating a more just and equitable society.

3.5.3 Khalid al-Bassam's Novel *Thaman al-Milh*:

3.5.3.1 Preview:

The novel sheds light on the struggles and injustices faced by enslaved black African communities, highlighting the unfair treatment they receive and the impact of race, gender, and class on their lives. Through the experiences of black characters and their interactions with white characters, the novel exposes the ideology of “white supremacy” by illustrating the black characters' dependence on white characters for their freedom from slavery. The novel demonstrates this through two primary methods. Firstly, it explores the romantic relationships between black domestic workers and their white masters, portraying sexuality as a reflection of the societal and economic structures in which they live. This approach also underscores the black characters' constant need to assist the white characters in order to secure their freedom.

Secondly, the novel presents the character of the English consul, who re-presents the British Empire in Manama, as both an occupier and a saviour who seeks to end slavery in the country. This portrayal is situated within the context of the “white narrative” where the prohibition of slavery is seen as a key aspect of colonial powers' discourse of salvation. The novel also highlights the influence of colonial powers in creating hierarchical racism based on class and skin colour, revealing a dubious alliance between colonised slave owners and foreign colonisers. In the context, the author draws on previously undisclosed documents from the British archives, including secret correspondence between the British Ministry of Intelligence and the British Consulate in Manama, to shed light on the motivations behind the British Consul's prominent role in promoting and perpetuating the ideology of “white supremacy”.

By combining the two approaches, the author presents a nuanced portrayal of the joint struggle for freedom between black and white individuals, while also highlighting the distinct perspectives and understandings of freedom held by each group. The novel also explores the profound impact of racial oppression on the identity of enslaved Africans, demonstrating how their standards of beauty are often turned upside down in service to the perpetuation of stereotypes that reinforce white dominance. Furthermore, the novel reveals the ways in which social, economic, and cultural inequalities are perpetuated across generations, shaping individual choices and convictions. This is particularly evident in situations where poverty and lack of livelihood push individuals to seek escape through slavery, which may be seen as a cruel form of oppression by some, but as a means of liberation by others. This ambivalence highlights the complexity of historical events and the need for nuanced understanding of the past.

By presenting multiple perspectives and experiences of characters, the novel encourages readers to consider the multifaceted nature of freedom and slavery, and to question dominant narratives that often present a simplified or binary view of these issues.

Out of the 71 characters referenced in the novel, the majority—45—are Black. This reflects the novel's emphasis on Black African maids in early twentieth-century Bahrain, who re-present the largest group of female characters, totalling 24, as illustrated in Figure 1. Figure 2 depicts the ratio of Black to white characters.

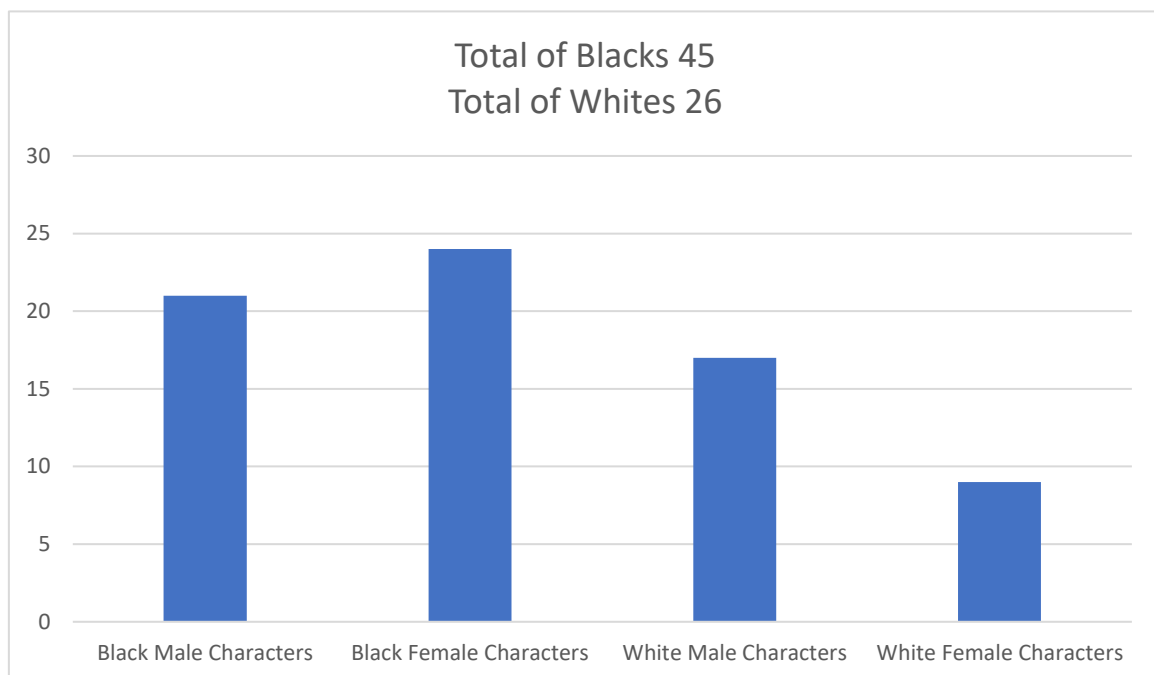


Figure 3.5.3.1 (a): The Total Number of Black and White Characters of *Thaman al-Milh*

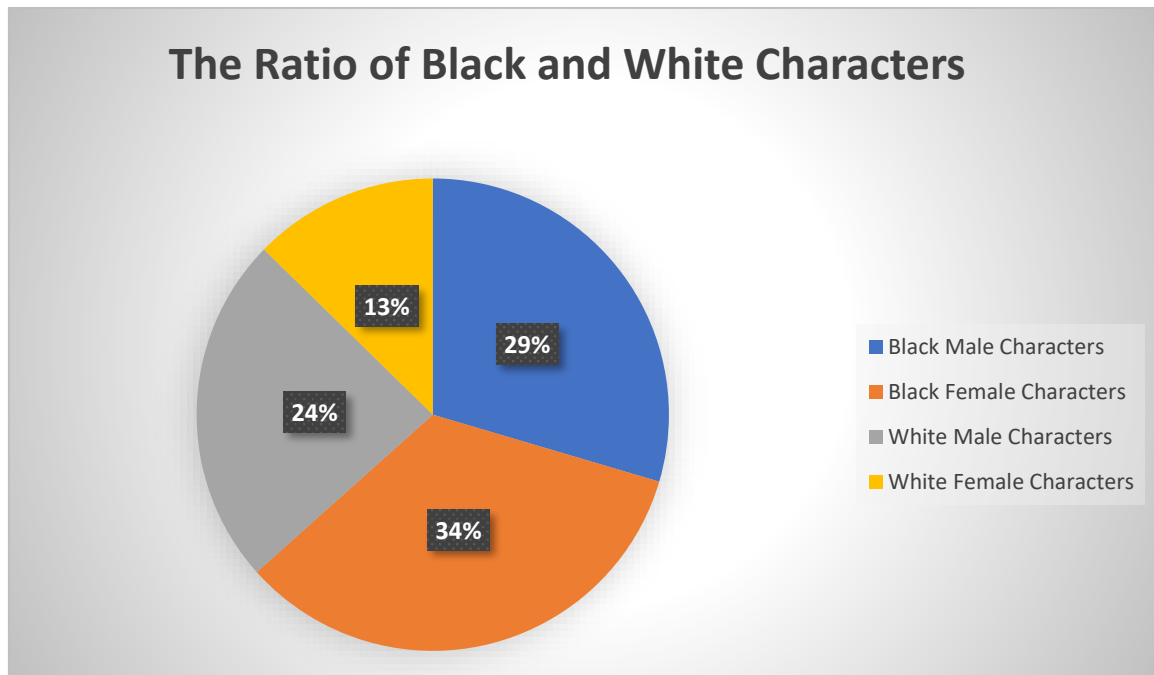


Figure 3.5.3.1 (b): The Ratio of Black and White Characters of *Thaman al-Milh*

The above figures reflect the demographic re-presentation of characters in the novel, highlighting a significant focus on Black African maids during the early twentieth century in Bahrain. Figure 1 illustrates that Black women constitute the largest group of female characters, underlining their centrality to the narrative. Figure 2, showing the ratio of Black to white characters, further emphasises the disparity in re-presentation and possibly signifies the novel's exploration of race and social dynamics during that time period.

In our analysis of the novel, we will now turn our attention to examining scenes that depict re-presentations of white and black characters. By closely reading these scenes, we aim to identify and highlight any differences in the re-presentation of these characters, with the goal of gaining a deeper understanding of the novel's re-presentation of race and its potential implications.

5.3.3.2 The Adverse Re-presentation of Black Characters:

The novel's re-presentation of romantic relationships between characters is striking, particularly in its depiction of the complex relationships between black slaves and white masters. Two significant relationships unfold simultaneously, showcasing both the negative connotations surrounding black re-presentation and the positive connotations surrounding white re-presentation. The first relationship is that between *Muza*, a white mistress, and *Salem*, her black servant, while the second is between *'Abda*, another black slave, and her lover *Barakat*, a free white individual.

First, there is the narrative of *Muza*, a young widow, and her enslaved black lover, *Salem*. This is followed by the romantic relationship between *'Abda*, an enslaved black woman, and *Barakat*, the wealthy young son of the Imam. These relationships are woven with elements of race, gender, and class.

3.5.3.3 Slaves and Sexuality: Typical Stereotypes

In this context as we will see in some examples, the novel re-presents the sexuality of black domestic servants as excessive in both relationships, whereas the sexuality of white upper-class male characters is depicted as more subtle, emotional, and intimate. In contrast, the white upper-class women who engage in relationships with black slaves are portrayed as lustful and lacking control over their desires. For instance, *Muza*, *'Abda*'s second owner, is shown to be a woman of great beauty and charm who never married despite her wealth and social status. After her husband's death, she inherits a large house and engages in a sexual relationship with her black servant, *Salem*, to satisfy her insatiable desires. According to the novel's description, the only reason *Muza* was forced to have sex with a black slave, as one of the female slaves, *Marzouqa*, says: "Having sex with a white man like her means a scandal in our society, and a woman who desires sex must invent methods and perhaps men of another kind." (al-Bassam, 2017:160)

This passage appears to be discussing themes of societal expectations and gender roles. *Marzouqa*'s statement suggests that women who desire sex must navigate complex societal norms and find ways to accommodate their desires, potentially even resorting to alternative relationships or arrangements. This commentary raises questions about the constraints placed on women's sexuality and the ways in which societal expectations can limit their autonomy and agency. It is also worth noting that *Marzouqa*'s statement is laced with sarcasm, implying that she may be critiquing the societal norms that dictate women's sexual behaviour. This could be seen as a commentary on the oppressive nature of these norms and the ways in which they can restrict women's choices and freedom.

Nevertheless, in contrast, the black slave woman, *'Abda*, is re-presented, as we will note in the following passages, as purely erotic in her relationship dynamics. This re-presentation highlights the power dynamics at play in these relationships and raises questions about the agency and autonomy of the black characters. In her account of the relationship between *Salem* and *Muza*, *'Abda* first mentions overhearing "unknown sounds" and "strange noises" emanating from *Muza*'s bedroom (ibid:158). These descriptions imply that the interracial sexual encounter

between the white-skinned mistress and the black enslaved man is portrayed as an exotic and primitive act. Indeed, in the context of the passage, the descriptions of “unknown sounds” and “strange noises” imply that the sexual encounter between *Muza* and *Salem* is unusual, unusual to the point of being almost unrecognisable or unintelligible. This kind of language can be seen as objectifying and reducing the black enslaved man to a mere spectacle, rather than treating him as a human being with agency and dignity.

‘*Abda*, who is not physically present, describes the scene as a “loud sex party” (Ibid:161), during which *Muza* appears to be surrendering to *Salem*’s advances. The narrator details *Muza*’s increasing lust and vocal expressions of pleasure, culminating in her final scream and the subsequent showering of kisses upon *Salem*’s body (Ibid:160). In one of her descriptions, ‘*Abda* recounts, “At the moment Salem entered the room, closed the door, and began to interact with Muza, I only heard Muza’s groans and screams in bed, while Salem was on top of her, shaking her violently and making her feel his masculinity.” (Ibid:160)

Muza’s submission to her enslaved lover leads to ridicule from other enslaved women, who label her as sex crazed (ibid:161). The narrative hints at this when it mentions *Muza* spreading the rumour that “Salem is castrated to quell suspicions about their affair.” (Ibid:161) *Muza* is portrayed as a promiscuous woman who has surrendered to her slave, while *Salem* is characterised by his sexual efficiency as a typical black enslaved man – tall, strong, and possessing a hyper-masculine physique. The narrator describes him as “an unmistakable man, with exceptional physical strength, and a face that differs from those of other slaves.” (Ibid:159), hinting at his proximity to handsomeness. The portrayal of *Muza* and *Salem* reinforces problematic stereotypes about race and gender, where *Muza* is depicted as promiscuous and subservient, while *Salem* embodies the hyper-masculine ideal often imposed on black men. This characterisation not only dehumanises the individuals but also perpetuates harmful tropes that fuel systemic racism and sexism.

3.5.3.4 Black Characters are Influenced by Beauty Standards

In contrast, *Barakat* is defined by his fair, standard beauty, and gentle demeanour. His light complexion is specifically what captures the attention of ‘*Abda*, a young black enslaved woman who does not seem to appreciate the beauty of darkness. She expresses,

It was his gaze that attracted me to him, honestly. The majority of fair-skinned men I’ve encountered here tend to be closer to a brown hue. But he had a truly white face, so

pristine that I could detect his fragrance from a distance. His visage is radiant and adorned with a full moustache that enhances his attractiveness. His eyes are wide, resembling those of a woman. His nose is delicate, and his hair is luxuriously soft (Ibid:139)

Barakat's appeal and masculinity in this context are portrayed as a result of his social status and skin colour. This portrayal stands in stark contrast to the hypersexualised dynamic between *Salem* and *Muza*. *Salem* communicates only through "strange sounds" while *Barakat* engages in conversations about love, desires, and shares stories with 'Abda. Although their relationship is also based on physical intimacy, *Barakat* is depicted as a kind and gentle partner. The terms used to describe their relationship differ significantly from the raw sensuality of *Muza* and *Salem's* affair. With *Barakat*, it is characterised by a blend of romance, closeness, and lovemaking. During their initial sexual encounter, which takes place in a secluded boat in the middle of the sea away from prying eyes, *Barakat* treats 'Abda with kindness and tenderness. She recalls, "He took my hands and embraced me so warmly that I willingly allowed him to take the lead without hesitation." (Ibid:166). 'Abda describes her emotions towards him as "love's ecstasy" with their physical intimacy viewed as a way to nourish the body with affection (Ibid:167). In a considerate gesture, he ensures her satisfaction, asking if she enjoyed the experience. 'Abda's sexuality, however, is depicted as carnal and instinctual, akin to *Salem's*. She uses the term "shabaq" to express her sexual nature, a word in Arabic associated with primal sexual instincts devoid of emotional attachment (Ibid:167).

3.5.3.5 Whiteness Bolsters the Self-esteem of Black Characters

At the opposite end of the spectrum, these interracial and cross-class relationships are seen as a means of empowerment for servants, particularly when they are treated with kindness and respect by their upper-class partners. In the novel, 'Abda's romantic involvement with *Barakat* appears to boost her self-assurance. Being courted by a wealthy, white man makes her feel attractive and wanted. The chains of servitude begin to loosen as their relationship progresses. 'Abda speaks of feeling liberated and like a normal woman because of their connection, prompting her to seek her own freedom. She reflects,

For the first time, I realised that slaves experience pleasures just like their masters, and that a female slave is no different from other women in the world. The desire exists within them, but they are often deprived and constrained in their actions (Ibid:167)

However, the conclusion of this relationship is not hopeful, as *'Abda* comes to understand that societal hierarchies are more rigid than she had initially believed. The ending of the story is open-ended but lacks any sense of optimism regarding this romance.

Moreover, the novel highlights the pernicious effects of “white supremacy” through the dynamic between *'Abda*, a slave, and *Barakat*, a white man. *'Abda*'s character is defined by her reliance on *Barakat*, leveraging their intimate relationship to secure her freedom. The novel underscores this power imbalance by depicting *'Abda*'s inability to find solutions on her own, instead seeking help from *Barakat*. *'Abda*'s failed attempt to enter the governorship headquarters alone prompts her to return to *Barakat*, begging for assistance. *Barakat*'s suggestion that they feign a master-slave relationship to gain access to the officials is a stark illustration of the racial power dynamics at play. He tells her, “At least when entering the gate, we make them feel that I am a master, and you are my slave.” (Ibid:193). As a result, *'Abda* is able to enter the headquarters and meet with an Indian employee at the consulate, who promises her the emancipation document. However, it takes *Barakat*'s intervention – after a two-month delay – to secure the emancipation document from the British authorities (p. 203). This reinforces the idea that even in moments of freedom, slaves like *'Abda* are still subject to the whims of their former oppressors.

Overall, the novel re-presents the insidious nature of “white supremacy”, highlighting how even those fighting for their freedom can be constrained by the power dynamics at play in their relationships with others.

3.5.3.6 The Positive Re-presentation of White Characters:

The second approach in which the idea of “white supremacy” was reinforced is through re-presenting the British consul and his aides, as well as His Majesty's Government, as a saviour who would liberate the slaves in the country. This implies that the enslaved individuals are unable to free themselves or even their Arab enslavers, who practice slavery with impunity despite repeated warnings and appeals from the authorities. The British government's repeated demands to stop the slave trade, as documented in a series of letters, agreements, and protocols (Ibid: 87-92), further reinforce the dominant narrative of the coloniser as liberator.

3.5.3.7 The Coloniser as a “Liberator” and “Saviour” of Black Individuals

Here we will choose some examples to demonstrate the dominance of the re-presentation of the coloniser as “liberator”. The novel's reinforcement of the “white saviour” complex is exemplified in several instances. One notable example is the opening scene in the first chapter,

where the British consul and his staff celebrate with a large number of Western guests at the British headquarters in Manama. The British Governor, Colonel Robinson, delivers a speech that sets the tone for the narrative: "Happy New Year to all. Drink to Britain's splendid greatness and to its protectors of backward and miserable countries." (Ibid:9). This speech embodies the idea of the Western saviour, who sees themselves as on an "apostolic" mission to rescue "backward and miserable" countries from their perceived inferiority.

The narrative then delves into the details of the British Navy's operations in the region, ostensibly aimed at freeing slaves. However, a closer examination reveals that these efforts often result in re-enslavement rather than genuine "liberation". For instance, when local police apprehend runaway slaves at the home of a prominent slave broker, the case is quickly settled at the governor's headquarters. The broker is forced to agree not to sell them in Bahrain, but instead buys two of them as servants. The remaining slaves are deported to Karachi to work at low wages, as per an agreement with the King's government in India (Ibid:13). This episode illustrates how the British notion of "liberation" often meant merely relocating enslaved individuals to work in other parts of their colonial empire, perpetuating systems of exploitation and oppression.

The narrator's decision to highlight the secret correspondence between the British Ministry of Intelligence and the British Consulate in Manama provides crucial insight into the motivations behind the British Consul's prominent role in perpetuating the idea of "white supremacy". The British government's efforts to promote a positive image of its anti-slavery efforts in the region are evident in these secret reports. For instance, a report sent by British intelligence to the consul on March 3, 1905, describes a ship seized by the British Navy near Dubai, carrying over 80 slaves, including women and children, as "a living example of the atrocities committed by the Arabs in the region." (Ibid:88). This report frames the slave trade as a brutal and widespread practice perpetuated by Arab enslavers, while portraying the British Navy as a heroic force that is working to put an end to this "atrociousness". By highlighting such reports, the narrator sheds light on the ways in which the British government used its anti-slavery rhetoric to promote a narrative of Western superiority and moral righteousness, while downplaying its own complicity in maintaining systems of exploitation and oppression.

3.5.3.8 The White British as Self-Proclaimed Champions of Freedom and Justice

The novel further highlights the contrast between the humanity of the British occupiers and the dehumanisation of enslaved individuals through the consul's response to the same intelligence report, dated March 26, 1905. Despite his exposure to the British Empire's questionable dealings

with Gulf princes, which contradicted its public stance on combating slavery, the consul still believes that the empire is “spreading freedom and security in the world” (Ibid:91). This response reinforces the narrative's portrayal of the British as self-proclaimed champions of freedom and justice, while downplaying their complicity in maintaining systems of exploitation.

The novel also employs letters from enslaved individuals to the British embassy, detailing their painful experiences and seeking freedom (Ibid:169-174). These letters provide a glimpse into the daily struggles of enslaved people in Bahrain, who would often gather at the British governor's gate in hopes of obtaining their freedom. The heroine of the novel, *'Abda* is a prime example of this, as she seeks emancipation from her enslavement through the British. However, during her interview at the consulate, she requests permission to marry freely if she obtains the emancipation document, and the Indian employee responds affirmatively,

This is a significant concession from the British government, bestowed upon the enslaved people of the Gulf region, who are still trapped in the shackles of slavery and the oppression of their white masters. It is a testament to the British government's unwavering commitment to freedom and its efforts to eradicate the scourge of slavery from the world (Ibid:200)

This exchange highlights the limited nature of freedom granted by the British government, as it only extends to individual liberation, rather than addressing the systemic oppression and exploitation that perpetuated slavery. The Indian employee's statement can be seen as a commentary on the shallow nature of British benevolence, as they tout their efforts to free slaves while ignoring the broader issues of colonialism and racism.

On the other hand, the collusion between the white coloniser and the local white colonised is exemplified by the invitation of *Bin Nasri*, a Bahraini slave owner, to “merchants, princes, and important British figures” at his house (Ibid:62). *Bin Nasri's* wife reveals that the purpose of the party was to showcase his “best servants and slaves” in Bahrain (Ibid:60), suggesting that the primary goal was to demonstrate his ownership and control over these individuals. The guests included prominent British figures, including the British Governor *Robinson* and the commander of his navy (Ibid: 65), underscoring the close relationships between the colonial powers and their local collaborators.

This re-presentation highlights the Eurocentric perspective that underlies the novel, where the British are depicted as the heroes who will bring freedom and justice to those enslaved, while

the Arab enslavers are portrayed as uncaring and oppressive. By emphasising the consul's role as saviour, the novel reinforces the idea that Western powers are responsible for saving non-Western societies from themselves, rather than recognising their own complicity in perpetuating systems of oppression.

Considering other examples of beauty standards and the extent of the development or backwardness of the black community and its characters, the work's portrayal of black characters and their communities was not immune to the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes, which contributed to the reinforcement of black inferiority.

The novel highlights the paradox of reinforcing the supremacy of whiteness over blackness through internalised racism, as exemplified by the main character 'Abda's experiences. When 'Abda encounters her mistress 'Aisha's whiteness for the first time, she is struck by her beauty, which conforms to European standards. 'Abda begins to compare her own dark skin and curly hair to her mistress's fair skin and straight hair, wondering why God has given Aisha such beauty while she is relegated to a darker, less desirable complexion (Ibid:52). This internalised racism escalates when 'Abda has a dream in which she peels away her black skin, only to reveal white skin beneath. This disturbing image reveals 'Abda's deep-seated belief that blackness is merely a superficial layer that can be removed, revealing a more desirable whiteness beneath (Ibid:53). This belief is rooted in the notion that blackness is caused by dirt and lack of bathing, and that if this "impurity" is removed, one will become white like the rest of humanity.

On another occasion, when 'Abda meets *Barakat*, a handsome man who becomes her lover, he flirts with her for the first time, leaving her surprised and wondering why anyone would be interested in her (Ibid:138). After their first sexual encounter, she describes her joy and the pleasant feeling of being beautiful and desirable. However, her words convey a sense of unease, suggesting that it is unusual for a young black woman to be considered beautiful and desirable (Ibid:181). 'Abda's expression of her feelings implies that her beauty is despite her blackness, as if it is an anomaly that needs to be acknowledged. This internalised racism is further evident when 'Abda compares herself to white people, feeling inferior in their presence. She notes that they are free and masterful, with their own decisions and autonomy, while blacks are bound and commodified. In contrast, whites are seen as dominant and radiant, like "white dots on a black page", whereas blacks are reduced to mere "black dots" on a white page (Ibid:51).

3.5.3.9 Conclusion:

In conclusion, the novel starkly contrasts the re-presentations of black and white characters in romantic relationships. Black characters are hypersexualised, objectified, and lack agency, whereas white characters enjoy more nuanced emotional connections. *Muza*, a white mistress, exemplifies passionate involvement with her black slave, Salem, while *'Abda*, a black enslaved woman, is depicted in a purely carnal relationship with her white lover, Barakat. The power dynamics reveal white characters wielding greater agency, which persists even in moments of kindness towards black characters, underscoring their dependency on former oppressors.

The text perpetuates the “white saviour” narrative, presenting black individuals as helpless and reliant on white intervention for liberation. This undermines black agency and implies that they cannot fight for their own freedom, distorting their self-perception and beauty standards towards whiteness. Such portrayals entrench the idea that only white individuals drive change, thus reducing black characters to passive recipients of benevolence.

Conversely, British colonial powers are depicted as liberators, with the consul portrayed as a champion of freedom, reinforcing the “white saviour complex” narrative. The “white saviour” implies that white people save black people by being active agents of change, whereas black people are passive victims not capable of fighting for their own liberation. According to Cammarota,

The white saviour syndrome has the tendency to render people of color incapable of helping themselves—infantile or hapless/helpless victims who survive by instinct. People of color supposedly lack the capacity to seek change and thus become perceived as dispossessed of historical agency. Any progress or success tends to result from the succor of the white individual, which suggests that escaping poverty or ignorance happens only through the savior’s intelligence (Cammarota, 2011:244)

“White saviour” comes from the notion of “whiteness”, with “whiteness” being a form of racism based on “white supremacy”¹¹³, an ideology which assumes that white people, for one reason or another, are superior to black people. More importantly, as Dyer puts it, “as long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as human norm. other people are raced, we are just people.” (Dyer, 1997:1) The so-called “White supremacy”, then, in other words, is “a complex web of ideology,

¹¹³ According to Charles W. Mills, “white supremacy” in the context of the western society, is “the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today.” (Mills, 1997:1) And I claim this is the case in the Muslim context as the concept is discussed and examined throughout the work.

systems, privileges, and personal beliefs that creates unequal outcomes along racial lines across multiple categories of life including wealth, freedom, health, and happiness...it is collective and individual.” (Belew & Gutiérrez Ramón, 2021:5)

The novel thus presents a complex exploration of colonialism’s racial hierarchies, revealing how power dynamics shape relationships and perpetuate oppression. Ultimately, the stark contrast in re-presentations reflects historical societal attitudes and highlights colonialism's enduring legacies. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for recognising ongoing systemic oppression and working towards a more equitable society.

3.5.4 Najwa Bin Shatwan's Novel *Zarayb al-Abeed*:

3.5.4.1 Preview:

The novel delves into the complexities of identity, situated within the dichotomy of centre and margin, as well as the struggle between blackness and whiteness. On one hand, the novel presents a nuanced portrayal of enslaved black characters in Benghazi, highlighting their struggles and injustices. Conversely, it also depicts negative aspects of free white characters, showcasing their harsh treatment of black slaves driven by racial superiority. The novel's representation of characters oscillates between negative portrayals of black characters and positive re-presentations of white characters.

'*Atiqa*'s character is deeply entwined with her lineage, colour, and white heritage, leading to a conflict between blackness and whiteness that can be seen as a "war of colour and race". This suggests that the novel's portrayal of black and white characters is rooted in racist and colourist ideologies. '*Atiqa*'s journey is a quest for a fragmented black identity torn apart by societal norms and traditions, while the dominant white identity clings to power and refuses to acknowledge its citizens based on their colour and race. This dichotomy perpetuates the characters' accidental discovery of their own identity when they gaze into the mirror and realise that their racial difference is defined by the colour of their eyes, "inherited from a free man from Misrata with a red and white face like the Germans." (Bin Shatwan, 2017:40). The revelation that '*Atiqa*' is mixed-race, or hybrid leads to an oversimplification that it might be easy to overcome this conflict. However, this ignores the complexities of racial identity, intersectionality, and the ongoing legacy of colonialism and racism.

The novel poignantly illustrates this theme through the narrative of '*Atiqa*'s mother, an enslaved black woman who entered into a sexual relationship with her white master, *Muhammad ibn Shatwan*. The tragic circumstances surrounding the firstborn son's death at the hands of the white master's family, who feared that the child would inherit black skin, serve as a backdrop to '*Atiqa*'s own story. After her mother's death, '*Atiqa*' embarks on a journey to reclaim her lineage and inheritance rights, which are denied to her as a result of her blackness. Throughout her struggle, she faces numerous challenges and obstacles, including the need for white characters to validate her existence and secure her freedom. One such instance occurs when a white character, *Ali bin Shatwan*, appears to assist '*Atiqa*' in proving her lineage. This plot twist highlights the recurring pattern in which black characters rely on white figures to verify their

identity, freedom, and humanity. This dynamic perpetuates the dominant narrative of white supremacy, where whiteness is seen as superior, and blackness is marginalised.

The novel features a total of 84 characters, comprised of both black and white individuals. Black characters account for 64% of the total, while white characters represent 36%, as illustrated in the first figure. The second figure depicts the ratio of black to white characters within the narrative.

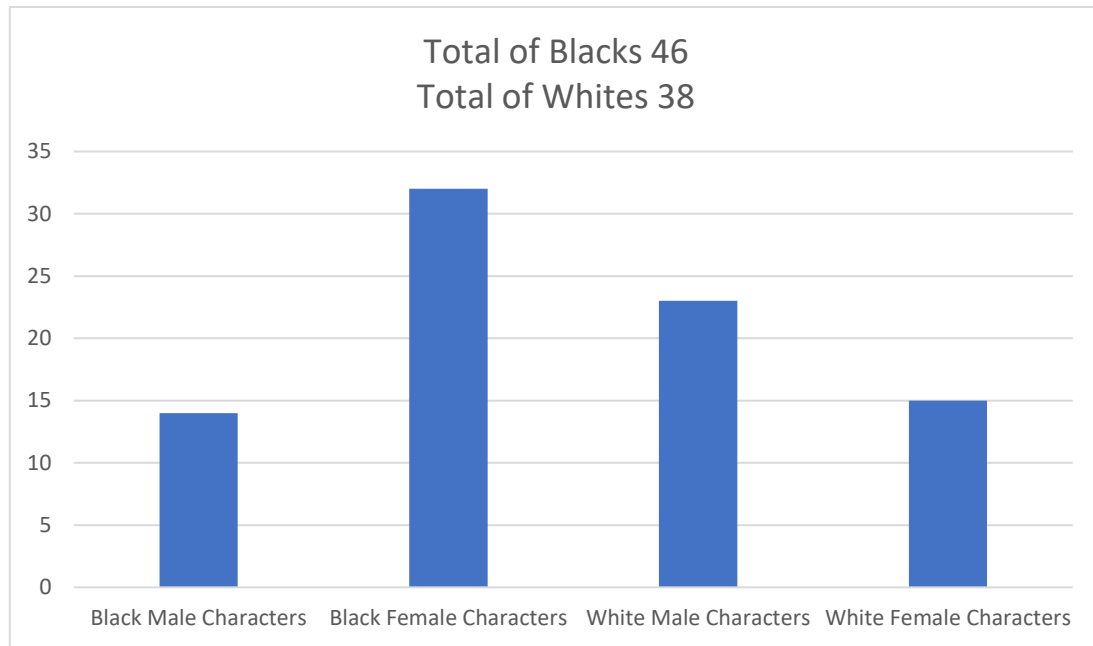


Figure 3.5.4.1 (a): The Total Number of Black and White Characters of *Zarayib al-Abeed*

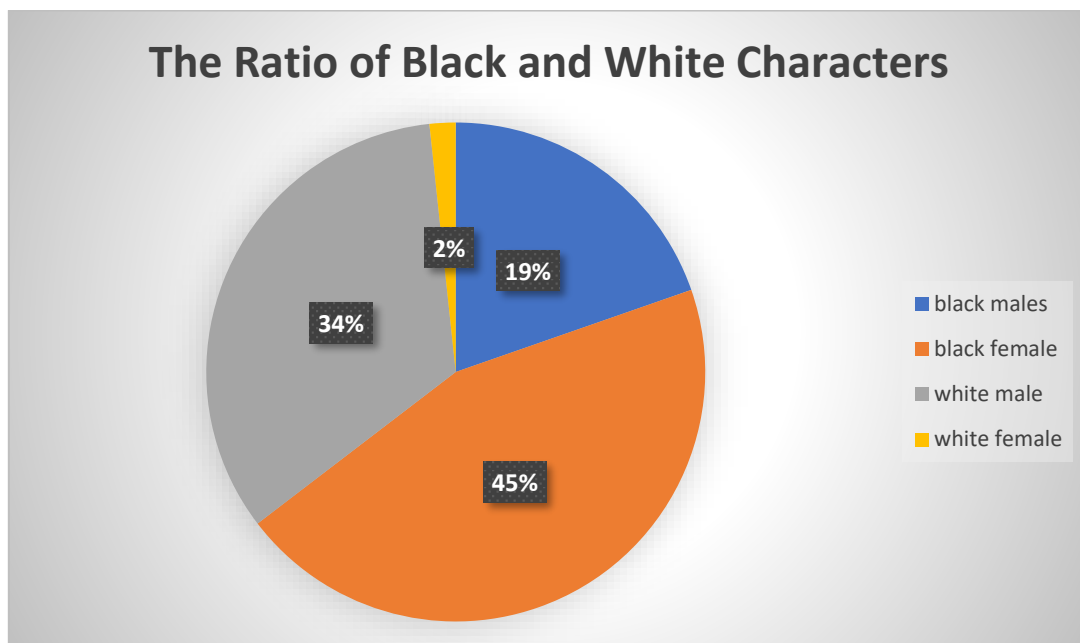


Figure 3.5.4.1 (b): The Ratio of Black and White Characters of *Zarayib al-Abeed*

The figures reflect the racial composition of the characters in the novel, highlighting the re-presentation of black and white individuals. The first figure emphasises the percentage breakdown, indicating that a majority of the characters are black (64%), suggesting a significant focus on black re-presentation. The second figure, which illustrates the ratio of black to white characters, provides a visual comparison that underscores the dominance of black characters in the narrative. Together, these figures may reveal insights about the themes of race, diversity, and re-presentation within the story.

This analysis will delve into the contrasting portrayals of black and white characters in the novel, examining the disparities between these re-presentations and the underlying factors that contributed to their creation. By scrutinising the positive and negative depictions of black and white characters, we can gain a deeper understanding of the novel's re-presentation of race and identity. The comparison will reveal how these re-presentations differ, shedding light on the cultural, social, and historical contexts that shaped them.

3.5.4.2 The Adverse Re-presentation of Black Characters:

The author introduces the conflict between identity and societal expectations through the character of 'Atiqa, whose calm demeanour is a result of the stark contrast between her almond-shaped eyes, which she inherited from her white master, and her black body, which she inherited from her black mother. This juxtaposition of characteristics creates a sense of silence, which is accompanied by deep sadness and confusion about her identity. The protagonist is torn between being a slave or a free woman, as the prevailing cultural narrative in Benghazi associates blackness with negative traits such as brutality, ugliness, and decadence. In response, 'Atiqa becomes a victim who avoids confronting the painful memories of her past, as evident in the novel (Ibid:12). This internal conflict highlights the complex and often oppressive nature of societal expectations and the struggle for identity that individuals face when they do not conform to dominant norms.

The protagonist of the novel is not limited to being a passive victim of her past, but instead, she uses her voice and the voices of other characters to shed light on the reasons behind the marginalisation of black people in society. The novel exposes racism in almost all its forms, including the derogatory names used to address blacks, as well as the humiliating treatment they receive.

3.5.4.3 Anger is synonymous with Black Slaves

One example of the negative stereotypes perpetuated about blacks is the association of anger and rage with black individuals, as is commonly seen in Libyan society known as “al-Bori” (Ibid:32). Notably, in this context, Toledano uncovered that “bori” has its roots in a religious ritual connected to magic and exorcism that was traditionally practiced by African communities during celebrations, parades, and festivals in cities such as Izmir, Istanbul, and other locations within the Ottoman Empire, including North Africa. (Toledano, 2007: 218-233)

According to Ferguson, “Bori” practices typically involve the presence of a spiritual leader, often the possessed individual(s), the royal spirit, collective participation through music and dance, the possessed person's family (real or imagined), and the spirits of their deceased relatives, as well as an external community or crowd. These rituals serve a specific purpose: they provide a means for the community to address pressing issues affecting the lives of the “possessed,” including pregnancy loss, poverty, depression, marital problems, abuse, and stress. The association with black rage stems from the unconventional behaviours that often accompany these practices, such as smoking, dancing, flailing, burping, drinking blood and alcohol, threatening, talking loudly, and disregarding etiquette. The prevalence of spirit possession practices among enslaved and freed African communities suggests that it was not solely a cultural ritual tied to their homeland but also a vital strategy used to cope with the challenges they faced as slaves in unfamiliar lands. (Ferguson, 2014:149-150)

3.5.4.4 Slavery and Blackness Are Interconnected

Other derogatory terms used to address black people include “Shoshan” for males and “Shoshanna” for females, which have become synonymous with blackness as mentioned earlier. In Libya, these names are often used to refer to every black person. Interestingly, even some blacks use these terms to address each other, as noted in the novel (Ibid:53-55). The use of phrases like “Black/Slave/Servant” are often interchangeable in everyday conversations among characters. The practice of using derogatory nicknames like “Zenji/Negro” among black individuals highlights the normalisation of racism in their interactions. For instance, *‘Atiqa* affectionately refers to her husband *Yusuf* as a “Negro,” saying at one point, “well, the nigger I love” (Ibid:15). In another instance, *Yusuf* playfully tells her, “sleep now and get rid of what the old Negro says,” to which she responds, “the old Negro is my friend and lover” (Ibid:17). Additionally, there’s an instance where he teasingly calls her “blackie.” (Ibid:27)

The colour barrier between black and white groups is a metaphorical one that prevents them from understanding each other due to their disparate experiences. For example, *Ta'widha* states: "What separates us from them is whiteness, not blackness. I realised this without explanation. Their non-black skin cannot bridge the distance between us." (Ibid:48) This quote highlights the sense of distance and separation that exists between the two groups, underscoring the need for greater understanding and empathy.

3.5.4.5 Blackness and the Sense of Despair and Hopelessness

For black characters, their skin colour is seen as an inevitable destiny, not something they can change or choose. While individuals can alter certain aspects of their identity, such as their name, their race and skin colour are fundamental characteristics that cannot be altered. As a result, the concept of identity is often deeply tied to these physical characteristics, making it difficult for black individuals to reclaim their sense of self or redefine their identity.

For example, this phenomenon is reflected in the experiences of the black characters, who seem to be powerless to resist the impact of their skin colour on their identity. *'Atiqa* laments: "The blackness continued its journey until it overwhelmed my little milky heart and plunged me into black sadness over something that I either did not do myself or was not the cause of at all." (Ibid:60) This quote highlights the sense of despair and hopelessness that can arise from feeling trapped by one's race and skin colour. It suggests that, for many black individuals, the only option is to surrender to the fate that has been assigned to them, rather than attempting to reclaim or redefine their identity.

3.5.4.6 Subordination to White Beauty Standards

With the characters divided by colour and race, the novel's world is starkly divided along racial and socioeconomic lines, with a white upper class and a black lower class. This dichotomy allows the reader to view the world through a black-and-white lens, highlighting the stark contrasts between the two groups. The two social classes inhabit separate realms, both literal and metaphorical. The white upper class enjoys access to education, business, work, and power, while whiteness is consistently associated with freedom, wealth, beauty, and cleanliness. *Ta'widha's* thoughts reflect this perception:

My mind only realised that free people are always white, people who are not like us in everything, they don't look like us even when they're like us. My admiration for the

cleanliness of their clothes and homes, as well as the charity they give us, makes me inclined to admire them and comply with them and fondly follow their way of living. I don't know why they're the masters, and we're the slaves, why they're the nobles, and we're the lowest? (Ibid:47-8)

This quote highlights the pervasive sense of inferiority and subjugation felt by the black characters, who are drawn to the supposed virtues of the white elite while struggling to comprehend their own marginalisation.

3.5.4.7 The Challenging Living Conditions in the Black Community

As for the lower class, the novel portrays the black characters as living in squalid, isolated, and marginalised areas, where they are plagued by poverty, disease, illiteracy, and unemployment. The narrative consistently associates blackness with slavery, inferiority, animality, and sensuality. The assumption is that any black character is a slave, and any slave is inherently dirty, smelly, ugly, and unemployed. Bin Shatwan's novel is a prime example of this dehumanising representation. The following examples illustrate the derogatory portrayal of black people and their community:

"Garbage and dirt accumulate in pens with unpleasant odours emanating from flies, human faces, and watermelon peels." (Ibid:33)

"The slaves have nothing to do but swat at flies. They are waiting for someone to come and ask them to do something. They are just busy chasing cats and dogs." (Ibid:70)

"Garbage accumulates around them, and lice multiply in their hair." (Ibid:71)

These descriptions perpetuate harmful stereotypes, such as portraying black people as naturally prone to dancing, singing, and drinking. These characteristics are presented as biological imperatives rather than cultural expressions or individual choices (Ibid:103-7).

3.5.4.8 Witchcraft and Wizardry: Steady Stereotypes

In addition to the image that reflects the extent of the backwardness of the black community in Benghazi, the narrative focuses on the most significant factor contributing to their supposed inferiority: their belief in magic. Throughout various sections of the novel (133, 275, 309), black characters are consistently portrayed as believers in magic, which reinforces the idea that they are incapable of distinguishing between the physical and metaphysical worlds. This representation may also imply a cognitive deficiency, positioning black individuals as inferior to

their white counterparts and destined to serve them. In this narrative, some black characters are relegated to one-dimensional roles, lacking depth and individual desires, serving only to support the white protagonists. This portrayal reinforces the notion that black people are less valuable and less human than their white counterparts, warranting less attention and unique stories. Moreover, associating black people with witchcraft may have been intended to instil fear and apprehension within society. This fear may lead to increased isolation and marginalisation.

A notable example of this is when *Muhammad* becomes infatuated with his black servant, leading his family to believe that he is under the influence of magic or possessed by a jinni. They perceive his infatuation as a sign of his mental instability, emphasising the need for him to regain his senses and recognize that pleasure is a path to Satan's domain (Ibid:275). This portrayal not only dehumanises black people but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces the idea that black individuals are inherently inferior.

Nonetheless, the most prevalent form of magic practiced by black individuals in Benghazi culture is the sealing or locking ritual known as “tasfih/taqfeel” which is elaborately depicted in the novel. “Tasfih” is a religious magical practice often carried out on girls in certain North African regions, usually performed by elderly black women in rural villages who believe they have a connection to the Jinn. It is believed to protect girls from any form of sexual activity, whether consensual or forced. The seal or lock must be removed on the wedding night before the marriage can be consummated (Trabelsi, 2021). However, in the novel, this sealing ritual is reserved only for free girls of non-slave descent. Servants and enslaved girls are prohibited from participating in this practice, as the sexual availability of enslaved women to their masters is meant to be unrestricted at all times (Ibid:51-67).

For example, chapter six in the novel is dedicated to portraying witchcraft, reinforcing the stereotype that black individuals are merely absurd beings who blindly believe in superstitions. This depiction implies that they are not even worthy of protecting their own bodies, as their existence serves primarily to entertain their masters sexually. The second aspect of this scene involves the presumption that every black person is inherently a slave. In this instance, the practitioner refuses to perform the sealing ritual on ‘*Atiqa*, assuming she is a servant due to her black skin. She confronts *Sabriyya*, questioning, “Who told you servants can be locked?” ‘*Atiqa*, a slave by default, recalls the old woman's refusal to seal her because of her slave status and dark complexion (Ibid:59)

The opposite of “black” is “white” but *‘Atiqa* employs the term “free” - the antonym of “slave” - as a linguistic device to convey that “black” and “slave” are interchangeable in the context of the dominantly racist environment. This scene is filled with connotations, repetitions, emotions, narratives about slavery, young women's experiences with honour and virginity, fear, hope, tears, and a small victory as *Sabriyya* manages to lock her daughter with assistance from the practitioner's black servant. The author, through the character *Eidah*, also highlights the pervasiveness of magic within society on another occasion. *Eidah* states:

All the evil that occurs at their discretion is attributed to magic, not them, and anything they dislike is labelled as magic... They accuse every black person of witchcraft to further confuse its nature and create a complex environment for us. A person finds themselves defending against the same accusation instead of asserting their rights (Ibid:318-319)

3.5.4.9 The Positive Re-presentation of White Characters:

When it comes to positive re-presentations of white characters in the novel, they are often described as beautiful, elegant, and kind. A few examples include the description of *Ali bin Shatwan* when he visits *‘Atiqa* to hand her the lineage document: “He wore a clean cloak... He had a handsome appearance”. (Ibid:8 & 12) In another place the narrator says: “His greying hair is the most beautiful thing about him, tall, thin and white, his face is handsome, and his Arabic uniform is clean. He really has the look of a merchant.” (Ibid:19)

In describing Ta'widha's master “Muhammad bin Shatwan”, the narrator says when he entered her place to ask her about her condition: “She was shocked to see her master, who is strong and majestic ... he does not speak much and does not disobey any order.” (Ibid:176-177) Then she continues to confer on him the qualities of beauty after looking at his face slowly: “His wide eyes locked on two almond-coloured beads, his beautiful nose that is not devoid of a hook, his high moustache and red beard that falls on his cheeks softly and shiny, his thick smooth hair to a clean white neck, his long fingers filled with thick hair and a ring with a white inscription with a small blue stone in the middle in the palm of his right palm.” (Ibid:178)

3.5.4.10 Whiteness is Inherently Desirable

In stark contrast to the re-presentation of black characters, the passages highlight the idealised and romanticised portrayal of white characters in the novel. The lavish descriptions of *Ali bin Shatwan* and *Muhammad bin Shatwan's* physical appearance, emphasising their beauty, elegance, and majesty, can perpetuate the exoticisation of whiteness. This reinforces the notion

that whiteness is inherently desirable, potentially perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Furthermore, the characterisation of these white figures as kind, friendly, and benevolent can romanticise slave owners and enslavers, obscuring the brutal reality of their exploitation and oppression. This sanitised portrayal can downplay the extreme violence, trauma, and suffering inflicted upon enslaved peoples, erasing their experiences and humanity. By contrast, this juxtaposition highlights the problematic re-presentation of black characters in the novel, which may be characterised by negative stereotypes and dehumanisation.

Finally, despite '*Atiqa's* efforts to secure her freedom and recognition of her lineage and inheritance as a free person, born of a free father, she is only granted this honour with the help of a white character, *Ali bin Shatwan*. From the beginning of the novel, we see him telling '*Atiqa* the truth about her parents and assuring her that he is working to ensure her inheritance and prove her white lineage (Ibid:7-13). However, in the final scene, Ali himself acknowledges that his assistance to '*Atiqa* was merely an illusion, as societal norms had built a rigid wall between black and white people. Ali thinks to himself: "No, not now, Ali, be kind to '*Atiqa's* exhausted conscience. No matter how decent an apology it may seem to you, it is very harsh. Leave it for another time." (Ibid:350).

This depiction highlights the persistent societal barriers that prevent black people from achieving true equality and freedom. Even with the help of a white character, '*Atiqa's* ultimate freedom and recognition are conditional upon the benevolence of someone outside her own community. The narrative underscores the stark realities of racism and the limits placed on black people's agency and autonomy.

3.5.4.11 Conclusion:

The novel starkly contrasts the portrayals of black and white characters, emphasizing societal expectations and stereotypes that foster racism and oppression. Black characters are often depicted negatively, highlighting their supposed inferiority and victimhood, while white characters are idealized for their beauty and kindness. This harmful depiction reinforces negative stereotypes, with derogatory terms and associations linking blackness to slavery and brutality.

'*Atiqa's* struggle for identity underscores societal pressures and the limitations faced by marginalised individuals, as her reliance on a white character for freedom illustrates systemic barriers. The central theme suggests that freedom is a charity granted by whites to blacks, reflecting the notion that black characters need white guidance to navigate their struggles.

Overall, the narrative perpetuates stereotypes of black inferiority and white superiority, linking blackness with anger and poverty, further entrenching systemic racism and societal biases that persist today.

3.6 Similarities and Differences Between the Six Novels:

The similarities and differences between the six novels can be analysed in light of the framework questions posed at the beginning of the chapter. Here are some key observations:

(1) Notably, despite black characters being re-presented as a majority in all novels, it is clear that the authors of the two counter-novels who belong to black backgrounds have made a deliberate effort to prioritise the importance of black characters and move them from the periphery to the centre. In both *Dongola* and *Maymūna*, the narratives delve deep into the characters' experiences with suffering and pain, highlighting the significant contributions of black historical figures to civilisation. The authors condemn the injustices inflicted by white characters, using vivid language to describe their brutal, barbaric, and backward actions. Moreover, these novels focus on portraying their main black characters in a positive light, showcasing heroic characters like 'Awād Shalali in and *Omar al-Musk*. However, they do not require these heroes to seek help from whites, instead highlighting their agency and self-reliance. The novels also depict the black community in Egypt and Hejaz as struggling with poverty, deprivation, and limited access to basic services, serving as a critique of the societal and economic conditions that perpetuate these issues. It is also notable that the hero's black skin and African heritage do not hinder him in both works. Instead, it serves as an inspiration and motivation for him to cling to his African roots and proudly assert his black identity. The novels aim to present an alternative narrative to the dominant white narrative, promoting values of pride and honour in a history that has been deliberately or inadvertently erased or forgotten. Additionally, they aim to combat stereotypes about blacks as "others" by dismantling them and revealing their fragility.

Overall, through these two models, it becomes evident that contemporary novel writers of African descent are challenging the prevailing white narrative that re-presents black communities. Both pieces of literature are deliberate in their rejection of negative stereotypes, aiming to provide an accurate and genuine portrayal of black individuals. This effort is intended to counteract the distorted stereotypes that have been ingrained in society through constant repetition and lack of re-presentation of black voices, their experiences, and their perspectives on their own characteristics, concerns, and challenges. Drawing from the tenets of post-colonial literary theory, this narrative discourse successfully challenged traditional beliefs and introduced diverse storytelling that captured the uniqueness of black communities, their cultural identity, and their aversion to conflict unless provoked or oppressed. By confronting and overturning the harmful stereotypes of the past, these two works offered a positive portrayal

that showcased the nobility of their history, the virtues of their people, their inner harmony, and their adaptability to their surroundings and the natural world.

(2) The four novels written by authors from a white cultural background show notable differences when compared to the first two novels by Black authors. However, it remains unclear whether this distinction holds true across all Black slave narratives. This observation is significant and warrants further investigation. Despite featuring black characters as the main protagonists, these novels depict them as constantly in need of the help of white characters to escape slavery and its devastating effects. This portrayal reinforces the idea that white people are the sole agents of change, while black people are passive recipients of their benevolence. The re-presentation of black characters waiting for white rescue in novels like *Li-annī Aswād*, *Ta'am Aswād*, *Ra'eha Swada*, *Thaman al-Milh*, and *Zarayb al-Abeed* perpetuates the notion that white people are necessary for the liberation of people of colour, implying that black individuals are unable to fight for their own freedom.

This re-presentation has far-reaching consequences for black characters, as it shapes their perception of beauty standards, leading them to believe that beauty can only be achieved through whiteness. The internalised racism revealed in the narrative has a devastating psychological impact on black characters, affecting their self-perception and distorting their understanding of freedom, equality, and justice. The influence of race and colour on black characters is profound, leading to a severe identity crisis, as evident in the conflicts faced by heroes like *Jamal*, *Sorour*, *'Abda*, and *'Atiqa*.

The novels' portrayal of black characters' dependence on white characters also perpetuates harmful stereotypes about black people's abilities and agency. This reinforces the idea that black people are incapable of achieving freedom or equality without external help, further marginalising them. The novels' re-presentation of black characters' struggles and experiences serves as a commentary on the societal and economic conditions that perpetuate these issues, highlighting the need for change and challenging the dominant narratives that perpetuate systemic racism.

(3) The novels written by authors belonging to a white cultural background perpetuate the stereotype that black characters are constantly connected to magic and the supernatural. In the novels by al-Muqri, Bin Shatwan, and al-Da'as, black characters are consistently portrayed as believers in magic, which reinforces the idea that they are unable to distinguish between the material and metaphysical worlds. This portrayal can be seen as a form of "Othering", where

black characters are constructed as “absurd” and “superstitious” in contrast to their white counterparts, who are positioned as rational and enlightened. This re-presentation also raises questions about the intersection of race and cognitive ability, as it implies that black individuals are inherently inferior to whites due to their supposed inability to distinguish between reality and fantasy.

Furthermore, the depiction of black characters in these novels also reinforces the stereotype that black people are associated with sexual lust, reinforcing the idea that they are mere objects created for the sexual entertainment of whites. This portrayal is problematic because it reduces black individuals to their bodies and reduces their agency to their sexual appeal. This re-presentation also perpetuates the notion that black people do not deserve protection or dignity, as their existence is primarily seen as a means of satisfying the sexual desires of their masters.

(4) The re-presentations of these six novels, authored by both white and black writers, offer a window into how re-presentation functions, revealing its fundamental components: language, meaning, culture, perception, and stereotype. As a powerful tool in these narratives, the conflict between these re-presentations often centres around the struggle to subvert the dominant narrative. This challenge is particularly evident among authors with counter-narratives, who seek to upend the dominant narrative by exploiting the very same cultural tools it employs. In a complex process, they produce meaning by creating an imaginary “other” as a “real” model and situating it within a matrix of preconceptions.

In the upcoming chapter, we will delve into the intricate ideologies surrounding slavery as depicted in the novels. Our exploration will include an examination of the various viewpoints and beliefs presented in the narratives, shedding light on the origins of these ideologies and the ideological framework adopted by each story. We will critically analyse whether the works seek to explain or even justify slavery in the Arab world and assess the different frames of reference utilised for this purpose. Through this analysis, our aim is to offer a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced and complex ideological landscape surrounding slavery in the Arab world as portrayed in these six narratives.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ideology and Slavery

3. Theoretical Introduction: Oppressive and Utopian Ideologies

Given that the six chosen novels engage with the intricate and sensitive themes of slavery and blackness, it becomes essential to investigate in this chapter the interplay of “ideology and slavery” within these texts. This examination, which draws on Marxist critical theory of ideology, enables a nuanced understanding of the specific ideological narratives the authors convey in relation to slavery and its repercussions. A close analysis of how these authors build and express their viewpoints on slavery provides insight into their broader worldview.

Literature, in general, serves as a powerful tool in disseminating ideological discourses among the masses. According to researcher Lois Tyson, critics from a Marxist perspective contend that art, music, cinema, theatre, literature, and television are the primary vehicles for disseminating ideology because they can reach a vast audience in a seemingly innocuous form: entertainment. When we are entertained, our defences are lowered, making us more susceptible to ideological programming (Tyson, 2006: 60).

Tyson's original list of entertainment formats, which has since become somewhat antiquated, can now be expanded to include social media, a relatively recent addition to the entertainment landscape that has gained widespread popularity over the past two decades. Terry Eagleton, in his seminal work *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, proposes that literature's aptitude for disseminating ideology lies in its aesthetic appeal. He argues that literature with all its aesthetic power is an effective ideological vehicle due to its capacity to operate at multiple levels, engaging both our emotions and instincts, while also interacting with our perceptions of reality. This unique combination of qualities enables literature to normalise itself and present itself as ideologically neutral, thereby rendering it more accessible and less scrutinised than other ideologically loaded cultural productions (Eagleton, 1978: 20).

Historically, as the novel has emerged as the dominant literary form in the European context since the 19th century, it has become a potent medium for disseminating ideology, leveraging its inherent connection to individualism – a philosophical concept emphasising personal freedom – and the transformative power of storytelling. This synergy enabled the novel to tap into the public's fascination with narrative, capitalising on its ability to shape perspectives and influence opinions (Watt, 1957: 13 & 60).

Indeed, novelists frequently explore societal issues through their writing, highlighting the inherent social and political nature of the genre. They often employ their craft to critique and reflect on the social and political concerns of their era, transforming the novel into a potent instrument for disseminating ideology. By examining themes such as identity, class, and power, novelists with distinct ideological leanings can shape readers' perspectives and beliefs (Hall, 1993:3-15 & Huaco, 1973: 421–436).

Equally, the Arab literary landscape parallels its Western equivalent in notable ways. The novel, as a significant medium for exploring and reinterpreting ideologies—particularly concerning serious issues like slavery that profoundly affect public perceptions and actions—has, to varying extents, engaged the contemporary Arabic novel in vigorous ideological discussions, whether in support of or in opposition to prevailing views.

This chapter, like the preceding ones, utilises a series of questions as a framework to delve deeper into the ideologies that contemporary Arab authors incorporate into their works, shedding light on how they tackle issues related to slavery and racism. By examining these modern viewpoints in relation to the fundamental questions posed, we can better understand the foundations upon which Arab authors build their ideologies and investigate the origins and contexts of these beliefs, as well as the ideological narratives woven into their stories. This analysis also includes an examination of the various types of ideologies present and the conflicting viewpoints, particularly between authors with traditional conservative and liberal ideological backgrounds. Through a comparative study of six selected novels from these diverse perspectives, this chapter seeks to uncover the “ideological discourse” embedded within the narrative structures of the novels, facilitating a comparison of the differing viewpoints, and assessing any potential divergences or convergences between them.

To achieve this, our analysis will focus on the following guiding questions. We will explore the ideas presented in the questions by using examples from the six works to help provide answers.

4.1 The Chapter's Questions:

4.1.1 Which Ideologies About Slavery Are Present in the Work?

Within the intricate tapestry of the work, a multitude of ideologies (white supremacy, white saviour narrative and happy slave) intersect with the portrayal of slavery. Through an examination of the perceptions, concepts, and language employed in the novel's ideological

framework, we can reveal hidden ideological elements, offering a deeper understanding of the diverse perspectives that shape the narrative of this contentious issue.

4.1.2 Which Ideological Narrative Does the Story Embrace about Slavery?

By examining the narrative structure of a work, including its theme, plot, language, dialogue, and characters, it becomes evident that the story often harbours a distinct ideological stance on slavery. Uncovering any type of ideological narrative within a work reveals the underlying beliefs and values that influence the interactions and relationships between characters from diverse perspectives as they engage with the institution of slavery.

4.1.3 What's Their Origin?

By tracing the origins of the ideologies presented in the work on slavery, we gain insight into the historical context, development, and cultural significance of these beliefs. Uncovering the roots of these ideologies provides crucial context for interpreting the complex and multifaceted layers of thought surrounding this contentious issue, enabling a deeper understanding of the nuanced perspectives and values embedded within the narrative.

4.1.4 Does the Work Seek to Explain 'and/or' Justify Slavery in the Arab World?

The re-presentation of slavery in literary and artistic works can be a complex and sensitive topic, particularly when it comes to the Arab world. Does the work under examination seek to explain slavery, or does it justify its practice? This question is crucial in understanding the cultural attitudes and dominant ideologies surrounding slavery during the time of its creation. By analysing the narrative structures, character portrayals, and cultural contexts of these works, we can gain insight into how slavery was perceived and re-presented in the work, and how these re-presentations continue to shape our understanding of this controversial topic today.

4.1.5 If Yes, What Frames of Reference Are Utilised?

If the work does indeed explore the justification of slavery, examining the frames of reference utilised becomes paramount. These frames of reference serve as the intellectual scaffolding that supports and shapes the narrative's engagement with the complexities of slavery in the Arab world.

4.1.6 Which Ones Do the Characters Sympathise With?

The characters in the work may act as conduits through which ideologies about slavery are expressed and internalised. Investigating which ideologies the characters sympathise with, especially those who are consciously sympathetic, offers a window into their moral compass and the societal norms that influence their perspectives on enslavement.

4.1.7 What Reference (If Any) Is There to Emancipation and Abolition, and in What Context?

The themes of emancipation and abolition hold significant importance in Islamic history, as well as in the narratives that explore these periods. When a work includes references to these pivotal events or ideals, whether rooted in fact or fiction, it provides a rich context for the story, shedding light on the characters' desires for freedom and escape from oppressive systems, and ultimately offering a deeper understanding of their motivations and values.

4.1.8 If So, Does the Work Differentiate Between Emancipation/Manumission and Abolition?

The subtle differences between emancipation, manumission, and abolition offer a sophisticated understanding of the various paths to freedom in the Arab-Islamic context. By examining whether the work clarifies these distinctions, it becomes clear that the pursuit of liberation is a multifaceted process, replete with complexities and nuances. This nuanced understanding reveals the ways in which slavery persisted within the narrative, offering a more comprehensive picture of the characters' experiences and the societal attitudes towards freedom and bondage.

4.2 Chapter's Structure:

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part analyses three novels set in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain that explore the theme of slavery and its legacy through a conservative ideological perspective. The second part examines three additional novels set in Libya, Egypt, and Yemen, which approach the topic from a secular liberal viewpoint.

To provide a theoretical foundation for the analysis, the chapter begins with a section that addresses the concept of ideology and its predominant types. It explores the connection between ideology and slavery, highlighting the phases in which "belief systems" shape human perceptions. The discussion then shifts to the role and functions of ideology in society, including its relationship to systems of re-presentation. In the second section, we briefly examine the prevailing ideological foundations of slavery in medieval Arabic literature as a prelude to the ideologies presented in the six selected novels. Finally, the chapter concludes by assessing the similarities and differences between the liberal and traditional conservative perspectives.

4.3 What is Ideology?

Marxist theory suggests that ideology is a belief system that is deeply rooted in the cultural and economic conditions of a society, making it challenging to distinguish culture from the societal structures that have shaped it. This perspective implies that our beliefs and values are often influenced by the social and economic context in which we live, blurring the lines between culture and the broader societal systems that have produced it (Tyson, 2006: 60).

In this sense, Tyson proposes that Marxism, communism, capitalism, socialism, liberalism and even astrology and critical theories can be considered ideologies (Ibid:56). Tyson continues to argue that not all ideologies are created equal, as not all ideologies perpetuate oppression. Oppressive ideologies often cloak themselves in a veneer of normalcy, presenting their beliefs as the only natural or obvious way of seeing the world. This masquerade prevents us from grasping the material and historical contexts that shape our understanding of reality, since they refuse to acknowledge that these conditions have any impact on our perspectives. By doing so, oppressive ideologies maintain their dominance by obscuring the true nature of their influence and the circumstances that give rise to them (Ibid:56-7).

This study adopts Thompson and Bocock's definition of "ideology" as referring to specific forms of thought and discourse that promote and serve the interests of the dominant class, while also fulfilling certain psychological needs for subordinate groups. This ideology often perpetuates and reinforces existing social hierarchies, legitimising the power structures that maintain these inequalities (Thompson & Bocock, 1985:9).

Intrinsic to human nature is the drive to create a brighter future, both for oneself and for humanity as a whole. This innate aspiration is fuelled by a desire to transcend current circumstances and secure a more prosperous existence. This ambition drives political and social change, with two interconnected but distinct dimensions. On one hand, oppressive ideologies and power structures maintain the status quo, while on the other hand, utopian¹¹⁴ visions and

¹¹⁴ The term "utopia" means here as a form of ideology. It is true utopianism and ideology are often intertwined, but they occupy distinct conceptual territories. Utopianism, as a system of belief, is primarily concerned with envisioning an idealized future society. It is a vision of what could be a blueprint for a better world yet to come. In contrast, ideology is more focused on the present, seeking to understand and explain the complexities of the world as it is. It provides a framework for making sense of reality, shaping our perceptions of the here and now. While utopianism gazes toward the horizon, ideology surveys the terrain of the present. One is concerned with crafting a better future, while the other seeks to navigate the challenges and contradictions of the current moment. By distinguishing between these two concepts, we can better comprehend the different ways in which we grapple with the world around us (Sargent, 2013: 439–451).

progressive ideals critique the present and envision a more equitable and promising future. These dual dimensions suggest that oppressive ideology seeks to stifle any potential for change, while utopian thinking strives to broaden the horizons of transformation. In society, ideology and utopian thinking are intertwined, as they serve as lenses through which individuals and groups interpret the world according to their interests and goals. Both oppressive and utopian ideologies shape individuals' beliefs and values, influencing how they perceive their ideals and strive to achieve them (Mannheim, 1936:49-96 & Geoghegan, 2004: 123–138).

4.3.1 Ideology and Slavery

The system of slavery begins with an ideology that is implanted and reinforced through various institutions, starting from birth. Individuals are conditioned to accept and not question these perceptions through a range of influences, including family, education, media, politics, and cultural artifacts like proverbs, jokes, literature, and other forms of cultural expression.

These perceptions are also reinforced through moral, social, and religious penalties. Ideologies are the frameworks through which individuals are taught to re-present, interpret, understand, and make sense of the world and its social relations. Because these perceptions are constantly reinforced, it is very hard to not believe in them and, thus, internalise them.

To better understand how this process happens, Ringel et al. (2019) suggest that there are three phases of how a “belief system” shapes perceptions. According to this study, three important “accounts” are required:

- (a) *moralization* (the infusion of issues and events with moral significance); (b) *factualization* (the construction of pseudo-descriptive justifications for moral evaluations); and (c) *socialization* (the reinforcement of morally palatable beliefs by selective exposure to ideologically sympathetic people, groups, and media sources (Ringel et al., 2019:10)

In the first phase, “belief system” seeks to present moral attitudes as universal truths that must apply to everyone, regardless of temporal and spatial circumstances or cultural differences. They are presented as intuitive and objectively correct beliefs. “*Moralization*” is followed by “*factualization*” where most people are inclined to cite a number of supporting principles, factual evidence, and logical arguments (including religious arguments) that allegedly led them to their views. These two phases of “*moralization*” and “*factualization*” do not occur in an empty circle, but rather are embedded in a social framework where people are also surrounded by

other people who share those same beliefs and justifications (Ibid, -11-19). The author summarised her discussion about the consequences of these three phases:

Moralization turns teams into tribes. It contributes to an “us versus them” mentality, inciting intense emotions, unwillingness to compromise, and the desire to see the views of one’s own side as righteous and the other’s side as sacrilege. Factualization turns opinions into facts. Selective appeals to principles, logic, and favorable cost-benefit analyses justify preferred conclusions and create the impression that one’s position is grounded in reason and objectively true. Socialization turns beliefs into socially shared truth. It further reifies moral opinions into moral facts as people become more confident in the validity of their beliefs when they believe more people share those beliefs (Ibid, 22)

From this vantage point, ideologies play a critical role in shaping societal norms, values, and structures, which in turn influence how individuals conceptualise and pursue utopian visions. Understanding the essence of ideology, its objectives, and its intrinsic connection to re-presenting society or community is crucial in comprehending its profound influence.

As mentioned earlier when defining ideology, Eagleton highlights the fundamental role of ideology in shaping meanings, signs, and values in social life, primarily to legitimise the power of dominant groups or classes. He stresses the intrinsic involvement of ideology in signification, arguing that it serves to maintain relations of domination by assigning meaning to reinforce the status quo. (Eagleton, 1991: 1-5).

In the context of slavery, Eagleton's delineation of ideology highlights how it operates as a hierarchical system that serves the ruling class, specifically the masters, by shaping and controlling the construction and manipulation of meaning. This ideology perpetuates the master-slave dynamic, reinforcing the power imbalance between the dominant and subordinate groups (Jackson, 2003: 2-3, Webb, 2009:117, & Spencer, 2006:3).

4.3.2 Ideology and Re-presentation:

Eagleton explicates the pivotal stages through which the mechanism of ideology progresses: (1) Ideology serves as a system of re-presentation of “reality” that governs, in all societies, the individuals' relationship to the tasks dictated by the social structure as a whole. (2) This system of re-presentation is thus not a form of knowledge; instead, it serves as the requisite array of

constructed “reality” for historical agents. (3) Within class-based societies, ideology additionally functions to maintain individuals within their class-determined positions (Eagleton, 1994: 146).

Further elaborating on the interplay between the ideology system and re-presentation, illusions, and exploitation in deceived societies, the author of *Ideology* underscores that in class societies, ideology serves as a re-presentation of reality, albeit inherently false due to its preconceived and partial nature – it is partial because its objective is not to impart individuals with a comprehensive understanding of the social framework in which they exist; rather, it seeks to furnish them with a distorted representation to uphold their position within the class-exploitative system. Althusser identifies the underlying link that binds these elements together at a deeper level: ideology. It is a distorted re-presentation bereft of knowledge, as knowledge is often subordinated to the interests of the ruling class (ibid.: 146).

For instance, conservative ideology, particularly its more extreme faction, envisions a society with stark social stratification, where some individuals are relegated to the role of slaves and others enjoy freedom. In contrast, liberal ideology advocates for the principles of individual liberty and equal treatment under the law, proclaiming that all individuals should be treated equally and have equal access to opportunities.

These ideologies, whether conservative or liberal, motivate individuals and groups to strive for their envisioned ideal society through various means, including political activism, social movements, peaceful cultural expression, or even resorting to violence. However, the dynamic between these ideologies is often marked by tension and disagreement, as differing viewpoints can lead to competing visions of a utopian society. Each ideology's proponents vigorously defend their own notion of an ideal social structure, often resulting in a clash of opposing visions.

This competition for dominance can result in social fractures, political polarisation, which may develop into violent confrontations as factions endeavour to impose their ideals on society. In some cases, this drive for an ideal society can culminate in the implementation of authoritarian or totalitarian measures under the guise of progress. Such actions may suppress dissent, curtail individual freedoms, and marginalise minority groups that do not align with the prevailing utopian vision (Boronat, 2016: 310–324).

Overall, the dynamic interplay between ideology and utopia within society is intricate and multidimensional, with each concept exerting influence on and shaping the other in diverse manners. Ideologies typically distort “reality” to uphold the supremacy of the dominant forces

within society and maintain their positions in the social hierarchy, whereas utopias strive to challenge and transform the existing status quo to benefit the marginalised and oppressed factions.

4.3.3 The Prevailing Ideological Foundations of Slavery in Medieval Arabic literature:

In Arabic literature of the Middle Ages, the ideological underpinnings of slavery were already deeply ingrained, with longstanding stereotypes and perceptions shaping the re-presentation of slaves in written works. These entrenched views had been developed over time, influencing the way slaves were portrayed in literary and cultural contexts. The notion of slavery was not a novel or pressing concern, but rather a deeply ingrained aspect of medieval thought, with certain ideological constructs governing how slaves were depicted in writing (Lewis, 1992:92-98). This is evident from the work of Bahraini author Nader Kazim, who conducted a comprehensive study on the re-presentation of black people in medieval Arabic literature in 2004. Kazim's book, *Surat al-Sood fi al-Mutakhail al-Arabi al-Wasiet* (The Image of Black people in Medieval Arabic Imaginary), analysed medieval Arabic narratives and found that there was little difference between the negative stereotypes of black people written in the 9th century AD and those written in the 21st century.

According to Kazim, this suggests that whoever attempts to challenge these stereotypes or write something different from the accepted collective discourse will face rejection, confrontation, and ridicule (Kazim, 2004:170). This implies that the re-presentation of black people in medieval Arabic literature was entrenched and resistant to change, and that writers who sought to challenge these stereotypes were unlikely to be successful. The persistence of these stereotypes over time highlights the enduring power of ideology in shaping our understanding of the world, as well as the need for continued critical analysis and challenge of these stereotypes.

As Kazim puts it in his study, medieval Arabic literature derived its perceptions of black slaves from five distinct ideologies:

1. Bloodline, race, and biological descent: This ideology emphasised the idea that race was a biological fact, and that people of different racial groups were inherently inferior or superior.
2. The Biblical theory of race: This ideology drew on biblical concepts and teachings to justify the notion that certain races were superior or inferior.

3. The Symbolism of the colour black and white: This ideology associated the colour black with evil, darkness, and ugliness, while white was associated with good, light, and beauty.
4. Culture/nature perspective: This ideology saw black people as being closer to nature, and therefore, more primitive, and uncivilised than white people.
5. Islamic climate theory: This ideology posited that the climate and environment of a region influenced the physical characteristics of its inhabitants, with hot climates like those in Africa producing darker-skinned people (Ibid:15-16).

These ideologies collectively contributed to the negative stereotypes and dehumanising portrayals of black people in medieval Arabic literature. Kazim's study highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of these ideologies, which were deeply ingrained in the culture and society of the time.

Fast forwarding to modern times, a closer examination of the ideologies employed by contemporary Arab authors in their works offers valuable insights into how they tackled the issues of slavery and racism. By considering these contemporary perspectives in the context of the foundational questions posed at the outset of this chapter, we can gain a deeper understanding of whether and how Arab authors have built upon, evolved, or departed from the prevailing ideologies about slavery and blackness that were characteristic of medieval Arabic literature.

4.4 The Traditional Ideological Lens:

4.4.1 Sa'dā' al-Da'as's Novel *Li-annī Aswād*: Slavery is a Choice

4.4.1.1 Preview:

Li-annī Aswād centres around the *Jamal's* family, a middle-class African descent black family grappling with a significant identity crisis in the late 20th century, both in the United States and Kuwait. The novel highlights the significance of Blackness as the primary trigger for this identity crisis, as it foregrounds the dominant ideology that equates Blackness with slavery, viewing it as an effective force only for social reproduction that perpetuates systemic consequences across generations. Through this traditional ideological lens, children of Black individuals often inherit their parents' status, remaining trapped in the lower echelons of the social hierarchy solely due to their ancestral ties to slavery. While the narrative does not explicitly link racism to economic inequality, it suggests that societal stereotypes victimise individuals based on their skin colour due to notions of racial purity. To rationalise the acceptance of blackness as an unavoidable destiny, which is depicted in the novel as a “genetic condition” beyond human agency, and to prevent the condemnation of religious ideological discourse as anti-black, the novelist employs an “apologetic discourse.”

As we will see in some examples, the novel's re-presentation of *Jamal* and *Joanne*, who believe their skin colour is predetermined by genetic will, subtly underscores the insidious ways in which racism can erode individuals' sense of connection to their own blackness. By distancing them from any inherent connection to their race, the novel shines a light on the pervasive and pernicious nature of racism, which can lead individuals to question their own identities and experiences. This narrative choice encourages readers to critically examine how societal structures and ideologies shape our perceptions and experiences, ultimately highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of racism. The narrative, on the other hand, promotes ideological religious discourse as a discourse of equality and justice, shifting the blame for societal issues onto individual misconceptions rather than criticising the religious foundation. Instead of viewing racism as a deeply rooted ideological sickness necessitating drastic intervention, the narrative treats it as a temporary ailment alleviated with superficial remedies like painkillers and sedatives. This approach raises the question of whether such temporary solutions can effectively address the underlying roots of the problem.

4.4.1.2 Fatalism and “White Supremacy”:

The author employs “fatalistic” ideology as a pervasive theme in the narrative, infusing *Jamal*'s memories with a sense of inevitability that shapes his worldview and influences the reader's perspective. Through this device, the author subtly persuades readers to adopt a fatalistic outlook, fostering a deeper understanding of the protagonist's psyche and experiences. This religious belief posits that blackness is a predetermined and immutable aspect ordained by God, leaving black individuals powerless to alter their skin colour and diminish its detrimental impact on society. This conviction is apparent from the novel's onset, framing blackness as a divine destiny beyond the control of black individuals. Despite being aware of his own skin colour, *Jamal* holds onto the belief that his blackness is an innate characteristic due to his birth. He expresses this clearly in a monologue addressing an imaginary white person: “I always wonder why I am black? Why me and not you? I know your lined-up answers. I memorise them and hate repeating them with tired arguments delivered by a faith-filled voice.” (al-Da’as, 2010:3)

In a more candid tone that expresses the heartbreak towards the inevitability of fate, *Jamal* says elsewhere: “Fate did not have a single logical reason to make me less black.” (Ibid:11)

When *Jamal* inquires, “Is it wrong for me to wish I wasn't this colour?” (Ibid: 2), he realises that this contemplation could lead to a cascade of weighty follow-up questions, prompting him to label it as potentially self-destructive. But *Jamal* goes on:

Should I embrace the colour inherent in my genes, or should I strive to become colourless? Should I describe my dark skin using words, or should I adopt a light black hue that doesn't reflect my true self? Do I celebrate the heritage within my pores, or turn a blind eye to the struggles of others with the same skin tone? Do I have the freedom to be myself, or should I borrow traits that do not define me? (Ibid: 2-3)

The above quotation highlights the internal conflict and struggle that *Jamal* faces as a result of his racial identity. The question “Is it wrong for me to wish I wasn't this colour?” suggests that *Jamal* is grappling with feelings of self-loathing or frustration with his dark skin colour. The subsequent questions he poses to himself can be interpreted as an exploration of the complexities and implications of racial identity. These questions indicate that *Jamal* is struggling to reconcile his sense of self with the societal expectations, biases, and limitations imposed upon him due to his race. The quotation also highlights the internalised racism and self-doubt that

many people of colour may experience, and how it can lead to feelings of confusion, self-doubt, and disconnection from their true selves.

4.4.1.3 Every Black Person is a “Slave” Ideology:

During an extensive monologue, *Jamal* dismisses pre-packaged ideological responses from white society, as he finds their arguments steeped in religious bias and entrenched in a culture that fails to acknowledge or accept the existence of “the other black” especially in scenarios involving interracial marriage. “Don't repeat your gelatinous answer, don't strip my case of its roots, don't strip it of its suffering, don't strip it of its depth, you don't know what it means to be black, what it means to have your colour be a source of humiliation,” *Jamal* said.

Instead, *Jamal* opts to highlight the destructive impact of racism on his own black identity. To *Jamal*, being black entails:

Is it offensive to have a coloured identity that follows you from birth to death, one that immediately reveals and defines your place in society? This identity labels you as guilty until proven innocent and brands you as impoverished before poverty even touches you. This is the identity thrust upon me. Can you embrace this for yourself? Do you desire to be recognized as a slave? (Ibid: 3-4)

4.4.1.4 Manifestations of Conservative Ideology:

The profound sense of identity turmoil, rooted in the ideology of “white supremacy” is not unique to *Jamal* alone, but extends to all members of his extended family, notably his American mother, *Joanne*. Raised in American society, *Joanne* harboured a fervent desire since her teenage years to wed a man less black than herself in the hopes of sparing her children from a similar fate. This pervasive racism results in blackness becoming a persistent affliction that breeds feelings of inferiority shared even by the Black characters in the story. Both in America and Kuwait, *Jamal* asserts that *Joanne*'s family members have all grappled with this issue, highlighting the striking parallels between the two contexts:

Mothers express this longing as they silently communicate with the first black sperm, intensifying their whispers upon learning the gender of their fetus. If it happens to be female, the mother feels compelled to intensify her prayers to God... A female child born from a black mother with lighter skin is seen as extremely lucky. Being less dark-skinned

implies a life with fewer challenges and more chances for success. Thus, the message to be less black lingers during the early stages of development (Ibid: 7-8)

The above passage can be seen as reflecting conservative ideology in several ways: (a) The idea that a lighter-skinned child is seen as “lucky” and implies a life with fewer challenges and more opportunities for success perpetuates the harmful notion that darker skin is inferior. This reflects a conservative ideology that values whiteness and light skin as desirable. (b) The passage suggests that black mothers internalize these racist beauty standards and feel compelled to pray for a lighter-skinned child, which implies that they are complicit in their own oppression. This reinforces the idea that black people are responsible for their own marginalization and lack of success, rather than challenging the systemic racism that perpetuates these inequalities. (c) The reference to praying to God to ensure a lighter-skinned child implies a conservative Muslim worldview that sees God as intervening in human affairs. This reinforces the idea that there is a divine authority guiding human destiny, rather than acknowledging the role of social structures and institutions in shaping individual experiences. And if the previous passage highlights the mother's good fortune in giving birth to a light-skinned baby girl, the novel also notes that if the baby is a light-skinned male child, he will have an advantage. This advantage lies in his ability to form positive relationships with people of other races, particularly girls, and his calm demeanour, which is further underscored by his less prominent nose (ibid.: 9).

4.4.1.5 The Influence of White Supremacist Ideology in American Society on *Joanne*

The unresolved desires and conflicting emotions of *Jamal* and his mother perpetuate a persistent sense of inferiority, which influences their outlook throughout the story. This emotional entrapment is characterised by negative thoughts that plague them. For instance, despite *Joanne*'s privileged upbringing, with parents who are both educated professionals - her father is a lawyer and her mother a science teacher - she still harbours feelings of inadequacy when compared to white women with blonde hair (ibid.: 39-51).

The overwhelming influence of white supremacist ideology in American society creates a deep sense of discomfort for her, leading her to see black as unattractive and white as beautiful. This perception causes her to shy away from forming a friendship with her white classmate, *Melissa*, believing that “Melissa embodies American beauty while I represent ugliness.” (Ibid:35) From a young age, she understood that she would never wed a white man (Ibid: 18). It is evident that *Joanne* has grown up under the long-standing stereotypes created by white people about black

individuals. The ideology of white supremacy has a powerful impact on her, leading her to envision *Melissa* living in a picturesque, ideal world. Despite *Melissa* residing in a modest, unsanitary apartment without running water, *Joanne* perceives her differently (Ibid: 39).

When flipping through American magazines, all she encounters are images of gorgeous white women, reminiscent of those seen in Hollywood films. *Joanne* finds herself unable to resist viewing these images as a mark of privilege solely because “they are blonde.” (Ibid: 46) In this scenario, one can see the connection between images, identity, and how they influence the meaning for black viewers. This connection gives rise to the concept of “identity politics” or “image politics” sparking the question of which world we belong to — black or white. According to Hall, “identity politics” emerged as a response to:

the fact that people were being blocked out of and refused an identity and identification within the majority nation, having to find some other roots on which to stand. Because people have to find some ground, some place, some position on which to stand (Hall, 2019: 73-4)

Nevertheless, Black individuals, as in the case of *Joanne*, grapple with this issue when confronted with images that do not reflect their experiences. The fact that she finds herself unable to resist viewing blonde women as a mark of privilege suggests that she has been socialised to believe that these physical characteristics are synonymous with superiority. This passage highlights the ways in which societal beauty standards can be internalised and perpetuated, even by individuals who have been fortunate enough to have been born into privileged circumstances. It also suggests that *Joanne's* sense of self-worth may be tied to her conformity to these standards, which can be problematic and limiting.

Rather than attributing *Joanne's* feelings of disconnection to her own individual shortcomings, it is clear that they are a result of broader societal and cultural norms that shape black individuals' perceptions of beauty and identity. Specifically, *Joanne's* inability to see blackness as an embodiment of American beauty stems from a lack of re-presentation in the media she consumes. The absence of black faces and bodies in the magazines she reads serves as a powerful reminder of her exclusion from the dominant beauty standards, leading to feelings of alienation and disconnection among black individuals.

4.4.1.6 How the Ideology of “Whiteness” Can Mask Racism:

The narrator's approach to addressing societal perceptions, meanings, and beliefs about black individuals in Islamic history is surprisingly timid. Despite acknowledging the cultural role in perpetuating stereotypes, the novelist shies away from confronting or dismantling these ingrained taboos. In the American context, the novel perspective echoes a fatalistic tone, as seen in the following statement: “*Joanne* realised that blackness was her destiny, no matter how much she tried to escape from it” (Ibid:46). In the Kuwaiti context, the author appears to conform to the prevailing Islamic narrative, attempting to portray Islam as a religion that celebrates black people. The novel reinforces this perspective through its characters, as *Jamal* draws on an ancient historical event from the time of the prophet Muhammad to illustrate the equality between blacks and whites in Islam. *Jamal* remarks: “Similar to all Muslims who uphold the belief in the equality of all individuals, they take pride in the black features of the prophet's Muezzin, Bilal al-Habashi, as they gather around the black Ka’aba and reverently kiss its black stone (Ibid: 161)

The re-presentation of *Bilal Ibn Rabah* (d. 640) serves as a prime example of how the ideology of “Whiteness” can mask racism, causing white individuals, white privilege, and racist institutions to go invisible. Though Bilal is often lauded in Islamic tradition as the initial African Muslim to shatter the colour barrier and hold a significant position in Islam, there is a subtle implication that he was racially unique - a black man who singlehandedly overcame racial barriers.

This narrative insinuates that *Bilal* had to possess exceptional qualities to be deemed worthy of interacting with white Arabs, suggesting that no other black individual prior to him had been considered competent enough for such a role. Envision, for instance, an alternate headline that reads: “Bilal Ibn Rabah, the first black man, permitted by the predominantly white prophet to serve as the first Muazzin in history.” This rephrased version underscores a crucial distinction, highlighting that Bilal, despite his commendable abilities as a Muazzin, could not have assumed a prominent role without the approval of the white Muhammad, who held authority over the institution.

In this context, Bilal's reference contradicts the author's intended message about equality between black and white individuals in Islam when citing Bilal's story. Instead, it emphasises that systemic racism recognises the social and institutional power that white individuals have over black individuals, making racism a complex social construct that cannot be defeated simply by

highlighting historical examples. Rather, it requires deterrent laws and strict legislation to achieve economic and social equality between people regardless of their colours and races.

4.4.1.7 Sectarian Racism in Kuwait

The author highlights one aspect that reveals the strong opposition to accepting those perceived as different, particularly black individuals, by white characters. This opposition stems not only from colour-based biases but also from differences in sect, as revealed by the author's discussion of certain positions. An example of religious sectarian racism is evident in the *Fawzi* family's refusal to allow their daughter *Nadia* to marry *Walid*, because he is a young Shiite and they are Sunnis (ibid:183). As an example of racial racism, *Joanne* recalls *Fawzi* recounting an incident of their neighbour's racism, where he refused a black man's proposal to his daughter simply because his aunt had married a black man. He believed that "when a white woman marries a black man, it tarnishes the family lineage, likening it to injecting one's genes with germs and causing the entire family to fear contamination." (Ibid: 188) However, he backtracks on his stance, attempting to rationalise his neighbour's behaviour. In a defensive argument, *Fawzi* states:

Our neighbour is religious, yet he overlooks the fact that our religion emphasises equality among all human beings... He fails to remember that skin colour is determined by God alone, and that racism stems from individuals who have strayed from their Islamic teachings (Ibid: 188)

These examples illustrate that both religious and racial biases can coexist and perpetuate discrimination against marginalised groups. Instances such as the significant sectarian divide between Sunnis and Shiites, and the racial divide between blacks and whites perpetuated by the concept of "white supremacy" ultimately led *Jamal* to permanently return to America. The refusal of *Fawzi* to permit his sister *Nadia* to marry a Kuwaiti man named *Walid* because he was Shiite highlighted the hypocrisy within *Fawzi's* family, who tried to portray himself as advocates for equality in Kuwaiti society (Ibid: 182). This experience prompted *Fawzi* to request in his will to be buried in Shiite cemeteries as a gesture of remorse and solidarity with his sister (Ibid: 184). The revelation of *Fawzi's* refusal to allow his sister to marry *Walid* on sectarian grounds was a pivotal moment that led to his wife's decision to return to America, shedding light on a previously unknown aspect of *Fawzi's* character (Ibid: 189). *Joanne* expressed disbelief at the hypocritical nature of Kuwaiti society, writing to her son about the complexities of their experiences in Kuwait compared to their life in America:

Yesterday, you were happily spending time with your cousin Huda, but today you are prohibited from seeing her because her father is religious. I am aware that she has already started dating someone online. I find it challenging to tolerate this hypocrisy. While our life in America may appear mundane, it is straightforward and transparent compared to the complexities we face here (Ibid: 195)

4.4.1.8 Societal Fears Surrounding Blackness:

As *Jamal* grapples with tension in his relationship with his new white Kuwaiti girlfriend, *Dalal*, and experiences difficulties in forming friendships with his white university peers, anger bubbles inside him as the pressure becomes unbearable (Ibid: 190-212). Seeking to understand the prevalent anti-black sentiments in the Muslim community, *Jamal* faces internal conflicts. Following the demise of his relationship with *Dalal*, he initiates an online romance with another white Kuwaiti woman, *Sara* (Ibid: 221-235). Through their correspondence, *Jamal's* emotions become entwined with *Sara's*, as they bond over shared interests and optimistic perspectives on life in American society, where legal measures counteract racism. However, complications arise in their three-year-relationship when *Sara's* family opposes her union with a Black man, citing concerns about the potential social stigma their future grandchildren might face (Ibid: 252-255).

This realisation prompts *Jamal* to acknowledge his lack of belonging in Kuwait, reflecting on the limitations of the societal norms around him:

I no longer belong in a place that rejects my love solely because of my skin colour, while my beloved remains conflicted by familial expectations. My young white partner desires the passion of a passionate Black man yet fears the implications of our future children inheriting my race (Ibid: 255).

This quote poignantly captures *Jamal's* experience as a Black man in a predominantly white society, where the colour of his skin has become a source of exclusion. The quote reveals the complexities of his relationships, particularly with his white partner, who is drawn to him but struggles with the implications of their future children's racial identity. This moment of realisation, where *Jamal* acknowledges he no longer belongs in Kuwait because of his skin colour, highlights the challenges he faces in navigating a society that does not accept him for who he is.

This theme is deeply relatable to many people of colour who have been marginalised or excluded from mainstream society. It also sheds light on the intricacies of race relations, exposing how

societal expectations and biases can create tension and uncertainty, even in loving relationships. By sharing his story, *Jamal* invites us to consider the intersectionalities of identity, love, and belonging, and the ways in which these factors intersect and impact our lives.

4.4.1.9 The Ideological Roots of Racial Injustice

Jamal, therefore, decides to leave Kuwait after his attempts to integrate into society fail:

Today, I fulfil my mother's wishes by returning to the country [America] where I am not labelled as a slave and where hypocrisy does not reign as people seek forgiveness by claiming we are all slaves of God (Ibid: 255)

Jamal's decision to return to America was motivated by his mother's wish, but also by his own desire to escape the racist legacy that defined him in Kuwait. He longed for a society where he could exist without being reduced to a set of negative stereotypes or expectations. In America, *Jamal* hoped to find a place where people would not use religion as a means to justify social and economic inequality. For *Jamal*, returning to America was not just about geographical distance, but about seeking self-acceptance and freedom from the societal expectations that had constrained him. He yearned for a sense of authenticity and self-expression, untainted by the biases and prejudices that had shaped his life in Kuwait. This journey highlights the universal human quest for identity and belonging. *Jamal's* story is a powerful reminder that our search for self-acceptance and autonomy is deeply rooted in our need for authenticity and connection with others. By choosing to return to America, *Jamal* is taking a bold step towards embracing his true self, unapologetically and unconditionally.

Jamal adds, indicating the differences between the two societies:

I return to a land where women freely express their desires without the burden of societal norms tied to their husband's background or their children's skin tone. I return to a nation where a person of colour once held the highest office in the White House (Ibid: 255)

In America, as this quote indicates, *Jamal* aspires to live in a society where women can freely pursue their desires, unfettered by societal expectations tied to their partner's marital status or skin colour. For him, the appointment of Barack Obama, the first African American President of the United States, serves as a beacon of hope for a more inclusive future. This historic milestone demonstrates the significant progress made towards racial equality in America.

This passage takes on added significance because it highlights the interconnectedness of social issues, recognising that different forms of oppression often intersect and inform one another. The struggles of people of colour, women, and individuals in interracial relationships are all intertwined, and solutions must acknowledge these complexities. Through *Jamal's* story, we gain a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by marginalised individuals, particularly Black people. His journey is a powerful reminder of the importance of self-acceptance, authenticity, and social change. By exploring these themes, *Jamal's* narrative offers a profound commentary on the human experience, urging us to strive for a more just and equitable society.

What stands out in this context, a disturbing trend emerges: the use of justifications to perpetuate discriminatory treatment towards blacks in Kuwaiti society. The notion that individuals are “slaves of God,” as articulated by *Jamal*, serves as a pretext for viewing blacks as inferior. Although the novel does not attribute this claim to a specific character, it is clear that it re-presents a widespread perspective in society, as referred to as “hypocrites”. This concept's significance lies in its direct connection between religious beliefs and racist attitudes. The phrase “slave of God” is used to justify the oppression and dehumanisation of blacks, reinforcing their perceived inferiority to whites. This quote unequivocally indicates that racism, at least among those who subscribe to these beliefs, is indeed harmful.

In the context of the characters who sympathise with anti-black and anti-slave sentiments exhibit examples of discrimination and prejudice in the work. For instance, *Jamal* recalls an incident where his colleagues mocked him at university, making him feel angry and humiliated. The irony is that when he gets angry, others cheer, as he says, “When we get angry, others cheer, because we are slaves.” (Ibid:210) *Jamal* is particularly upset when whites make fun of blacks, even when they exercise their natural right to be angry and happy. He remembers being in high school and having to suppress his anger for fear of being called a “slave monster” (Ibid:211)

Jamal has not forgotten the insult he received on his first day at Kuwait University when he asked a student the way to his classroom. The white student replied, “It seems that nothing is important now except talking to the slaves.” (Ibid:212) *Jamal* is confused by the contradiction between the Muslim girl's hijab and her racist behaviour, which he believes is discrimination against people based on colour. The situation was tense and provocative, but *Jamal* suppressed his anger because he believed that “only free white people have the right to express their anger and feelings, while we do not have the right to express our feelings because we are just slaves.” (Ibid:213) *Jamal* also recalls that in America, no one associates jinn with blacks. For example, he

and his mother often enjoy dancing and singing in church in America without being accused of dealing with jinn or magic. However, in Kuwait, the prevailing belief in society is that “every black person is a slave, and every slave is possessed by jinn.” (Ibid:215). He realises that these stereotypes are false images created by whites to control blacks. In this context, *Jamal* attempts to draw a comparison between the image of Christ in white and black culture. He points out that this perception is nothing but an illusion (Ibid:218), highlighting the need to challenge these stereotypes and promote understanding and acceptance.

4.4.1.10 Conclusion:

The novel *Li-annī Aswād* by Sa’dā’ al-Da’as’s employs the mood of fatalism to explore the complex and deeply ingrained issues of racial identity, white supremacy, and internalised racism. Through the character of *Jamal*, the author skilfully conveys the sense of inevitability that accompanies being black in a society that perpetuates racist ideologies. The novel highlights the ways in which black individuals are socialised to believe that their skin colour is a predetermined and immutable aspect of their identity, leaving them powerless to alter its impact on society. The novel also critiques the destructive nature of internalised racism, as *Jamal* struggles to reconcile his sense of self with societal expectations and biases. The character of *Joanne*, *Jamal*’s mother, serves as a poignant example of how internalised racism can lead to feelings of inadequacy and disconnection from one’s own identity. The novel shows how societal beauty standards, perpetuated through media and cultural norms, can shape an individual’s sense of self-worth, and create a sense of inferiority.

Furthermore, the novel highlights the ways in which religious beliefs can be used to justify or mask racism. The portrayal of Bilal Ibn Rabah, a prominent figure in Islamic history, is used to reinforce the idea that Islam values equality between all individuals, but this narrative is problematised by the implication that Bilal’s exceptional qualities allowed him to overcome racial barriers. This critique highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of racism and its complex intersections with religious beliefs.

Ultimately, the novel suggests that racism is a systemic issue that requires deterrent laws and strict legislation to achieve economic and social equality between people regardless of their colours and races. The novel concludes with *Jamal*’s permanent return to America, symbolizing his inability to escape the cycle of racism and internalized racism that has defined his life. Overall, the novel is a powerful exploration of the complexities of racial identity, white supremacy, and internalised racism. The novel offers a nuanced critique of societal norms and institutions that

perpetuate these issues and serves as a powerful call to action for greater understanding and change.

4.4.2 Khalid al-Bassam's Novel *Thaman al-Milh*: Salt for Gold

4.4.2.1 Preview

This novel exemplifies the “white saviour narrative” ideology suggesting that white individuals have a significant role in society - that of saving black slaves. Unable to free themselves, the burden falls on the white colonisers, depicted as the British in this narrative, to rescue them from slavery. Ironically, the white colonisers in the story fulfil both the roles of saviour and occupier. What adds to the irony is that this novel was not authored by the colonisers themselves but by the colonised. It propagates the ideology of “white supremacy” whether by portraying the colonisers as liberators or presenting local white individuals as saviours. The black characters, as we will demonstrate here, internalise this ideology, believing that slavery is their inevitable fate from birth. While neglecting the root of racist Arab stereotypes, the story reinforces “whiteness” as the norm by associating blackness with slavery. This association aims to justify the exploitation of black individuals, discourage rebellion, and facilitate the enslavement of human beings.

As historians like Jerzy Zdanowski have observed that after the abolition of slavery, the British government established a tradition of granting emancipation to enslaved individuals who sought asylum on British soil including ships. This meant that simply by entering a British consulate or ship, slaves could gain their freedom (Zdanowski, 2011:865). Within this context, the novel delves into the contradictory actions of the British government in its efforts to abolish slavery. On one hand, the government works towards ending the slave trade by rescuing slaves from smuggling operations at sea through ships. On the other hand, it also engages in facilitating the slave trade by making agreements with local merchants and princes (al-Bassam, 2017:90).

The British Consulate in Bahrain played a pivotal role in issuing emancipation documents to slaves. ‘*Abda*, as depicted in the novel, manages to secure her freedom after enduring hardships with her Arab master. Upon learning about the emancipation agreement enacted by the British Mandatory government, she diligently pursues her right to freedom (Ibid: 190).

4.4.2.2 Freedom Ideology between East and West: Two Different Realities

In the novel, shortly after the festive New Year's party hosted at the British government headquarters in Manama, the capital of Bahrain, Colonel *Robinson*, the British governor, found himself taken aback by breaking news just two days later. Rising early in the morning, the Colonel hastily perused the telegram, which delivered unexpected information. It reads, “The British

Navy successfully liberated 18 slaves from an Omani vessel en route to Dubai near Muscat. Upon our ship's arrival at the port of Manama, 16 of the slaves were able to flee..." (Ibid: 11) As mentioned earlier, following the announcement praising the British colonists for their role in freeing slaves from local Muslim smugglers, the narrator reveals that a group of these freed slaves rejected their newfound freedom and instead requested to be sold or returned to their masters (Ibid: 12). Naturally, the stance taken by the freed slaves surprised the British ruler, who exclaimed angrily, "what reasoning is behind this?" The local policeman responded, "That is precisely their desire... they do not seek freedom." The Colonel forcefully struck the table with his right hand and yelled in disbelief, "This is absurd... I refuse to accept it." (Ibid: 13)

Due to his doubts, however, he requested the presence of all Arab slave translators to ensure that there was no misunderstanding. It became apparent that the black slaves and the British ruler existed in two distinct realities, making communication, and understanding between them impossible without a linguistic intermediary (Ibid:13).

This event highlighted that the issue between Western and Arab societies goes beyond language barriers and reveals a structural gap rooted in social hierarchy. The translator's efforts were ineffective in bridging the gap between these two worlds. The two different realities are the subjective experiences and perspectives of the black slaves and the British ruler, respectively. The black slaves' "reality" is rooted in their past experiences as slaves, including their relationships with their slave masters, the culture, and social norms they were familiar with, and their understanding of freedom. Their desire to be sold or returned to their masters suggests that they may have been motivated by a desire for security, stability, or a sense of belonging. The British ruler's "reality", on the other hand, is shaped by his cultural and societal values, which likely emphasised the importance of freedom. His perception of freedom is tied to Western values of individual liberty and autonomy, which may not have been compatible with the cultural context and experiences of the black slaves in this story. The conflict between these two realities stems from their differing values, beliefs, and experiences. The British ruler's refusal to accept the slaves' decision not to seek freedom highlights the difficulties that can arise when individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact.

The conclusion saw a resolution reached between the local slave broker and the colonel, with an agreement for the Arab broker to refrain from selling the slaves in Bahrain. Instead, they would be deported to Karachi to work there, in accordance with a pact made with the British

King's government in India. Just two days prior, the government had requested slaves from the Gulf region to work for minimal wages (Ibid: 13).

4.4.2.3 The Ideology of “Whiteness” and the Reinforcement of the Status Quo

To further highlight the contradictory stance of the British government towards the slave trade in the region, the narrator recounts an exchange between the British Royal Navy Commander, *Mulkyes* and some sailors. Assigned by the colonel to catch fish for him and his staff, *Mulkyes* jestingly remarked to the sailors, “While we are busy fishing, the colonel is out hunting people on land.” The sailors burst into laughter, prompting the captain to quip further, “It looks like fishing being easy here, whether it's on the sea or on land.” (Ibid: 14)

The significance of this exchange between the British Royal Navy Commander, *Mulkyes*, and the sailors can be interpreted in several ways: (a) The British government, re-presented by the Royal Navy Commander, is tasked with combating the slave trade, yet they are simultaneously engaged in activities that promote or facilitate the continuation of the trade. The Commander's remark about “hunting people on land” highlights the hypocrisy of the British government's stance on slavery. This quote suggests that the British were not taking their anti-slavery efforts seriously or were not committed to eradicating the practice; (b) The sailors' laughter and the Captain's subsequent joke imply a sense of cynicism and disillusionment among the British personnel. They might have felt that their efforts to combat slavery were futile or that it was a “necessary evil” to continue their activities in the region. This sentiment could have contributed to a sense of moral fatigue or apathy towards the issue; and (c) Fishing, in this context, can be seen as a metaphor for the ambiguity and complexity of the situation. Just as fishing can be both a source of sustenance and a means of exploitation, the British government's actions can be seen as both an attempt to combat slavery and a means of perpetuating it. The joke about “fishing being easy” whether on land or sea suggests that the British were adept at navigating these complex waters, but perhaps not necessarily with integrity or moral compass.

This exchange poignantly exposes the moral duplicity and contradictions inherent in the British government's stance on slavery during this era. By juxtaposing the Commander's words with the sailors' cynicism, the passage illuminates the inherent flaws in the colonial narrative, particularly the notion of a “white saviour” complex. The British government's actions, which oscillate between anti-slavery rhetoric and complicity in the slave trade, undermine the idea of their moral authority and highlight the fragility of their claims to benevolence.

4.4.2.4 The Dominant Narrative Prevailed: Blackness Equals Slavery by Definition

The novel also probes the pervasive beliefs among its white and black characters regarding blackness and its inextricable link to slavery, a notion that was deeply ingrained during an era when every black person was, by definition, a slave. Through the narrator's lens, the novel scrutinises the fundamental assumptions that underpinned enslavement and justified the mistreatment of black individuals. The characters frequently employ phrases that perpetuate the notion that enslaved people are inherently destined for servitude. The concept of "The High Price of Freedom" serves as a powerful ideological tool, used to deter black people from challenging the established order. One striking example of this can be seen in *Muza's* response to 'Abda's inquiry about her freedom. When asked about her liberty, *Muza* becomes enraged and queries her reasoning, declaring: "Don't you know that you're a black slave, and God has ordained for you to remain a slave for all your life?" (ibid.: 186) This dialogue reveals the deeply ingrained ideology that dehumanised black people, viewing them as inherently subordinate and predetermined for a life of slavery.

Furthermore, the novel reveals that this ideology of inherent subservience was not limited to the white master's beliefs. Many black slaves themselves internalised this concept, often accepting their fate as predetermined. 'Abda poignantly reflects on this notion, stating: "I thought this had become ingrained in slavery, something inherent in us black people." (Ibid: 41) Similarly, 'Abda's fellow, Umm al-Khair, advises her to accept her enslavement, saying: "You should realise that we are destined to a life of slavery from birth, and all forms of enslavement are merciless and harsh because of our dark skin. It is our burden and disgrace." (Ibid: 49) This sentiment highlights the devastating impact of slavery on the self-perception and self-worth of enslaved individuals, who often came to believe that their blackness was synonymous with subjugation.

This internalisation, however, is not necessarily an acceptance of their own deservingness of slavery, but rather a resignation to the "reality" of their situation and the oppressive system they are trapped in. In other words, they may not necessarily believe that they deserve to be enslaved, but they may believe that others will inevitably enforce their enslavement and that they have no choice but to accept it. In this context, 'Abda and Umm al-Khair's statements suggest that they have internalised the dominant narrative that blackness is inherently linked to slavery, and that they are powerless to change their circumstances.

Consequently, 'Abda succumbs to this advice and comes to understand, following severe punishments from her master, that "the patience of slaves is more valuable than their bravery." (Ibid: 50) Interestingly, the novel exposes how such ideological discourse serves as a convincing tool for masters to uphold the status quo, while slaves adopt it to navigate their circumstances and safeguard their lives. Additionally, the novel presents a paradox concerning the reinforcement of "white supremacy" over blackness by black individuals themselves.

4.4.2.5 "Whiteness" as the Sole Standard of Beauty:

Despite the narrator seemingly taking an anti-slavery stance, he perpetuates the ideology of "white supremacy" through all his characters, particularly exemplified through the main character, 'Abda. When 'Abda first sees the whiteness of her mistress Aisha while assisting her in the bathroom, she is struck by Aisha's beauty, which conforms to white standards. She contrasts her mistress's white complexion and smooth hair with her own dark skin and coarse, curly hair, questioning the uneven distribution by God of beauty traits (Ibid: 52). Internal racism and a fear of being black intensify as 'Abda later dreams of peeling off her skin with a knife, only to reveal white skin underneath. She begins to believe that "the blackness of our bodies is merely a superficial layer caused by dirt and lack of hygiene and removing it would reveal the whiteness shared by the rest of humanity." (Ibid: 53)

During an encounter with Barakat, the attractive man who would later become 'Abda's lover, he flirts with her for the first time, leaving 'Abda surprised and questioning why a handsome man would show interest in her (Ibid: 138). Following their first intimate moment together, 'Abda reflects on the joy and sense of being beautiful and desirable that she experiences. However, her expression of these emotions suggests that it is uncommon for a young black woman to feel beautiful and desired, stating, "I felt that [my body] was beautiful despite its blackness, and that all men desired it despite its darkness, and that I was beautiful despite my enslavement." (Ibid: 181) 'Abda's perception of white individuals is influenced by the white world, where she feels inferior in their presence because:

they act freely, and they are masters of themselves and their decisions. No one sells them and no one buys them. Their world is white, and their lives are light in colour... as if we are black dots on a white page (Ibid: 51)

From the text, it seems that the author is critiquing the ideological stereotypes rather than endorsing them. The passage suggests that the characters, particularly 'Abda, are struggling with

internalised oppression and the societal norms that dictate their value and worth. The way *'Abda* describes her experience of feeling beautiful and desirable despite her enslavement and blackness implies a sense of contradiction and complexity. She is aware that her beauty and desirability are not typical for a young black woman in her situation, and this awareness may be seen as a commentary on the societal norms that perpetuate racist and sexist attitudes.

The passage also highlights the ways in which *'Abda's* perception of white individuals is influenced by the dominant culture, where they are portrayed as having agency, freedom, and autonomy. The image of “black dots on a white page” is a powerful metaphor for the ways in which marginalised individuals are often erased or rendered invisible in dominant narratives. By re-presenting these complex and nuanced views, the author appears to be critiquing the ideological stereotypes that perpetuate racism, sexism, and internalised oppression. The text suggests that these ideologies are damaging and limiting, and that individuals like *'Abda* are capable of complex emotions and thoughts that resist these dominant narratives.

4.4.2.6 The Normalisation of Human Slavery

The narrative approach underscores that while racism is ingrained in institutions, internalised racism is equally entrenched. The concept of being “slaves of God” is invoked to justify and normalise human enslavement. This belief—that all creation is subservient to God—has historically been used to rationalise the enslavement of individuals in the name of religion. An illustrative instance occurs in the narrator's account after *Hanna* is sold in the Mecca market and is subsequently renamed by her new Bahraini owner. The narrator recalls how, upon *Hanna's* birth, her family comforted her about her dark skin by saying, “You are a slave... But you are a slave to God.” (Ibid:34) Yet, the narrator poignantly adds, “Now, she is no longer a slave to God, but a slave to humans.” (Ibid: 34)

Earlier, the narrator describes the moment when *Hanna* is renamed *'Abda* by her new Bahraini owner, stating, “From Hanna to *'Abda*, the new name became a label for her body, her little history, her race, and, most importantly, her colour. She is now a slave—body, soul, colour, slavery, and everything that is black.” (Ibid:34)

The passage powerfully illustrates how the concept of divinely sanctioned subservience is manipulated to justify human enslavement, revealing the deep-seated complexities of racism and identity. The stark transition from *Hanna* to *'Abda* symbolizes the stripping away of

individuality and humanity, reducing her existence to mere ownership and colour in a context steeped in both racial and religious undertones.

The narrator's reflection suggests that the original phrase was used to downplay the stigma associated with slavery, making it seem as if *Hanna's* enslavement was not a shameful or dehumanising experience, but rather a natural part of her life. The phrase "slave of God" can be seen as a euphemism that downplays the agency and autonomy of enslaved individuals, making it seem as if they are not being exploited or oppressed by humans, but rather are fulfilling a divine purpose. This concept can be used to justify the institution of slavery, implying that it is not a human construct, but rather a divine decree.

Yet, if "slave of God" is indeed a human construct, created to justify and normalise the institution of slavery, then it's fair to say that "God" in this context is just another label for the dominant group or the oppressor. In that sense, "slave of God" is not fundamentally different from "slave of mankind". This interpretation highlights the ways in which religious justifications can be used to reinforce existing power structures and social hierarchies. By using divine authority to justify enslavement, those in power can use the concept of "God" to legitimise their own dominance and control over others. By recognising that "God" is also a human construct in this context, we can see that both "slave of God" and "slave of mankind" are part of the same oppressive system. This challenges the idea that there is a fundamental difference between divine and human forms of oppression, and instead highlights the ways in which both are used to maintain power imbalances and exploit certain groups.

4.4.2.7 The Ideology of "Happy Slave":

The writer explores the role of religious ideology in slavery particularly the ideology of "happy slave" by contrasting the experiences of slaves in Christianity and Islam through the character *Abda*. She reflects on her own unhappiness as a Muslim in comparison to the joy of slaves who have converted to Christianity and found solace in participating in the church orchestra, like *Samuel, Solomon, Jacob, and Thomas* (Ibid: 82). She views these converts as truly liberated and feels compelled to seek a closer connection with them to ease her inner turmoil. Each day, she grapples with questions such as why Christian slaves appear content and express their joy through music, while she and her fellow Muslim slaves remain perpetually melancholic. She ponders whether happiness comes from religion or skin colour, and whether changing one's faith leads to a better life (Ibid: 83). Following a Mass where she listens to the priest's sermon and prays, *Abda* approaches *Samuel* and asks: "Are you content with Christianity?" *Samuel*

responds: “My sister, Christianity has granted me freedom, which is all I desire.” (Ibid: 85-6) After this conversation, Samuel abruptly leaves, marking his departure with the sign of the cross and a fearful expression, leaving *Abda* to reflect that “his sudden departure resolved many of my inquiries and alleviated my anxiety about religion, which had been weighing heavily on my heart and soul.” (Ibid: 86)

The concept of the “happy slave¹¹⁵” ideology is a complex and contentious one that has been used to justify and perpetuate systems of oppression and exploitation throughout history. This ideology suggests that individuals who are subjugated or enslaved can find contentment, satisfaction, or a sense of fulfilment in their circumstances. This notion has been employed by oppressors as a means of rationalising and maintaining control over marginalised or enslaved populations by promoting the idea that their suffering is somehow tolerable or even beneficial to them. Hence, the idea of content or cheerful Christian slaves seen by *Abda* may be seen as a way to justify the status quo and discourage resistance. This harmful belief suggests that those who are oppressed are satisfied with their situation and do not desire change. It can be used to undermine efforts for social justice, equality, and human rights by presenting a false image of marginalised individuals' experiences. It is crucial to challenge the ideology of the “happy slave” not by comparing religions, but as a distortion of “reality” that upholds inequality.

4.4.2.8 Conclusion:

In conclusion, this novel perpetuates the “white saviour narrative” by portraying white individuals as the heroes who rescue black slaves from their oppressive circumstances. The novel also reinforces the ideology of “white supremacy” by associating blackness with slavery and inferiority. The characters, including *Abda*, internalise these ideologies, believing that their blackness is inherently tied to slavery and that they are destined for a life of servitude.

The novel highlights the contradictions in the British government's stance on slavery, which oscillates between anti-slavery rhetoric and complicity in the slave trade. The exchange between the British Royal Navy Commander and the sailors illustrates the hypocrisy and cynicism of the British government's actions. The narrative fails to distinguish between abolition in colonial thought and emancipation in Islamic thought, which emphasises the voluntary and paternal nature of individual acts. Despite the abolition efforts by the British Consulate, the prevailing

¹¹⁵ See Dwyer, Erin. (2021). *Mastering Emotions: Feelings, Power, and Slavery in the United States*. University of Pennsylvania Press. PP. 71-102.

attitudes towards slaves in Bahraini society remained unchanged. This persistence of slavery's cultural and societal norms made it challenging to eradicate the institution of slavery, let alone challenge its underlying power structures. The continued dominance of slave-holding culture over slaves demonstrated the profound influence of culture and ownership on the social system, as slavery had become an integral part of Bahrain's social fabric. In this context, the novel highlights the resilience of slavery as an institution and the ways in which it is deeply entrenched in the social and cultural fabric of Bahrain. The failure to abolish slavery despite efforts by the British Consulate underscores the significant role that culture and societal norms play in perpetuating systems of oppression.

The novel challenges the concept of the “happy slave” ideology by comparing the experiences of Christian and Muslim slaves, questioning the role of religion in promoting contentment or oppression within the slavery system. Moreover, this perspective is problematic because it implies that there is a moral distinction between different forms of slavery, with some being more acceptable than others. However, as pointed out earlier, slavery is inherently a violation of human rights and dignity, regardless of its form or context. The notion that some forms of slavery are better or more humane than others is a flawed and misguided perspective that ignores the inherent suffering and oppression that slaves experience. By highlighting the limitations and flaws of this ideology, the novel underscores the importance of recognising the universal harm and injustice caused by slavery, regardless of its cultural or historical context.

The novel critiques the internalised oppression and self-perception of enslaved individuals, who often believe that their blackness is synonymous with subjugation. The characters' internalised racism and fear of being black are intensified by the dominant culture, which portrays whiteness as superior. However, the novel also presents a nuanced view of internalised oppression, suggesting that it is not simply a matter of individuals accepting their inferior status, but rather a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that is shaped by societal norms and dominant ideologies.

Ultimately, the novel exposes the ways in which racism and internalised oppression are entrenched in society, highlighting the need for a critical examination of these ideologies and their impact on individuals and communities. By critiquing the dominant narratives and presenting complex and nuanced views, the author challenges readers to re-evaluate their understanding of racism, internalised oppression, and the ongoing legacies of slavery.

4.4.3 Maḥmūd Trāwri's Novel *Maymūna*:

4.4.3.1 Preview

While the novel aims to expose the exploitation of black African Muslims by “Arab Bedouins” en route to Mecca for Hajj in the early 20th century, it also touches on the intertwined themes of racial origins and supremacy. By highlighting the narrator's belief, *Maymūna*, that all human races stem from black origins, the narrative challenges the notion of white dominance and promotes the idea that blackness holds an exceptional significance as the root of all racial diversity (Trāwri, 2007:11).

The narrative style of the novel reflects the ideological stance of the narrator as in other novels. For instance, the narrator portrays the “Arab Muslim Bedouins” as criminal gangs, highlighting their perceived fixation on sex and labelling them as non-Muslims (Ibid:27). Drawing upon these beliefs, the narrator asserts that ignorance and greed erode both humanity and faith, painting the “Bedouins” as uneducated and merciless (Ibid:12).

By leveraging the ideology of religion, which in the Qur'an¹¹⁶ stipulates the infidelity and hypocrisy of the Bedouins the narrator characterises the “Bedouins” conduct as “savage”, while also employing the concept of racial superiority to position black individuals as the source of human ancestry, “All other races converge on the shores of their [black] skin.” (Ibid:11). This dual approach underscores the narrator's perspective on the “Bedouins” as morally questionable and emphasises the significance of black origins in the narrative's overall thematic framework.

4.4.3.2 Utopian Aspiration and “Ideological Closure”

In *Maymūna*'s novel, the depiction of anti-slavery may initially appear as a hopeful desire to challenge the existing societal norms and strive for a more equitable social and political environment. However, within the narrative, the denunciation of slavery leads to a call for revenge (Ibid:12). I posit that in *Maymūna*'s work, the re-presentation of anti-slavery can be viewed as a utopian aspiration in a form of “ideological closure¹¹⁷” rooted in themes of

¹¹⁶ In the context of this discussion, the relevant Qur'anic verse is Q 9:97, which states: “The Desert-Arabs are the most steeped in disbelief and hypocrisy, and the most likely to ignore the limits that Allah revealed to His Messenger.” Ibn Kathir, a renowned commentator on the Qur'an, interprets this verse as follows: “The Almighty has informed us that among the Bedouins are found infidels, hypocrites, and believers, with their disbelief and hypocrisy being more pronounced and severe than those of others.” (Ibn Kathir, 1999, 4:76)

¹¹⁷ “Ideological closure” can refer to a situation where a work of fiction presents a singular, fixed worldview or perspective without allowing for alternative interpretations or viewpoints. This can manifest in various

victimisation and degradation. The story unfolds as the narrator recounts her family's decision to migrate from West Africa to Mecca, citing their escape from the oppressive treatment by white Christians as the primary motivation for their journey.

This narrative reveals the historical brutality inflicted upon Africans by European colonisers, prompting the family's quest to challenge the prevailing conditions influenced by external social, political, and cultural factors (Ibid: 11-15). While the novel depicts the “white Christian” involvement in the enslavement and exploitation of Africans through theft, sabotage, and other despicable actions, it applauds the Muslim Arab caravans that ventured into Africa during the 7th century, highlighting their innocence and good intentions (Ibid: 38). This dichotomy is a good example of “ideological closure” where the attempt to create a false narrative that distinguishes between “good” colonialism (Arab-Islamic) and “bad” colonialism (Western Christian), which ignores the fact that colonialism, regardless of its geographical origin or cultural context, is inherently exploitative and oppressive. By doing so, the author is perpetuating a simplistic and misleading view of history.

Drawing on the insights of Marx and Engels, who emphasised the role of material conditions in shaping people's lives (Marx and Engels, 1976: 31-32), we see in this novel, the primary motivation for immigration is not to challenge beliefs, but rather stems from the harsh realities brought about by the Christian colonial violence. The desire to change the status quo suggests that African Muslims are upholding the existing ideological framework. According to the narrator, there are three main reasons for undertaking a pilgrimage to Mecca: seeking salvation, responding to the call of Islam, and being close to the House of God (Ibid: 11 & 15). The narrative of migration underscores Althusser's concept of ideology as “a system of representations relating to material practices” (Green and Lebehan, 1996: 129), highlighting how the rejection of Christian dominance leads the narrator to perceive migration to Islamic territories as the sole utopian solution.

Although colonial “brutality” is not exclusive to Christianity, the narrator's association of this violence with the Christian faith underscores the “ideological closure” present in their utopian aspirations. This discourse also points towards a metaphysical endeavour in challenging the

ways, such as characters and events being portrayed in a way that reinforces a particular ideology or belief system, without exploring nuances or complexities that might challenge or complicate that perspective (Jameson, 1981:195-270 & Makaryk, 1993:523).

status quo, underlining the religious underpinnings that shape the outcome of this “ideological closure”.

The author employs narrative techniques to fictionalise the experience of victimisation during the immigration journey, blurring the lines between “reality” and fiction. This victimisation is depicted as a perpetual process of transformation, serving as a form of ideological confinement that shapes individuals' perception of the world. The resulting change can lead to unforeseen repercussions. Consequently, the narrator portrays the journey from their homeland to Mecca as a harrowing progression (Ibid:21). As the narrator recounts the harrowing migration from their homeland to Mecca as a journey plagued by horrors, they encounter non-believers, described as “pagans” who do not adhere to Islam (Ibid: 15-17). The narrator openly admits to being afraid of three things during their journey: “night, darkness, and pagans.” (Ibid: 18) This portrayal highlights how the concept of “ideological closure” influences the narrator's perception of “reality”. Despite being of the same racial background, conflicts arise between the narrator and the pagans due to their differing religious ideologies, illustrating the profound impact of belief systems on individual actions and perceptions of truth. Following their escape from the African black pagans, they ventured across the river to delve into the forest depths. There, they encountered a group of white individuals, whom the narrator immediately labelled as enemies solely based on their colour, without any prior knowledge (Ibid:19). This narrative construction highlights how the use of signs such as “night, darkness and brutality” conveys more than just events, as it is imbued with ideological cues that reflect the narrator's perception of their victimhood, positioning Muslim Africans as targets of various adversaries, including the forces of nature. Consequently, the narrator implies that Muslim Africans are powerless to achieve a perfect resolution, as the ideological markers woven into the narrative suggest a recurrent theme of victimisation where Africans are constantly depicted as being besieged by multiple foes. By acknowledging the experiences of powerlessness and victimhood, this passage can cultivate empathy towards those victims. Moreover, this depiction can prompt readers to recognise the shared human vulnerability to the forces of nature and societal oppression, specifically the historical and ongoing narratives of white dominance over black communities. By doing so, the narrative can facilitate a deeper understanding of the collective human experience of powerlessness, helplessness, and victimisation, ultimately promoting a more compassionate and equitable society.

The narrative structure ultimately reveals that the “ideological closure” tied to black victimisation transcends mere racial tensions. The novelist suggests that the only utopian aspiration within *Maymūna*’s narrative lies in the recitation of the Qur’an, a practice that can be viewed as ideological in nature (Ibid: 17-18). This interpretation aligns with Ricoeur’s assertion that labelling something as “ideological” is not merely a theoretical judgment but reflects a particular view of “reality” shaped by daily practices (Ricoeur, 1986: 165). The recitation of the Qur’an serves as a tangible manifestation of the narrator’s familial existence and reality, offering a sense of hope and purpose in navigating the challenges posed by victimisation.

This utopian drive to resist victimhood re-presents a form of “ideological closure” that seeks to define the individual’s existence within a framework of class domination. For the narrator, grappling with the dominant ideology encountered during their journey mirrors the ideological underpinning of reciting the Qur’an. By reciting the Qur’an, the narrator redefines their existence within a framework of their faith, rather than being defined solely by their victimhood. The “ideological closure” provided by the recitation of the Qur’an suggests that the narrator has found a way to resolve their feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness. This closure can be seen as utopian because it implies a sense of finality and completeness, providing the narrator with a sense of peace and fulfilment.

Ultimately, the narrator’s family finds themselves confronted with “ideological closures” when faced with adversities, underscoring the complex interplay of beliefs, realities, and struggles they must navigate. In this passage, the narrator turns to mythology as he portrays a Hausa sheikh named *Adamu* conversing with animals like snakes, birds, and ants. When *Maymūna*’s father encourages the group to recite the Qur’an in times of trouble, a cluster of ants questions *Sheikh Adamo* about his departure while their companions remain silent. Despite the ants’ plea for him and his wife to stay and alleviate their distress, *Adamo* explains that he is leaving out of necessity, inviting them to join if they wish (Ibid:23)

4.4.3.3 Ideology Between the Victim and the Executioner

The narrative framework of *Maymūna*’s novel encapsulates what Terry Eagleton refers to as the “limited power of consciousness.” (Eagleton, 1991: 33). This notion suggests that the constraints of imagination inhibit the potential for a utopian vision to prevail over the dominance of “ideological closure”. While the novel delves into themes of slavery and opportunities for societal transformation, the author posits conflicting perspectives on the plausibility of altering the existing power dynamics. Despite intimating a potential for change, a prevailing theme of

“ideological closure” suggests that such transformation is unattainable for the characters within the narrative. The narrator conveys a sense of resignation by stating, “The secret of existence lies in enduring defeat and seizing bitterness.” (Ibid:9), signifying an acceptance of perpetual struggle without achieving victory. This recurring pattern of failure to challenge the status quo stems from the overpowering influence of the illusion of victimhood, positioning the narrator as a subject bound by the constraints of the dominant white ideology. Through this indirect portrayal, the narrator endeavours to persuade the reader of the character's victimisation and their struggle against an entrenched system of power dynamics. Thus, the narrative can be interpreted as an ideological allegory portraying the enduring struggle against systemic oppression and the limitations imposed by prevailing ideologies. In order to truly understand her emotional landscape, one must follow her narrative thread: “I endured hardship and survived,” (Ibid:9) she says, her words a poignant reminder of the human capacity for perseverance. But what does it mean to survive? The novel suggests that perhaps this is not the most important question.

Therefore, the narrator draws a poignant parallel between her own narrative and the noxious odour with which her uncle, *Omar*, had once painted his body to deceive others and escape the brutal reality of slavery. By likening the bitterness of her own experience to the corrosive impact of slavery on societal progress, she underscores the devastating effects of this insidious institution on individuals and communities. In a confessional moment, *Omar* himself admits: “I smell the stench of filth on my body...Oh my God, is it the filth in me?... Oh my God... Is it my own repugnance that transforms into musk in their perception while I smell it for what it is?” (Ibid.: 129), highlighting the self-loathing and shame that can result from complicity in such a morally reprehensible practice.

This comparison serves to urge readers to confront the stark realities of the brutal history of slavery, compelling them to acknowledge the atrocities that have marred social movements. *Maymūna's* narrative serves as a means to advocate against slavery, functioning as an ideological tool that simultaneously embodies the concept of “ideological closure”. By emphasising the need for attention to be directed towards the repercussions of slavery, the narrator highlights the absence of true social justice throughout history. This insistence on confronting the negative aspects of the past underscores the narrator's interconnectedness with the world and its historical context, as she endeavours to shed light on the pervasive influence of ideology in justifying and perpetuating the abhorrent conditions stemming from slavery. However, the

narrator assigned this duty to her daughter, *Quds*, from the third generation, expressing her bold opinions about slavery. *Quds* speaks openly for the first time saying, "Slavery may not have disappeared, but the facade has changed... My mind is consumed by the conflict that perpetuates and rationalises slavery... The weight of history bears down on me... I attempt to move on, to push past, but I am unable to." (Ibid:136)

Quds' reflection poignantly captures the enduring legacy of slavery, suggesting that while its overt forms may have shifted, the underlying conflicts and justifications persist. The emotional burden of history paralyzes *Quds*, highlighting the struggle to reconcile with a past that continues to influence the present, making the pursuit of genuine progress feel almost impossible.

4.4.3.4 Black Narratives Against White Narratives

The narrator recognises that the ideologies that perpetuated oppressive systems like slavery were deeply ingrained and instrumental in sustaining them. However, she also acknowledges that historical events are shaped by human constructs that are inevitably intertwined with ideologies, often serving the interests of one group at the expense of another. In response, the narrator uses alternative narratives as a weapon to highlight the urgent need to challenge and dismantle the dominant narratives that have enabled these injustices to persist, emphasising the need to find new narratives that can replace those that have allowed such atrocities to occur.

By validating her defiance against slavery, the narrator confirms her identity as an African woman who has made it her mission to educate her daughter on the history of Africa and the unfiltered truth about their ancestors, in a bid to uphold the torch of liberation through each generation. "My dear *Quds*, please share with others all that I have told you. Let my daughter, tell them, so they know we are still connected and not estranged." (Ibid: 135)

Conversely, the narrator underscores a clear division between "us" and "them" predicated on religious lines, with the intent of segregating diverse ethnic communities. She celebrates African tribes that integrated and formed a cohesive identity with Muslim Arabs in Hijaz, where the mantra is "The believers are only brothers" (Ibid: 28). Her focus on division extended beyond Islam and Christianity, as she also glorifies the forests as the domain of black individuals, contrasting them with ignorant Western invaders and pimps motivated solely greed (Ibid:13).

In this context, the narrator eschews the notion of integration with others, instead opting to establish a racial divide delineated by a dualistic framework of (us/them). Because the "Other" is different (racially or otherwise) from the majority of the group, there is a tendency in the

narrative to set rules and boundaries that separate the majority from the minority. This tendency of creating “them” rather than an “us”, according to Spencer,

can be seen to be important in human society as it affirms qualities and characteristics that a group sees as normal as the rules by which they live. In the most obvious cases these affirmations gain official and legal status and those breaking the rules are portrayed as ‘criminals’, ‘insane’, ‘deviants’ or ‘anti-social’. They may live and work on the fringes of ‘respectable’ society, and make up a marginalised group or underclass, but they are also frequently associated with racial or ethnic groups. Such boundaries are, by their very nature, implicitly political and strike to the heart of personal and social identity (Spencer, 2006:8)

In this context, the “ideological closure” perpetuated by the racial dichotomy impedes the narrator's ability to effectively verbalise the inherent dilemma, thereby aligning with the prevailing ideology by perpetuating the dichotomy of (us/them). Ultimately, the insistence on maintaining a racial dualism can be perceived as an embodiment of “ideological closure”.

Moreover, the narrator contends that historical progress does not address societal challenges effectively. *Maymūna* experiences a sense of disconnection following an extended period in Mecca. She expresses, “My name is not what makes me strange...it is time, for it does not acknowledge my complexion...the sea complements the skin of my people...all races converge along its shores, weighing it down with exclusion and fire.” (Ibid:11) Consequently, the narrator's concept of “ideological closure” proposes that ideology essentially serves as a method of representation—an amalgamation of cultural elements that are perceived, embraced, encountered, and influencing individuals in a way that surpasses their awareness. As mentioned earlier, by highlighting that every race is rooted in her own complexion, the narrator implies a sense of superiority within her racial group, suggesting that this is a fact unbeknownst to others.

This underscores her attempt to sway the reader into accepting her ideology regarding the purported superiority of her Black race. Essentially, while White individuals may uphold the ideology of white supremacy, the narrator leverages this very ideology to persuade the reader that her complexion serves as the core from which all other races emanate. Her endeavour to convince the reader of her race's superiority can be interpreted as an exercise in “ideological closure”. By claiming her race's superiority, she is attempting to validate and legitimise her group's dominance over others as well as closing off opportunities for dialogue, debate, and critical reflection.

4.4.3.5 Ideology and Delusions:

The narrator delineates the plight of Black individuals who endure mistreatment and enslavement due to racist ideologies, particularly those stemming from Christian beliefs. Terry Eagleton posits the notion that ideologies “are often seen as peculiarly action-oriented sets of beliefs.” (Eagleton, 1991:47) In the narrative, the narrator recounts the harrowing account of white Christians seizing her ancestors, binding them in chains, and transporting them on a harrowing journey to a distant land, where they were stripped of their dignity and left to suffer (Ibid:12). Subsequently, Black individuals are subjected to degradation and are compelled to obey their oppressors to evade brutal repercussions, akin to being treated as mere animals. The narrator suggests that confronting unjust historical circumstances may engender an ideology that rationalises seeking retribution, illustrating how ideology can fuel delusions. She remarks, “When my father recounts his memories, his eyes brim with intense anger.” (Ibid:12). Despite her uncle's attempts to recall the positive aspects of their experiences upon arriving in Mecca, her father asserts that white Christians perpetuate severe injustices due to their fixation on material wealth (Ibid:13).

This underscores how “ideological closure” as articulated by Karl Mannheim, aligns with her father's societal and racial background, shaping his worldview (Mannheim, 1936:51). Consequently, her father struggles to shake off the deeply ingrained anger-fuelled ideology. As Althusser suggests in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists*, ideological representations construct a specific perception of reality, framing it in a particular manner (Althusser, 1990:29). Despite her uncle's efforts to espouse a utopian perspective, the stronghold of “ideological closure” remains potent, causing her father to rely on his ideologically driven experiences to legitimise his wrath. Consequently, this justification distances him from comprehending actuality, thereby impeding the narrator's father from embracing a utopian impulse to thrive in Mecca.

Within the novel, ideology functions as a form of re-presenting the imagined connection to the socio-historical context. Althusser articulates that ideological re-presentations involve concepts related to nature and society, encompassing the everyday existence of individuals - their interactions with nature, society, social structures, other people, as well as their own economic and political undertakings. However, these re-presentations do not offer accurate depictions of the realities they represent. While they may include some elements of knowledge, they are

always part of a larger system of re-presentations that is inherently biased and guided by “a false conception of the world or of the domain of objects under consideration.” (Althusser, 1990:24)

The narrator reflects on her father's journey from Africa to Mecca and recounts an instance where he encountered ideological discrimination from an African religious group. She observes that they are from,

different races, only separated by the Red Sea from achieving their goals, religion binds them together, their aspiration to reside in Mecca fosters their unity. They continuously assert that the religion that 'It doesn't bring us together, we don't need it (Ibid:22)

This suggests that when an African religious group embraces ideological religious beliefs, it compels its members to conform to the same path. Nonetheless, what may appear as a utopian drive actually conceals a form of ideology. It leans on one ideology to counter another, illustrating that the narrative structure harbours an “ideological closure” characterised by oppression and degradation.

4.4.3.6 The Narrator's Ideological Stance

Finally, in this novel, the narrative reflects the narrator's ideological stance, evident in her derogatory remarks about the Bedouins. Through her beliefs, she rationalises her racist views towards them, labelling them as bandits fixated on sex and portraying them as gangs that prey on pilgrims' convoys (Ibid:27). Additionally, she asserts that they are non-Muslims, citing their ignorance and ruthless nature as evidence of their lack of humanity and religion (Ibid:12). By employing ideology to condemn the Bedouins' behaviour as socially unacceptable, the narrator solidifies an “ideological closure” of anti-racism that showcases how ideology can manipulate individuals as subjects. This manipulation necessitates the narrator's expulsion of the Bedouins from the Islamic faith that shapes their identities. In this scenario, the narrator discovers Qur'anic backing for reliance upon when Muhammad refers to the Bedouins as greater disbelievers and hypocrites, as mentioned earlier in Surah At-Tawbah (Qur'an: 9:97), in an effort to evade the negative portrayal of Islam by endorsing slavery. By accusing the Bedouins in this light, the suspicion of criticising the religion is removed.

The narrator also posits that Black Africans are devoid of ideology, suggesting that their consciousness is a social-ideological phenomenon. She asserts that Black individuals innately embody humanity, live in harmony with their environment, and possess heightened senses that prioritise experiential perception (Ibid:31). She describes the African community in Mecca as

innocent individuals, free from the vices of villains, lacking in curiosity, kind-hearted, harbouring no ill will towards others, and unfamiliar with the concept of theft (Ibid: 107)

Moreover, she emphasises that Arab individuals with connections to Africans exhibit bravery and intellect (Ibid:35). This insinuates that those who perpetrate violence against Black individuals lack an understanding of nature, intelligence, and courage, ultimately using ideology to justify aggression and humiliation. The narrator underlines the necessity for Africans to address the discriminatory behaviour of Arabs and contests the notion that peace alone can lead to an ideal society; instead, it hinges on ideology. For instance, she recounts a scenario where *Munawar* and a few fellow tribesmen agree to accompany individuals with pure intentions but misguided beliefs on clandestine outings at night (Ibid:39). This serves to illustrate that maintaining a peaceful approach does not eliminate racist actions and societal injustices. Additionally, the narrator highlights a conversation between her uncle and other enslaved individuals who urge him to fight for his liberation, emphasising that failure to do so would consign him to perpetual enslavement (Ibid:59). Essentially, she posits that an anti-slavery ideology rooted in opposition to victimisation can serve as a shield against further harm for Africans.

4.4.3.7 Narrative is Written by the Victors:

This exploration of the concept of “ideological closure” within the novel underscores the role of anti-slavery as a social and political movement aimed at addressing the societal context of racism. However, the pursuit of anti-racism is paradoxical, as it still relies on the ideology of slavery, characterised by degradation and mistreatment. This socio-political perspective of challenging the existing societal norms sheds light on the historical struggle against slavery in the Arabian Peninsula during the previous century. Despite this, the narrator's consciousness is evident in her resistance against the grand narratives constructed by the conquerors, whether they are of Western or Eastern origins. The fact is that “defeated Black” only exists within a “narrative” or “story”.

Ultimately, the history of enslavement is viewed as a narrative enforced by “those who carry swords.” (Ibid: 44) Thus, the strong urge to establish a “black narrative” became the predominant theme of this novel, overshadowing all events and interpreting them in a black hue that the author believes to be the fundamental colour of humanity. In a conversation with her father, *Maymūna* urges him to “embody Adam, who is portrayed as colourless by heaven and was misled by human tendencies when brutality emerged, causing a divide.” (Ibid: 74) She highlights

that cruel societies drive individuals towards brutality, and the aspiration to transcend such brutality brings people together (Ibid:50 & 64).

4.4.3.8 Conclusion:

In conclusion, *Maymūna's* novel presents a complex and nuanced exploration of the themes of racial origins, supremacy, and the struggle against slavery. Through the narrator's experiences, the novel highlights the interconnectedness of these themes and the ways in which they are shaped by ideologies of racial superiority and colonialism. The narrator's belief in the importance of black origins as the root of all racial diversity challenges the notion of white dominance and promotes a sense of pride and self-empowerment among black individuals.

However, the novel also perpetuates a simplistic and misleading view of history by portraying Arab-Muslims as “good” colonisers and Christians as “bad” colonisers. This dichotomy ignores the fact that colonialism, regardless of its geographical origin or cultural context, is inherently exploitative and oppressive.

The novel's portrayal of slavery as a form of victimisation serves to create empathy for those who have been oppressed, but also reinforces a sense of powerlessness and helplessness. The narrator's recitation of the Qur'an serves as a form of “ideological closure” that provides a sense of hope and purpose in navigating the challenges posed by victimhood.

Ultimately, the novel presents a complex and nuanced exploration of the interplay between ideologies, power dynamics, and individual experiences. While it challenges dominant narratives and promotes a sense of self-empowerment among black individuals, it also perpetuates some problematic views of history and colonialism. The novel serves as an important reminder of the ongoing struggle against systemic oppression and the need for continued education and awareness about the historical and ongoing narratives of white dominance over black communities.

4.5 The Secular Ideological Lens:

4.5.1 Ali al-Muqri's Novel *Ta'am Aswād, Ra'eha Swada*

4.5.1.1 Preview

The story primarily follows the struggles of marginalised black individuals facing discrimination and oppression within Yemeni society during the latter years of the 20th century. Yet the narrative is tinged with the “white saviour” ideology, portraying white characters as the sole agents capable of rescuing black individuals. This ideology suggests that black individuals are depicted as incapable of overcoming marginalisation without the intervention of white individuals, attributing their challenges to the intricate cultural and social dynamics within society.

The “white saviour narrative”, as explained earlier¹¹⁸, is a concept in which a white individual takes charge of guiding people of colour into mainstream society through their own perceived kindness and authority, thereby perpetuating the belief that people of colour are incapable of helping themselves. This narrative has historically been effective in marginalising people of colour. In literary works, the “white saviour narrative” reinforces white perspectives and stereotypes that uphold the dominant ideology of whiteness. By lacking a true sense of self, individuals are constantly vulnerable to political scrutiny, especially in their interactions with those deemed as the “Other”. White saviours often view themselves as superior, whether consciously or not, and rush, as seen in this novel, to enact changes without considering the potential negative repercussions.

Against the historical backdrop of the tale, set amid the mid-seventies to the early eighties, the Socialist Party in South Yemen, predominantly composed of individuals from a white background, champions the “liberation of blacks” through the mantra of “liberation of Akhdam”. The narrative delves further into the actions of white politicians, who launch initiatives and make promises to emancipate black individuals and bestow upon them social and legal parity with the broader Yemeni society.

4.5.1.2 Blacks' Reaction to the “White Savior” Ideology:

To demonstrate the influence of ideologies presented in the novel, we will begin by examining the slogan “Liberate the akhdam” which sparked debates among black characters and shaped

¹¹⁸ See: PP. 234-5.

their responses to the concept of the “white saviour”. We will then move onto the Yemeni cultural references interwoven in the narrative, providing a glimpse into the genuine experiences of black individuals, and shedding light on community awareness, values, and belief systems.

Despite incorporating Marxist principles to challenge white supremacy, as evident in *Sorour*'s actions in this novel, the author seemingly allows the pervasive influence of white supremacy to dominate the novel's events and characters. This is precisely what *Sorour* conveyed during one of his dialogues:

These are the words of Ambo [white people], who debate whether we are of African or Yemeni descent, whether we are created from humans or jinn, and even if God or Satan formed us. Let them voice their opinions freely... It does not matter if they suggest that we were created or descended from the lowest place, we are indifferent to whether we come from a prestigious lineage or a disgraceful one (al-Muqri, 2008:83)

However, it appears that *Sorour* felt profound disappointment as he ultimately acknowledged that “white supremacy” had prevailed over the struggle of black people. He expressed this sentiment with a tone of resignation:

We the Akhdam, conditioned to believe that even our aspirations for ownership are confined within the framework of our own servitude. Our documents and contracts only grant us the privilege to serve ‘Ambo’ [the white master]. We compete amongst ourselves to determine who will be granted this privileged position (Ibid: 84-85)

Throughout the narrative, the prevailing concept revolves around waiting for the white saviour, the Yemeni president, who pledged to rescue the former black slaves from their plight. In a moment filled with sorrow and reflection, *Bahja*, a leftist character, mourns the loss of the “liberator of slaves” former president of the Democratic Republic of Yemen, *Salem Rabie*¹¹⁹, also known as “Salmeen”. She expresses regret over the passing of the white president:

¹¹⁹ Salim Rabai Ali (d. 1978) known by his comrades as "Salmeen", was the Marxist head of state of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) from 22 June 1969 until his execution on 26 June 1978. See: al-Watan al-Adeniya Newspaper. (2020). "تفاصيل تكشف لأول مرة عن الرئيس سالمين بشهادة جنرال روسي" (Details revealed for the first time about President Salmeen, with the testimony of a Russian general). Published on 22/12/2020. Link accessed on 29/12/22: <https://al-wattan.net/news/143239>.

Salmeen liberated the slaves and instilled a sense of dignity in them for the first time. Under his leadership, we were not viewed solely as slaves. If someone disrespected us, we had the power to report them, and they would be promptly imprisoned (Ibid: 88)

Bahja proceeds to discuss the assistance offered by the previous president to the *Akhdam* community, including services and support provided to the black population. For example, under the leadership of the former president, the *Akhdam* were given the opportunity to work in the military and be employed by the government for the first time. Many of them received an education and were taught to read and write, irrespective of race. Those who had previously worked as musicians and entertainers at events like parties and weddings were now employed as performers in music and dance groups. As a result, there were no longer any *Akhdam* individuals forced to beg for charity from others (Ibid: 88). In concluding her admiration for the “white saviour”, she encapsulates her vision regarding the attributes of this impending saviour and the actions he must take to benefit the black community:

We long for others who appreciate us for who we are, respect our culture, accept our skin colour, and value our black taste and our black smell (Ibid: 88)

Sorour's intervention at this moment reveals a stark contrast to *Bahja's* perspective, as he passionately opposes the notion of a “white saviour” and the idea that marginalised communities should rely on the benevolence of their oppressors for liberation:

They hire us and then abandon us without resources for centuries, only to casually suggest integrating us into society. Are we expected to applaud the state while living in deplorable conditions? (Ibid: 88)

In this quotation, he challenges the dominant narrative of integration, arguing that it should not be a one-way process where marginalised groups are expected to accept scraps from the table while living in dire conditions. Instead, he advocates for a mutually beneficial and equitable approach that addresses the systemic injustices and historical traumas faced by marginalized communities. *Sorour* continues to reflect:

I recently met three young people from the Ambo [white] community, who reminded me of the traditional sayings they still recite... Let us strive for freedom, let us truly be free, but let us reject carrying labels such as Akhdam, Luhoj, Shammam, Ashfuli, Snakum, Ahjoor, subiyen, akhdam, Slaves. In our view, the servant means free (Ibid: 88-9)

Here, *Sorour* shares a poignant experience with three young men from the dominant community, who still recite traditional sayings that perpetuate harmful stereotypes and racist attitudes. He uses this encounter to highlight the ongoing effects of historical trauma, emphasising that the legacy of slavery and colonialism continues to shape the lives of marginalised communities. By rejecting labels such as “Akhdam,” “Luhoj,” and “slaves,” *Sorour* critiques internalised oppression and the tendency for marginalised communities to define themselves solely through the lens of their oppression. He instead urges them to reclaim their own identities and characteristics, free from the shackles of their past.

Through his words, *Sorour* underscores the urgent need for marginalised communities to take ownership of their own liberation, rather than relying on the benevolence of others. His critique also serves as a powerful reminder that internalised oppression is a complex issue that requires a nuanced understanding and collective effort towards healing and empowerment. Then he goes on to say:

It is their responsibility to redefine the meaning of slavery in their language, not us... Why shouldn't we embrace freedom with our own identities and characteristics? Why should we follow the Ambo if we seek liberation? Don't we have the right to determine the path towards our own freedom? (Ibid: 88-89)

At the end of his argument, *Sorour* reformulates the narrative about slavery and freedom. By asserting that it is the responsibility of the dominant society to redefine the meaning of slavery in its own language, he challenges the idea that marginalised communities should be expected to define themselves solely through the lens of slavery and oppression. Instead, they call for a more nuanced understanding of freedom and self-determination. At the same time, the speaker emphasises that marginalised communities have the right to determine their path toward freedom and liberation, rather than having others tell them what that means. This is a strong assertion of independence and agency.

Overall, this quote is important because it offers a powerful critique of systemic racism, challenges dominant narratives about slavery and freedom, and affirms the right of marginalised communities to self-determination.

4.5.1.3 Religious Ideology Challenged:

The narrator's secular ideology shines through as he has his main character challenge the clergy's hypocrisy in a poignant scene where a Sheikh visits the impoverished black *Akhdam* slums to

preach about equality in Islam, despite the residents' struggles with basic necessities like clean water. 'Aisha's sharp critique of the Sheikh's teachings exposes their superficiality, pointing out that he fails to address the practical challenges faced by the community, such as maintaining cleanliness without access to water, soap, or proper sanitation, or finding ways to survive without resorting to stealing or begging when they lack even food to eat:

He failed to explain to them how they would maintain hygiene without water, soap, or bathrooms, or how they would refrain from stealing or begging when they had no food to eat (Ibid: 96-97)

The narrator strives to present a balanced perspective through his characters by challenging the vulgar ideologies and the concept of the "white saviour". *Sorour*, representing a conscious leftist intellectual, criticises the presence of white politicians at political events and questions their motives in trying to position themselves as saviours of the marginalised *Akhdam* community (Ibid:101). Despite the calls for cooperation from other black individuals like *al-Hartoush* to promote coexistence and combat discrimination, *Sorour* remains sceptical about the intentions and credibility of white politicians. Consequently, he argues that unlike some of his peers who advocate for collaboration with white politicians for coexistence, the black *Akhdam* should refrain from participating in such activities until the lumpen proletarian class understands and prioritises its interests in line with the necessary transformations. In this context, *Sorour* underscores his scepticism towards politicians' credibility by posing the crucial question: "What role do the *Akhdam* play in political engagement if their future class interests hinge on near-impossible circumstances and prerequisites?" (Ibid: 101)

Sorour's pessimistic view reflects a sense of disillusionment and a belief that the political landscape is obstructing meaningful change for the black community. He highlights the empty promises made by white politicians, which often lead to disillusionment and a sense of betrayal among marginalised groups. *Sorour's* poignant question about how the *Akhdam* can be motivated to join the revolution underscores the challenges faced in mobilising a community that is often excluded from mainstream political movements. Ultimately, the narrator's portrayal of differing perspectives and scepticism towards political alliances sheds light on the complexities and barriers faced by marginalised communities striving for socio-political change.

Now, let us explore the Yemeni cultural references that are woven throughout the narrative, including popular proverbs and prophetic hadiths. One such example is the reference to the

prevalent Yemeni proverb equating black individuals to impurity akin to dogs, as highlighted by *Sorour*:

Anyone who befriends al-Akhdam ends up feeling regretful...al-Akhdam is considered dirtier than the Jew...Clean up after the dog¹²⁰, and avoid contact with al-Akhdam (Ibid:88)

Sorour is struck by the significance of this proverb, noting: "Imagine that, according to Islamic teachings, an unclean bowl can be cleansed seven times, with dust as the first step, after a dog drinks from it. Yet, if a servant eats in a bowl, the impurity remains until the bowl is shattered." (Ibid: 89)

This quote perpetuates a harmful ideology that degrades the status of people of African descent, particularly black Yemenis, suggesting that they are inherently impure or tainted. The notion that a slave is inferior to a dog is a stark reminder of the deep-seated racism and discrimination that has been embedded in society. These traditional proverbs, which emphasize themes of superiority, contempt, and racism, have a profound impact on the self-worth, identity, and sense of belonging of black Yemenis. As seen in the case of *Sorour*, these harmful stereotypes can have a lasting influence, perpetuating negative attitudes and reinforcing systemic inequalities.

In another example of the penetration of ideology into the fabric of Yemeni society, the author delves into the intertwining of ideology and religion, particularly examining the role of religion in relation to slavery and blackness. *Ambo* recounts an incident involving *Sorour* that exposes the impact of ideology in perpetuating inequality between blacks and whites. According to *Ambo*, a few weeks following *Sorour*'s release from prison, he expressed an interest in entering the *al-Arbadi* Mosque located near the restaurant where *Ambo* was employed, with the intention of praying the evening prayer. This act stemmed from a curiosity to challenge the principles of Islam that he had been exposed to, rather than a genuine intent to adhere to them. He says,

As soon as *Sorour* positioned himself at the forefront of the late worshipers to serve as their imam, he was quickly stopped by one of them who forcefully pulled him back by the upper arm, exclaiming, 'I seek refuge in God. Eventually, a servant leads us in prayer?'

¹²⁰ *Sorour* refers in this context to a revered hadith of the prophet Muhammad, which states: "If a dog drinks from a bowl, wash it seven times. The first one is with dust." (al-Nisaburi, 1991, 1:34)

This passage suggests that even in a religious setting, where one would expect to find a sense of unity and equality among worshipers, the ideology of racism and discrimination can still prevail. The fact that *Sorour*, as a black Yemeni, is stopped from leading the prayer by a white Yemeni worshiper implies that the latter believes that only a white person can properly lead the prayer. This incident highlights the intersection of ideology and religion, where racist beliefs are used to justify discriminatory behaviour. The worshiper's comment "I seek refuge in God" implies that they are seeking divine justification for their actions, perpetuating the idea that their actions are righteous and God-ordained.

This event also underscores the social and cultural norms that perpetuate racism in Yemeni society. The fact that *Sorour* was stopped from leading the prayer simply because of his skin colour suggests that there is a deep-seated belief in the superiority of whiteness. This incident demonstrates how deeply ingrained racism is in the fabric of Yemeni society, even in religious settings where one would expect to find a sense of equality and unity. Furthermore, this passage raises questions about the role of religion in perpetuating or combating racism. In this case, religion seems to be used to justify discrimination rather than promoting equality and inclusivity. *Ambo* goes on to detail what happened next:

Subsequently, the other worshipers became aware of his presence and began pushing him towards the mosque's exit, prompting *Sorour* to cry out, 'Where is the equality? Where is the prophet's teaching that there is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab, nor red over black, nor black over red except for piety Where... Where?' (Ibid:70)

This passage is a powerful and poignant moment in the narrative, as *Sorour* quotes the teachings of the prophet Muhammad to challenge the racist actions of the worshipers. The quote "there is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab, nor red over black, nor black over red except for piety"¹²¹ is a well-known speech that emphasises the importance of character and faith over superficial differences such as skin colour or nationality.

By quoting this speech, *Sorour* is pointing out the hypocrisy and injustice of the worshipers' actions. He is saying that they are violating the very principles of their own faith by treating him differently because of his skin colour. He is also highlighting the contradiction between their

¹²¹ A passage from the final sermon believed to be delivered by the prophet Muhammad near Mecca during his last pilgrimage prior to his death in 632 AD. See: McIntire, S., & Burns, W. E. (2009). *Speeches in World History*. Facts on File. PP. 79-80.

actions and the teachings of the prophet, which emphasise equality and justice. The use of this Hadith serves as a powerful critique of racism and highlights the importance of faith in promoting equality and inclusivity. It also underscores the idea that religious beliefs and teachings can be used to justify discrimination, but they can also be used to challenge and overcome it.

Furthermore, *Sorour's* question "Where... Where?" suggests a sense of frustration, anger, and disappointment. It implies that he feels that his fellow worshipers have abandoned the principles of their faith and are instead perpetuating racism and discrimination. His words convey a sense of longing for a time when people could come together regardless of their differences, as mandated by the teachings of the prophet.

Although Islam promotes equality through piety in theory, as evidenced by the prophetic text mentioned by *Sorour*, the practical reality can be more intricate. The capability to gauge the depth of piety in individuals is beyond human capacity, as it resides within the heart. In Islamic tradition, prophet Muhammad emphasised that humans lack the authority to pass judgment on the level of piety in others as long as it remains internal. According to Islamic teachings¹²², it is not considered pious to assess the piety of others. Humans are permitted to assess outward behaviour but not the intentions, as only God has that knowledge. Given this perspective, one may question whether equality among individuals can be founded on something as intangible and ungraspable as piety.

Hence, the conduct of these worshippers can only be rationalised by the guidelines within Sharia that regulate certain practices for Muslim slaves based on their legal standing. One example demonstrating God's differential treatment is found in the prescribed criminal sanctions outlined in the Qur'an (2:178), which vary for free individuals as opposed to slaves. Drawing from the Qur'anic texts and traditions of the prophet Muhammad, Muslim jurists have devised regulations, statutes, and judgments that limit the actions of slaves in areas such as prayer¹²³,

¹²² There is a hadith in Sahih al-Bukhari in which the Messenger forbids searching people's hearts: "I was not commanded to search people's hearts, nor to open their stomachs." (al-Fahal, 2010: 75)

¹²³ On May 29, 2021, the Libyan Fatwa House addressed a query they received concerning a person in a community who serves as the regular Friday imam for congregational prayers but faces resistance from some individuals who dislike praying behind him. The dispute arose due to the individual's ancestral ties to slavery prior to their liberation by the Ottoman Empire, with uncertainty surrounding the appropriate ruling for praying under his leadership. In response, the Fatwa House outlined that the Maliki school of thought considers it undesirable for a former slave to lead regular prayers and prohibits them from leading the Friday prayer, aligning with the views of the Malikis and Hanbalis. Conversely, the Hanafi and Shafi'i schools deem the leadership of a former slave in the Friday prayer as valid. Notably, various scholars

marriage, divorce, inheritance, and more due to their lack of the essential freedom requisite for fulfilling religious duties and transactions with equality (Ibn al-Muhammeely al-Shafi'i, 1995: 421). Such inconsistencies raise doubts about the true essence and execution of equality, particularly concerning black individuals who may not conform to Islamic practices.

4.5.1.5 Dismantling the “White Arab-Supremacy”:

As a result of this stance, *Sorour's* character underwent a transformation, leading him to reject religious ideology. Powered by a deep determination to dismantle “white Arab-Islamic supremacy” ideology, *Sorour* made his stance known after consuming several sips of local wine, stating: “Why do we blindly adhere to these ‘Ambo’ [white individuals], even when we strive for liberation? Shouldn't we have the ability to determine the shape of our own freedom?” (Ibid:89)

Sorour expresses his discontent with the dominant white culture's assumption of authority and privilege in matters of liberation, arguing that white individuals do not have the moral authority or right to dictate how others should be freed. This sentiment suggests that he believes white people's claims of liberating others are often motivated by self-interest and paternalism, rather than a genuine commitment to equality and justice. His questioning is an invitation to examine the culture that shapes their perceptions. He wants to know why their culture doesn't promote equality and why black people are marginalised. The explanation for these questions may be rooted in their history and cultural beliefs. *Sorour's* emphasis on the freedom to choose means the freedom to choose without being subject to another manipulated belief system. He encourages the questioning of beliefs to ensure they withstand scrutiny. To him, religion is not restricted to prayer; it entails the mind and emotional patterns of behaviour.

In light of the above, it seems that a convincing argument does not provide answers; instead, it propels the mind to ponder tough questions and challenge stereotypes. His position may suggest that his people are enslaved to mere illusions, fake governments who have influence only from the power they relinquish to them. This is where the journey towards liberation begins. The stance also suggests that these discrepancies reflect the deep-seated perceptions of white

maintain that regardless of the individual's past slave status, their imamate in both obligatory and Friday prayers remains valid. See Dar al-Efta'a al-Libiyya, 2021. Regarding the matter of having a slave leading prayers, Fatwa No. (4084). Link accessed on 15/01/2023: <https://ifta.ly/%D8%A5%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B6-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A9/19538/>

supremacy ingrained in the minds of both Arab and white cultures. This belief in racial superiority perpetuates the marginalisation of black individuals and the legitimisation of slavery.

4.5.1.5 The Foundations of Yemen's Ideological Social Framework:

Overall, despite the inherent challenge posed by the black ego and its conflicting nature with the white cultural system, which upholds white supremacy and silences black individuals, even within the confines of the courtroom, the hierarchical social structure in Yemen - portrayed within the novel as a pyramid ingrained in the societal framework through religious ideology, as in the examples presented- exacerbates the oppression faced by black individuals. The religious elite and judges occupy the apex, while black slaves are relegated to the base of this social hierarchy. The writer, despite his white background, attempts to present balanced perspectives on white supremacy ideology; however, he ultimately succumbs, through his characters, to the dominance of white thought over black individuals, thereby perpetuating stereotypes. The novel reveals a disregard for racist laws and the systemic roots of institutionalised ideology that perpetuate mistreatment and discrimination against black individuals. By painting racism in Yemeni society as the result of a few deranged and malevolent white individuals, the novel fails to acknowledge it as a deeply ingrained ideological structure within society.

4.5.1.6 Conclusion:

In conclusion, the novel examines the complex dynamics of race, power, and oppression in Yemeni society through a secular lens, highlighting the struggles of black individuals against discrimination and the white saviour ideology. It critiques the impact of white supremacy and the “white saviour narrative” on black liberation. Despite attempts to challenge these ideologies, the story ultimately reinforces stereotypes and fails to address the systemic roots of racism, emphasizing a dominant theme of awaiting a white saviour, represented by the Yemeni president.

Through the character of *Sorour*, the novel critiques political power dynamics, exposing how white politicians manipulate marginalised communities for their gain. Black characters advocate for freedom and equality, while white figures resist, maintaining the status quo and revealing the exploitation faced by black individuals in their pursuit of justice despite shared ideologies. The narrative explores how characters like *Sorour* and *al-Hartoush* confront discrimination and marginalisation. Their differing approaches to dealing with white politicians reflect the complexities of oppression. The novel raises critical questions about freedom, equality, and the

interplay of ideology and religion in perpetuating inequality, stressing the urgency of dismantling systemic racism rooted in Yemeni society.

Most importantly, the author's secular perspective allows for a critical examination of societal norms and beliefs. Through cultural references like Yemeni proverbs and songs, the novel enhances understanding of black individuals' experiences and underscores the need for structural change away from outdated norms.

Overall, the novel offers a nuanced depiction of race, power, and oppression, shedding light on the challenges faced by marginalised communities navigating systems of discrimination and inequality.

4.5.2 Najwa Bin Shatwan's Novel *Zarayib al-Abeed*:

4.5.2.1 Preview

The novel delves into the profound connection between slavery and blackness, a paradox deeply ingrained in the Arab imagination over centuries. The novel grapples with this paradox by exploring the ways in which characters' internalised racist attitudes towards black slaves have been shaped by the complex historical and cultural influences that have contributed to the ambiguous relationship between slavery, blackness, and identity in Libyan culture at large. As a result, the novel reveals how these historical and cultural factors have entrenched a deep-seated ambivalence towards blackness within the Arab imagination, perpetuating a conflicted dynamic between their cultural identity and their treatment of black individuals.

The author explores the concepts of enslavement, colonialism, and emancipation, as well as the dynamics between blacks and whites in Benghazi society. Questions emerge regarding the granting of rights, such as freedom, and whether they are bestowed or earned. The pervasive ideology of "white supremacy" surfaces, influencing characters' beliefs and sentiments towards notions of racial superiority, highlighting the societal polarisation prevalent at that time, the repercussions of which still echo in contemporary conflicts.

4.5.2.2 Established Ideologies: The Dominance of White Supremacy Over Black Individuals:

In the opening lines of the novel, established ideologies are addressed as the author depicts the arrival of *Ali*, *'Atiqa*'s cousin, and her father's close friend, who seeks to communicate with her. *Ali* arrives to share the story of *'Atiqa*'s parents and assure her that he is advocating for her to receive her father's inheritance from her father, the white master, *Muhammad bin Shatwan*.

The narrator speaks, reflecting on *Ali*'s thoughts about what he should say to *'Atiqa*:

It wouldn't be fitting for him to say to her, "I came to speak with 'Atiqa' bint Ta'awidha, the servant of Hajj Muhammad bin Shatwan." No, he should refrain from using the word "servant". It would be more appropriate for him not to do so, even though he struggles to find another term to describe Ta'awidha, the subject of this talk. No one has ever provided the servant with a name or identity beyond that of a slave. He knows nothing else about her and is unsure of what to say to her daughter Atiqa. He must address her as a human being, using terms like "Jariya" [concubine] or slave without alluding to her subordinate status, which contradicts the prevailing cultural norms of society (Bin Shatwan, 2017:9)

This passage illustrates how deeply ingrained the culture of slavery has become in society, shaping ideological perceptions that have evolved into longstanding beliefs and traditions. The belief persists that even once liberated, blacks are still bound to the notion of slavery for life, as exemplified by *'Atiqa's* situation. This belief ingrains the idea that individuals such as *'Atiqa's* mother will always be designated as a slave or servant. Despite grappling with the internal turmoil resulting from this oppressive legacy, *Ali* defies the conventional societal standards and communicates with *'Atiqa*, refraining from labelling her mother as a slave or servant when asked about his purpose for being there (Ibid: 10)

In that same scene, a noteworthy ideological contradiction emerges as the author portrays the white master, *Ali Bin Shatwan*, presenting *'Atiqa* with a document detailing her lineage. This act symbolises a recognition of *'Atiqa's* rights in her father's name and inheritance, suggesting a restoration of her freedom and dignity, despite her black colour and her mother's status as a slave (Ibid: 11)

The fundamental question that arises here is: What is the significance of *'Atiqa's* former white masters returning her document? Why must slaves depend on white masters for recognition of their rights? Can rights truly be granted or taken?

These inquiries hint at the notion that freedom is viewed as a charity bestowed upon black individuals by white people at their discretion. The writer underscores the prevalence of "white supremacy" over black individuals by subtly suggesting that the act of returning the document is akin to a charitable gesture. However, what distinguishes emancipation in Islamic culture as an act of charity?

The writer criticises these concepts in the novel, as evidenced on at least four occasions.

The first instance is when recounting the story of an elderly black woman from Ghadames city in Libya, who was a concubine. Her wealthy master, seeking to atone for a sin, chose to grant her freedom. In Islamic practice, when a Muslim commits a sin, they have the option to free a slave as a means of seeking repentance from Allah (Qur'an, 5:89). The writer portrays this through the character *'Atiqa*, who states, "Freedom is granted in exchange for sin. This is one of the religious rules, meaning that your wrongdoing is valued as the life of another human being." (Ibid: 72)

The second example is depicted in a dialogue between *Hussein*, who has embraced Sufism, and a former slave who has recently been emancipated. *Salem* inquires about if he's interested in knowing how he gained his freedom, to which *Hussein* responds:

I am content with my understanding of freedom. Slaves are granted freedom as either a reward from their masters for their work or as a form of atonement for the master's sins. It is not permissible for a slave to actively seek their own freedom, as doing so would be viewed as disobedience necessitating punishment. However, the granting of freedom and acts of expiation are solely within the discretion of the master, not the slave (Ibid: 280)

The third instance arises when the master punished his slave *Ta'awidha* for neglecting to feed the cats, resulting in severe beating and confinement that led to the death of her baby from dehydration. Witnessing this, the servant *Salem* sorrowfully remarks, "the value of the sheep that day was equivalent to a cardboard box. [where the baby dies]." (Ibid: 255) *Salem's* comment highlights the absurdity and cruelty of the master's priorities. The value of a sheep is often considered significant in Arab cultures, but *Salem's* comparison underscores the absurdity of placing the value of a sheep above the life of an innocent child.

The fourth and final incident revolves around the reaction of the Sheikh upon the loss of an infant. Displaying a lack of empathy towards the tragedy, the Sheikh rationalises the indifference by stating that the baby was merely "a piece of tender meat, half of which belongs to a servant." (Ibid: 263)

These portrayals serve as pointed critiques of the harsh treatment endured by black slaves, as well as a poignant reminder of the need for re-evaluation and redress, particularly in contexts where historical injustices continue to reverberate. Yet the narrator refrains from offering direct explanations, inviting readers to ponder these issues openly.

Freedom, in this context, is not something that can be taken away; rather, it is a charity or benevolence that masters may choose to bestow at their discretion. It is deemed deeply offensive to predicate a person's liberty on a mere piece of paper. This concept is illustrated when an emancipation document, intended to grant freedom, is destroyed in a fire set by Italian authorities during the eradication of a plague outbreak in the slums of Benghazi (Ibid: 166). The narrative highlights the futility of such document, as it proves ineffective in freeing slaves from bondage. This is exemplified by *'Atiqa*, who remains in servitude despite being the offspring of a free father under Islamic law (Ibid: 11). The reason as Ltifi puts it:

The child that Ta'widha bears from Muhammad does not redeem her from her enslaved status nor become her winning ticket to freedom. Unlike some female slaves

incorporated into the concubinage system, Ta'widha fails to thrive as a concubine with Umm al-walad status...the assumption that freedom is automatically granted to the enslaved woman after birthing mixed offspring is revealed to be a complicated process that does not easily apply to everyone (Ltifi, 2020:123)

The conclusion of the story leaves us with a palpable sense of disappointment towards the deplorable practices depicted. '*Atiqa* comes to the realisation that even if her name were to be intricately embellished in gold on a document, it would not bring her deceased mother back to life or grant her freedom from slavery.

This stark truth is underscored by her despondency, particularly when reflecting on her cousin *Ali Bin Shatwan's* inability to even repay the value of her mother when she was sold in the slave market (Ibid: 350).

Nevertheless, if there is a measure of depth that the author attains in the narrative, it lies in her astute observation of the cultural maladies surrounding slavery. By likening slavery to a malignant cancer spreading within society, the author effectively diagnoses the deep-rooted issues at play. When an entire society becomes entrenched in a "slave society", breaking free from its legacy becomes an arduous task. *Atiqa's* friend *Eida* poignantly expresses this sentiment to *Ta'awidha*, highlighting the pervasive presence of racism and intolerance within their country (Ibid: 321). *Atiqa* reinforces this sentiment by asserting, "do not fear the judgments of others about me. I am not among the privileged individuals whose lives and reputations are safeguarded. My true identity remains unknown to all." (Ibid: 20)

4.5.2.3 Ideological Clash Between Blackness and Whiteness:

Can the Muslim community in Libya in the 20th century define itself based on colour and race? How are colour and race linked to identity? Why do colour and race often lead to conflict?

Addressing these questions, the author delves into the protagonist's struggle, which centres around her lineage and undeniable inheritance. '*Atiqa* affirms, "My story is one of lineage and inheritance, both of which are beyond dispute." (Ibid: 22). From this vantage point, the novel explores the battle of colour and race, showcasing the ideological clash between blackness and whiteness— a conflict stemming from a fractured identity torn asunder by societal norms and conventions. This identity exists in two contrasting realms: a romantic one that purportedly embraces all races and colours, and a harsh reality that rejects its inhabitants based on their colour and race. It is in this context that '*Atiqa* stumbles upon her own identity serendipitously,

upon seeing herself in the mirror and realising that her distinctiveness lies in the colour of her eyes - an inheritance from “a free man from Misrata, with a complexion of red and white akin to the Germans.” (Ibid: 40). Upon discovering her mixed-race or “mongrel” background, *‘Atiqa* becomes acutely aware of the heavy price she must pay.

Amid these dual conflicts, the author and her characters strive to prevail over one another, initially appearing to approach the situation from a standpoint that seems unbiased and logical to the reader. Yet, upon closer scrutiny of the text, it becomes apparent that the author is actually taking a risk by entering a precarious situation. The author illustrates the dynamics of this conflict through *‘Atiqa*'s tranquillity, stemming from the juxtaposition of the colour of her eyes against her physical appearance. This stillness evokes profound sorrow and a sense of identity crisis, as *‘Atiqa* struggles to ascertain her true self: a slave or a free individual. Given that the prevailing ideological discourse in Arab-Islamic culture associates blackness with cruelty, ugliness, and dishonour (Lange, 2007:429–445, Lewis, 1992:54-61, & Kazim, 2004:49-160), *‘Atiqa* finds herself victimised, going to great lengths to avoid reopening the wounds of the past (Ibid:12).

4.5.2.4 Manifestations of Racial Discourse Among Black Individuals:

The narrative, along with the voices of various characters, extensively exposes a prominent contradiction. This contradiction manifests itself fully, showcasing how deeply ingrained racism is within society. The novel explicitly portrays racism in all its manifestations, ranging from derogatory names used to label black individuals to acts of humiliation directed towards them. The normalisation of hurtful terms such as “Zenji/nigger” among black individuals serves as evidence of the prevalence of racism. For instance, *‘Atiqa* consistently refers to her husband *Youssef* as “the Negro” as demonstrated in her remarks like, “Well, the nigger I love.” (Ibid: 15) Additionally, there are instances where her husband responds cheerfully by saying, “Sleep well now and disregard what the old nigger says.” To this, she retorts, “The old nigger is my companion and my lover.” (Ibid: 17)

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, black individuals are often associated with feelings of anger and fury, referred to in Libyan society as “al-Bori” and becoming synonymous with individuals of black descent (Ibid: 32). Other derogatory nicknames such as “Shoshan” for black males and “Shoshana” for black females are also common in Libya, where any individual with dark skin may be labelled as such. These names originate from a historical context of slavery, where individuals born to slave parents were given these labels. Ironically, even within the black community, there

is an acceptance of using such derogatory terms when addressing one another in certain instances, as depicted in the novel (Ibid: 53-5).

In everyday discourse among black characters themselves, terms like “Negro” and “Abd” are often used interchangeably as shown above. These terms serve as metaphorical barriers that separate the two groups and hinder them from connecting or empathising with each other due to their differing life experiences. For example, *Ta’awidha* reflects on this separation, stating, “It is their whiteness, not our blackness, that creates a divide between us. I have come to realise this without needing an explanation. Their non-black skin prevents them from reaching out to us and bridging the gap.” (Ibid: 48)

4.5.2.5 Embracing the Destiny of Blackness:

One of the prevailing ideologies is that black individuals often perceive their skin colour as something they have been destined for rather than a choice they made. While people can change certain aspects like their names, they cannot alter their natural colour or racial background. Given that one’s identity is frequently shaped by skin tone and ethnicity, it appears that there is little recourse for these black individuals to reclaim their fractured identities apart from resigning themselves to fate. This is exemplified in the novel by the black characters, as the impact of their black skin on their sense of self is profound. For instance, *‘Atiqa* expresses, “The blackness continued to spread until it engulfed my innocent heart and thrust it into a dark despair over something that I either had no hand in or was not responsible for at all.” (Ibid: 60)

The author's sensitivity towards ideological racism is evident in her portrayal of dialogue, where racist expressions and insults are depicted as habits of certain characters. By allowing the characters to discuss their “reality” rather than their personal opinions, the narrative effectively highlights the division in the world of the novel. This division is characterised by a split in identity, resulting in a segregated society comprising a white upper class and a black lower one. This dichotomy offers readers a perspective on this fragmented world through a black and white lens. The two social classes coexist on two levels - the real and the metaphorical. The white upper class possesses advantages such as education, business, work, and power. Whiteness is consistently associated with freedom, wealth, beauty, and cleanliness. *Ta’awidha* reflects on this disparity, stating,

My mind came to understand that the free people are always the white people, who are not like us in every aspect and do not resemble us even when they seem to be. I admire

their cleanliness in clothes and homes, and the charity they show us, which makes me inclined to admire them and follow their way of life with sincerity. I don't know why they are the masters, and we are the slaves, why they are the nobles, and we are the inferiors?" (Ibid: 47-48)

Concerning the lower class, specifically the black community, they inhabit segregated, confined, and marginalised areas, where they experience hardships such as poverty, illness, illiteracy, and unemployment.

Blackness in the novel, as shown below, is consistently associated with slavery, inferiority, animalistic traits, and sensuality. It is commonly assumed that any black character is a slave, and any slave is deemed unclean, malodorous, unattractive, and jobless. The re-presentations of negative stereotypes are often attributed to black individuals, and this trend is evident in Ben Shatwan's novel as well. The novel offers several illustrations, through the voice of the main narrator, *'Atiqa*, that depict blacks and their society in an unfavourable light: "The garbage and dirt in the corrals, accompanied by the stench of flies, human waste, and watermelon rinds." (Ibid: 33) "Slaves have no tasks but to shoo away flies. They wait for someone to assign them work. They're just busy chasing cats and dogs." (Ibid: 70) "Garbage accumulates around them, and lice multiply in their hair." (Ibid: 71)

Traditional stereotypes, such as dancing, singing, and drinking, are portrayed as inherent aspects of black biological traits (103-7). However, the author's emphasis on incorporating popular Libyan folk songs into the narrative adds another layer to the story. These songs, known as "Marskawi" serve as a means for "black slaves" to convey their suffering and deprivation (Ibid: 104-107 & 211-3). The term "Marskawi" originates from the Libyan dialect, referring to the desert city of Murzuq, where the music originated and was a significant stop for the slave trade. Historically, caravans of slaves from Central and West Africa travelled the arduous desert route from Murzuq to northern coastal cities like Tripoli and Benghazi. During this painful journey, slaves would sing long, mostly sorrowful songs called "Mawawil" which eventually evolved into an independent musical art form (al-Aswād, 2021 & Ibn Shatwan, 2020:80). This emotive, vocal music with a slow tempo has gained popularity in modern-day Libya. In societies marked by cruelty, oppression, and slavery, the art of "Marskawi" becomes a way for "blacks" to express their grief and loss in life.

4.5.2.6 Freedom is A “Charity”

Overall, the novel raises a crucial point about the ideology, which suggests that “freedom” is viewed as a “charity” bestowed upon blacks by white individuals at their will. The comparison between abolition advocated by the capitalist West and emancipation advocated by the Islamic East underscores the stark differences between the two concepts. Abolition focuses on outlawing slavery as a practice, while emancipation is addressed in the Qur’an as a voluntary, paternalistic, individual decision (Scaglioni, 2020:68). The novel highlights how emancipation is a selective and charitable notion, ultimately dependent on the slave owners' discretion, which paradoxically reinforced slavery in Libya rather than eradicating it. This dynamic demonstrates the slave owners' power over their slaves and perpetuates the ideology of “white supremacy” over blacks, as depicted within the novel.

4.5.2.7 Conclusion

The novel explores the intertwined themes of slavery, blackness, and white supremacy in early 20th century Libyan society through a secular perspective. It addresses ideologies, societal norms, and personal conflicts that shape the dynamics of racism and power in Benghazi, particularly the impact of Italian colonialism on slavery.

The narrative critiques the perception of freedom as a privilege granted by white masters rather than an inherent right, suggesting that emancipation is based on societal norms. Enslaved individuals view their fate as predetermined, perpetuating a cycle of oppression. The novel highlights the dependence of black slaves on white masters for recognition of their rights, revealing the ideological justifications for slavery often rooted in religious literature. Even sympathetic characters treat liberation as “charity”, overlooking the inherent rights of black individuals.

Through diverse characters, the narrative explores the ideological conflicts and systemic racism present in a society divided by race and ethnicity, prompting readers to consider the possibility of coexistence in 21st-century Libya amidst discriminatory beliefs. Additionally, Blackness is associated with slavery and inferiority, with harmful stereotypes perpetuated in societal discourse, reinforcing dehumanisation and negative perceptions of black individuals.

Overall, the novel reflects the lasting impact of “white supremacy” and the ongoing fight for liberation and equality faced by black individuals in Libyan society, particularly emphasising the critical role of women in this struggle.

4.5.3 Idris Ali's Novel *Dongola*:

4.5.3.1 Preview

In his novel, Idris Ali, is known for challenging oppressive ideologies by highlighting the marginalisation of Nubian society by post-colonial Egyptian nationalist ideology. The protagonist, '*Awad Shalali*', re-presents the struggle against the exclusionary identity promoted by the Nasserite regime in the 1960s. Despite attempting to lead his community towards a "utopian society" based on liberal principles, '*Awad*'s efforts ultimately fail due to the inability to convince his fellow citizens to embrace these values. The novel illustrates the tragic "reality" of the black Nubian minority being systematically marginalised and ostracized, with '*Awad*' serving as a symbol of the limitations of liberal ideological discourse in addressing these issues.

The author's approach in exposing the oppressive actions of the Nasserist regime against the black Nubian community in southern Egypt revolves around highlighting "Western liberal principles" as a means to achieve greater equality and social justice for all Egyptians, regardless of their background. To convey this message, the writer employs various storytelling techniques, with a key focus on boasting about the rich cultural heritage of black Nubians through tales of Nubia's historical triumphs and iconic figures (Ali, 2006: 39). Simultaneously, while showcasing these cultural achievements, there is a deliberate effort to mock the "white Arab invaders" who historically enslaved and exploited Nubia and its legacy, dating back to the 7th century AD (Ibid: 20-40).

4.5.3.2 The War of Ideological Narratives:

The author skilfully challenges the historical narrative and attempts to establish a "black narrative" to counter the prevailing "white saviour narrative" in various instances throughout the novel. For example, he undermines the exaggerated role that whites have assumed in the region's civilisations. This is evident in his portrayal of the character *Ruhiyya al-Bulaqiyya*, a white woman who is cunning and described as the one who "poisoned his father after colonising and exploiting him." (Ibid: 17) The author, through '*Awad Shalali*', critiques "the naive notion of his father, who saw civilisation in the North as a seductive white woman, falling victim to her deception." (Ibid:18)

The author depicts '*Awad*'s father's abandonment of his Black Nubian mother and his subsequent marriage to the white *Ruhiyya* in Cairo as a manifestation of his quest to escape cultural 'backwardness' and personal misery. By marrying a white woman, he naively believes he

is elevating himself and attaining a sense of 'civilisation,' viewing whiteness as a remedy for his own personal and cultural shortcomings. This narrative shift highlights the complex power dynamics between the white North and the Black South, illustrating how individuals from the marginalised Nubian community may internalise dominant ideologies and seek to distance themselves from their cultural heritage in pursuit of social status and acceptance in the white North.

On the other hand, the author further diminishes the status of whites by stating that they “hate the truth” and sarcastically remarking that “white represents the law” implying a skewed sense of justice. Additionally, he questions the legitimacy of a white policeman's authority by suggesting that “he should inquire about the origins of his blue eyes from his grandmother.” (Ibid: 39)

Obviously, through these examples, the author challenges and subverts the dominance of whites in historical narratives while advocating for a more inclusive and accurate re-presentation of the past.

On the flip side, the narrator presents the lifestyle of Europeans during his journey in Western Europe as:

residing in a dazzling world free from the harshness of traditions, authoritarian rule, or the rigidity of laws. In this society, individuals are free to believe in their own ideologies, whether they be communist, existentialist, pagan, Christian, Jewish, homosexual, or prostitutes—everyone has a voice (Ibid: 98)

This admiration for the western white culture peaks when the narrator encounters his French lover, *Simone* who he describes as a “remarkable woman who broadened his perspective and enabled him to view the world with objectivity.” (Ibid: 100) And despite her outward beauty, *Simone* is depicted as “possessing a noble character, rejecting extremism, embracing tolerance, appreciating the diversity of the universe, and rejecting the notion of Western superiority.” (Ibid: 100)

4.5.3.3 The Submission to Western Ideology:

While *Rawhiya Al-Boulakia* from Egypt re-presents the deceptive allure of the false “Arab white narrative” that ensnared the black people of Nubia, *Simone* from France embodies the European white figure, carrying the torch of Western civilisation and its enticing liberal values, leading the

protagonist 'Awad Shalali into her traps of deceit. The hero's admiration for Western white civilisation becomes apparent through his conversation with *Simone*, a French woman who questions why he is in Europe instead of Egypt. His response, "In my country, people like me are put in prison." (Ibid: 101), reveals his naivety regarding Western civilisation and its role in subjecting the people of the East to colonialism and subordination. This realisation transforms him, as the author depicts, into a slave to Western ideals, while also fostering a deep disdain for the concept of slavery (Ibid: 101). Yet, his complete submission to Western ideology and enslavement is exemplified by his disregard for his fundamental cause, the issue of Nubia and its independence. When *Simone* inquires about his reaction to Egypt's victory over Israel in October 1973, he feigns ignorance, showcasing his detachment from his own origin. In response, Simone questions his ability to love her while harbouring such hatred, to which he questions her allegiance to those who have inflicted harm in the war. She emphasises, "the one who loves forgives." (Ibid: 109) But he remains steadfast in his refusal to forget stating "the one who is unjustly imprisoned for ten years will never forget." (Ibid: 109)

The inconsistent roles of the "white saviour" whether Egyptian or French, in the narrative indicate the narrator's shifting perspective and his effort to establish a "black narrative" in opposition to the pervasive influence of "white supremacy" ideology. The narrator's realisation of the futility of advocating for his liberal beliefs among the black residents of his Nubian village, who were hesitant to support his reasonable requests for "good agricultural land, factories, and fair compensation" (Ibid: 60), ultimately led him to make the difficult decision to permanently leave behind Nuba, his wife, mother, relatives, and friends in pursuit of "the land of freedom" Europe (Ibid: 119). As he journeyed by train towards Europe, the author captures 'Awad Shalali's contentment by describing him as "closes his eyes and evokes the comforting image of Simone." (Ibid: 121)

4.5.3.4 The Failure of Western Liberal Ideology in Nubian Society:

This indicates the protagonist's disillusionment with the lack of prospects for change within Nubian and Egyptian society, which have both deteriorated into societies plagued with destruction (Ibid:113). It can be inferred from this that the Nubians, specifically the people of his village, have grown content with their circumstances, evident in their hostility towards their Nubian "liberator" 'Awad Shalali, the son of their town, whom they accused of betrayal (Ibid: 54). The narrator takes a more critical stance by asserting that *Shalali's* revolutionary efforts to free Nubia from white Arab domination have "ultimately failed due to the formidable presence

of a heavily armed state and the Nubian people's naive desire for protection rather than liberation." (Ibid: 56)

The village elders gathered to discuss the expulsion of *Shalali* from the village as a way to prevent looming disaster (Ibid: 59). In a firm repudiation of liberal ideology and its implications of freedom and autonomy, the village dean harshly rebuked *Shalali*, deeming him insane, questioning the relevance of "Dongola" by asking, "What does that have to do with us?" Another villager mentioned *Shalali*'s claim that Dongola was the capital of the Christian state of Nubia, to which the dean responded, asserting their Muslim faith and lifelong unity with God by saying, "We have always been Muslims, not Christians." (Ibid: 61)

In light of the above, his blackness continued to set him apart as an outsider within the rigid census classifications of white ideology, despite his efforts to embrace Egyptian identity under an open liberal identity. Also, despite his endeavours to challenge the notion of a "white saviour" and reinterpret the vision of utopia, these actions ultimately resulted in his imprisonment in one of the Egyptian regime's prisons. In defiance of rejection from the "white North", 'Awad revitalised Nubian nationalism, unveiling a renewed nationalist perspective that exceeded the expectations of Nubians in both Egypt and Sudan. Eventually, disillusioned by Egypt, Nubia, and Africa as a whole, he disdainfully turned his back on them, seeking solace only in secular Western Europe.

4.5.3.4 The Impact of Western "White Supremacy" on Postcolonial Egypt:

This analysis explores 'Awad's challenges as an advocate for his marginalised Nubian community, framed through Benedict Anderson's insights on postcolonial nationalism in the "Third World." By examining the complexities of ideological constructs inherited from colonial rule, the discussion reveals how these systems perpetuate the marginalisation of minority groups, shaping national identity in ways that often exclude and oppress.

'Awad's shortcomings as a self-proclaimed advocate for his marginalised Nubian community, as well as his inability to convince them of liberal ideals, can be explained by examining Benedict Anderson's interpretation of the peculiar evolution of postcolonial nationalism in the so called "Third World". According to Anderson, it is,

so often in the 'nation-building' policies of the new states one sees both a genuine, popular nationalist enthusiasm and a systematic, even Machiavellian, instilling of

nationalist ideology through the mass media, the educational system, administrative regulations, and so forth (Anderson, 2006:163)

Anderson's analysis sheds light on the ideological framework that was used to enforce the unity of modern Egyptian society and the subsequent marginalisation of the Nubian community. Despite nationalist movements rejecting imperial domination, postcolonial nationalist movements were greatly influenced by the colonial perspective of the world. The system inherited by nationalist Egypt from colonialism persisted, particularly in relation to minority groups, following the principles of "white supremacy" ideology. Black ethnic groups, not fitting into the dominant national narrative, were consequently labelled as "Others" and were subjected to this narrative. Anderson recognises the paradox in this ideology when he states:

At first sight, this conclusion may seem surprising, since colonial states were typically anti-nationalist, and often violently so. But if one looks beneath colonial ideologies and policies to the grammar in which, from the mid nineteenth century, they were deployed, the lineage becomes decidedly more clear (Ibid: 163)

What the rising nationalists received from their previous rulers was not the aspiration for nationalism, but rather something more profound and subtle—the "grammar" that would dictate how they could articulate their "national identity", regulations that constrained the new state's capacity to express its national identity and consider its geographical, demographic, and historical characteristics (ibid. 163).

While ancient Egypt is acknowledged as a prominent civilisation of antiquity, it often appears distant from the common narrative of the West being the foundation of civilisation. This common narrative tends to place the West at its core while simultaneously attempting to forge a racial connection between ancient Egyptians and white Europeans, thereby providing a historical context that lends legitimacy to their civilisational claims (Reid, 2002:21-63). As a result, according to Donald Malcolm Reid, in his other book *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from World War I to Nasser*, the interpretations of ancient Egypt's bio ethnic identity have significantly influenced various ethnic, cultural, and political groups' perceptions of their heritage and identity (Reid, 2015:1-10). Consequently, these groups have made deliberate efforts to lay claim to Egypt's legacy through different means, resulting in the manipulation and exploitation of history that reflect the political and cultural concerns of the period. Many historical writings from that era propagated the idea that the white race was superior to the black race. This notion fuelled the assumption among

scholars that only the white race was capable of creating great civilisations in the past. Historians of the time even went as far as to argue that the success of Egyptian civilisation was due to its Caucasian origins, reinforcing the notion of African being inferior (Foster, 1974:175–191).

The historiography of this era was influenced by European imperialism, particularly during the rise of imperialism and the unearthing of King Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922. These events brought Egyptian politics and history closer together, creating a historiography that utilised Egyptian history to support European imperialistic ideals, often at the expense of indigenous populations. This intense competition ultimately shaped Egyptology in a Eurocentric manner for much of the first half of the 20th century (Reid, 51).

Although seemingly unrelated to Egyptian racial theories, this Eurocentric focus significantly impacted how Egypt was perceived as a forerunner of white civilisation rather than black civilisation. For instance, Dr. Zahi Hawass, an archaeologist, and former Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Egypt, conveyed in a 2007 interview with an Egyptian newspaper his rejection of assertions suggesting that ancient Egyptian civilisation was inherently black and indigenous to Africa. Hawass asserted that “Tutankhamun is not a Negro” and stated that Egyptians are not Africans, despite Egypt's geographical location on the African continent (Sabry, 2021:1).

The ongoing debate regarding the racial origin of ancient Egyptian kings continues today. While there is general consensus that Cleopatra VII, the last ruler of Egypt from the Greek Macedonian dynasty established by Alexander the Great, is considered the queen of ancient Egypt, controversy arose when a black actress was cast to portray her in the Netflix docudrama series “African Queen” which premiered in May 2023. Following backlash from online commentators and even the Egyptian government, Netflix disabled the comments section on the series' trailer due to the hostile and racially charged responses. According to the Washington Post¹²⁴, the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Egypt denounced the series as a distortion of Egyptian history, and a prominent TV presenter accused Netflix of attempting to manipulate Egyptian culture. The controversy escalated when an Egyptian lawyer filed a complaint seeking to ban the streaming service in the country (Yee, 2023).

¹²⁴ See: Yee, Vivian. (2023). Whose Queen? Netflix and Egypt Spar Over an African Cleopatra. Washington Post, May 10, 2023. Link accessed on 20/02/2024: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/10/world/middleeast/cleopatra-netflix-race-egypt.html?smid=url-share>

This belief system's influence on Egyptian society's profound structures and ongoing discussions surrounding racial identity persisted into the modern era, highlighting its enduring legacy of dividing previously colonised societies such as Egypt and hindering their progress. Certainly, there are additional factors that played a role over lengthy historical periods in shaping this "white narrative", so it would be unjust to attribute all responsibility to European colonialism. The proliferation of racial ideologies has been facilitated by globalisation, migration, and increased cultural interconnectedness (al-Qudah et al., 2023:292).

4.5.3.6 End of the Story: The Hero Escapes to the "White Saviour":

For example, the people of Cairo do not link 'Awad to the Pharaoh Taharqah, but instead to the multitude of southern Africans who were enslaved and traded over centuries. *Shalali* himself acknowledges this during a conversation with the affluent Greek individual who employed him for ship work, stating: "The residents of Cairo sometimes mistakenly associate me with Sudan." (Ali, 2006:99) The association of slavery with Nubia was so deeply ingrained in historical recollection that the author, in the introduction, mentions a tale where Nubian slaves were so common that slave owners would even pay for a haircut for one of them (Ali, 2006:8). Therefore, it is not surprising that this dark chapter in history became part of the revived Arab historical narrative in Egypt, rather than being preserved as a memory of the Nubian Pharaohs who defended Egypt.

Nevertheless, during the years he spent in Europe, *Shalali*, assisted by *Simone*, eliminated "the Dongola syndrome, the bowmen, the Nuba slaves, and the Muslim swords." (Ibid: 101) In a display that supports the concept of the white saviour ideology, emphasising the black individual's dependence on the white for guidance and order, *Simone* teaches him: "History is a past that has ended, and dwelling on it is sickness and death, so let go of what has passed." (Ibid:101) When he recognises the impossibility of constructing a "black narrative" counter, he loses faith in all of that nonsense, distancing himself indefinitely from the threat of the nation-state's terrorism and the constant fear of its sword hovering over their heads (Ibid: 97).

4.5.3.7 Conclusion

Idris Ali's novel masterfully delves into the complexities of post-colonial Egyptian nationalism and its impact on the marginalised Nubian community. Through the character of 'Awad *Shalali*, the author challenges oppressive ideologies and explores the struggles faced by the black Nubian minority in their quest for equality and recognition. By highlighting the limitations of liberal

discourse in addressing issues of exclusion and marginalisation, the novel sheds light on the tragic reality of systemic marginalisation faced by the Nubian society under the Nasserist regime.

The novel challenges the prevalent “white saviour narrative” and establishes a “black counternarrative” that opposes white supremacist ideologies. The protagonist's disillusionment with his liberal ideals and his inability to effect change within his society reflects broader themes of resistance, identity, and the fight for independence under oppressive regimes. Despite his attempts to lead his society towards a utopian vision based on liberal values, ‘*Awad*’s efforts are hampered by the resistance of his fellow citizens to embrace these principles and the clash of these values with the conservative cultural norms of Egyptian society.

By delving into historical legacies, the influence of Eurocentric ideologies on Egyptian identity, and the enduring impact of colonialism, the novel offers profound insights into the complexities of postcolonial Arab nationalism and the struggle for liberation across racial lines. Through an examination of race, power dynamics, and identity within Egyptian society, Ali's work serves as a compelling commentary on the challenges faced by marginalised black communities and the lasting effects of oppressive ideologies from both Western and Eastern origins.

Through the character of ‘*Awad Shalali*’ and his quest for freedom and self-discovery, the novel prompts readers to contemplate the intricacies of slavery, racism, identity, resistance, and the pursuit of justice in a world shaped by historical injustices and ongoing struggles for equality. Ali's narrative underscores the importance of challenging dominant white Arab cultural norms and oppressive narratives in the pursuit of a more inclusive and just society for all individuals.

4.6 Similarities and Differences Between the Six Novels:

Each novel explored themes of slavery and blackness through the distinct lens of the author, influenced by their beliefs, experiences, culture, and education, irrespective of the time or setting of the narrative. The way the novels embody ideology is particularly susceptible of analysis through Marxist theory, showcasing a range of ideas that aligned with either secular liberalism or traditional conservatism. The authors aimed to leverage their ideologies to either endorse or contest dominant perceptions of slavery and blackness. Through comparing the six novels, patterns can be discerned in their treatment of these themes.

In *Maymūna's* novel, the concept of “ideological closure” is prominently displayed, influencing beliefs and behaviours through historical oppression and power dynamics. This ultimately leads to resignation and permanent defeat, as individuals are confined within a narrow framework, particularly cantered around religious texts and narratives. The narrative takes a traditional, conservative perspective, portraying condemnation of slavery that initially appears as a hopeful rebellion against societal norms but ultimately transforms into a call for vengeance. The depiction of antislavery in the novel is not portrayed as a lofty ideal, but rather as a reflection of “ideological closure” stemming from feelings of victimisation and resentment towards those outside the black community. Despite fleeting glimpses of potential change, the prevailing theme of “ideological closure” suggests that meaningful transformation remains unattainable for the characters within the story.

Thaman al-Milh delves into the intricate power dynamics and ideological manipulation within colonial settings of slavery, perpetuating white supremacy and the internalised beliefs of black individuals. The novel explores the contradictions inherent in the “white saviour narrative” portraying British colonists as both liberators and oppressors of black slaves. This portrayal sheds light on the complex power struggles within colonial societies and emphasises the significant influence that white perceptions of race and colour had on local populations and their customs. The perpetuation of “white supremacy” through the depiction of colonists or local white figures as saviours resulted in these beliefs being unquestioningly accepted and internalised by black characters.

Li-annī Aswād explores societal ideologies within the Muslim community in Kuwait and USA, examining the impact of race, religion, and cultural norms on individual perceptions and relationships. The novel also delves into the pervasive influence of conservative ideology that rationalises slavery against black individuals, as demonstrated by the discriminatory treatment

faced by the protagonist, *Jamal*, at the hands of his university peers. This ideology is deeply ingrained in a complex framework of beliefs, including the notion that blackness is inherently wicked and that black individuals are associated with jinn and sorcery. The novel employs “ideological closure” to prevent any form of critical thinking that might prompt the oppressed characters in the narrative, as well as readers, to break free from the cycle of stagnation and subjugation.

Ta’am ‘Aswad, Ra’eha Swada portrays the prevalence of white supremacist ideology as the storyline reveals the impact of white supremacy and the adverse consequences of the “white saviour narrative” on black liberation. Despite attempts to challenge white supremacy and present diverse viewpoints, the novel ultimately reinforces white dominance, perpetuating stereotypes and failing to address the systemic foundations of racism within Yemeni society. The recurrent motif of anticipating a white saviour, symbolised by the Yemeni president, highlights the work's portrayal of submission to the overwhelming sway of white supremacy. Nevertheless, the author's secular perspective blends the narrative, providing a critical analysis of societal conventions, religious doctrines, and conservative ideological convictions. This viewpoint facilitates a thorough exploration of the intricacies of race, authority, and subjugation within Yemeni society and creates a rupture in the traditionalist façade.

Zarayib al-Abeed provides a nuanced exploration of freedom, illustrating how it is frequently perceived as a privilege bestowed upon black individuals by white masters, rather than an inherent human entitlement. The novel exposes the concept of “white supremacy” through the portrayal of black slaves relying on white masters to acknowledge their rights, release them from bondage, and validate their heritage. It also sheds light on the ideological rationales employed by white masters to legitimise the subjugation of slaves, often drawing upon religious justifications. What sets the novel apart is its boldness in challenging the taboo surrounding unspeakable topics, prompting readers to vocalise their opposition to cruel practices that violate fundamental human rights.

Dongola confronts the dominant “white saviour narrative” and constructs a “black counter-narrative” that challenges the doctrines of white supremacy. The protagonist's disenchantment with his progressive beliefs and his lack of success in instigating change within his community reflect broader themes of defiance, identity, and the pursuit of autonomy within oppressive political and cultural frameworks. Despite his endeavours to guide his society toward a utopian ideal rooted in Western liberal values, the protagonist encounters obstacles as a result of his

citizens' reluctance to adopt these principles and the clash of these values with the traditional cultural practices of Egyptian society.

In conclusion, the six novels provide a rich tapestry of narratives that explore the complex dynamics of power, oppression, and liberation within societies influenced by historical contexts, religious doctrines, and ideological convictions. *Maymūna's* novel highlights the pervasive impact of "ideological closure" on the characters, leading to a sense of resignation and defeat within a narrow framework of beliefs. *Thaman al-Milḥ* delves into the intricate power struggles within colonial societies, exposing the contradictions of the "white saviour narrative" and the perpetuation of white supremacy. *Li-annī Aswād and Ta'am 'Aswad, Ra'eha Swada* examine the influence of societal ideologies and conservative beliefs on individual perceptions, shedding light on the systemic foundations of racism and the consequences of white supremacist ideology. *Zarayib al-Abeed* challenges the perceptions of freedom and white supremacy, prompting readers to confront the uncomfortable truths about the subjugation of black individuals by white masters. Dongola constructs a compelling "black counter-narrative" that challenges the dominant ideologies of white supremacy and offers a glimpse into the themes of defiance, identity, and autonomy within oppressive societal frameworks.

Overall, these novels offer a nuanced exploration of complex societal issues, providing critical insights and reflections on power dynamics, liberation struggles, and the enduring impact of historical oppression on marginalised communities. Through their diverse perspectives and narratives, the works invite readers to engage with the complexities of race, power, and resistance, prompting a deeper understanding of the societal structures that shape our world.

5. Key Findings: Discussion and Conclusion:

This dissertation has examined the emerging phenomenon of the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative” through two main approaches. First, it has created and developed a “questionnaire” to guide the study of this phenomenon and its future application to similar works. Second, it has highlighted the intellectual engagement sparked by these questions, concentrating on key topics such as authors and their messages, themes and perspectives, representations, and ideologies.

The research targeted narratives about slavery in the Arab world, drawing on a diverse set of six novels from Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, most published between 2000 and 2020. Using a Marxist critical literary framework, several conclusions were reached.

Chapter one lays the groundwork for a thorough analysis of the author's work and the messages he/she conveys within their historical context. To achieve this, the chapter examines the emerging phenomenon of the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative” in the 21st century, discussing the factors that contributed to their emergence at this time while highlighting the relative scarcity of such narratives in comparison to Western slave narratives in the past. It offers an overview of the “Black Arab Slave Narrative” landscape by presenting a chronological list of 15 novels, each accompanied by brief descriptions that illustrate the growing interest in this genre. From this list, six novels were selected for a detailed analysis, focusing on the circumstances surrounding each author and their intended messages, as well as exploring the general and specific narrative characteristics of the chosen works. By summarising these insights, the chapter identifies the emerging phenomenon of the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative,” detailing its nature, forms, domains, sources, and messages. The key findings can be summarised as follows:

1. **Emergence of Arabic Slave Narratives:** The emergence of this phenomenon signifies a transformative development in contemporary literature, addressing the historical impacts of slavery and blackness in Arab societies and creating a space for voices that have long been marginalised. This emergence reflects significant social and political changes in the Arab region, particularly following independence from colonial rule in the 1960s and subsequent decades.
2. **Common Characteristics:** This narrative phenomenon is marked by influences from postmodernism, a strong historical consciousness, participation in global social movements, and an evolving literary landscape.

3. Defining the Genre: The chapter categorises the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative” as a contemporary literary genre that revisits critical themes of slavery and black identity within Arabic-speaking contexts.

4. Urgent Need for Authenticity: Authors convey a collective urgency to rectify the absence of authentic slave narratives, seeking to restore the humanity of enslaved and black individuals by (re)imagining their lived experiences and perspectives.

5. Nuanced and Diverse Perspectives: These narratives present a variety of viewpoints on oppression, resilience, and identity. Writers from diverse backgrounds employ an array of narrative styles, including realistic, fictional, and semi-autobiographical forms, to challenge stereotypes and tackle complex issues related to race, colour, power dynamics, and social hierarchies.

6. Sensitivity in Exploration: The unique characteristics of these works enhance the understanding of slavery's legacy in the Arab world, underscoring the necessity of approaching these themes with sensitivity and depth.

7. Notable Authors and Themes: Six key authors explore themes of slavery, blackness, racism, and discrimination, leveraging their personal backgrounds and experiences to infuse authenticity into their narratives.

8. Connection Between Slavery and Blackness: Although the association between slavery and blackness remains prevalent in both literature and society, most these Arabic novels seek to illuminate this relationship, framing it both as a historical occurrence and an integral aspect of black identity.

09. Historical Fiction and Autobiography: Some narratives (Libya, Bahrain, Yemen) incorporate elements of historical fiction, while others (Saudi, Kuwait and Egypt) provide semi-autobiographical accounts from former slaves or examine the lasting repercussions of slavery across generations.

10. Reclaiming Historical Truths: These narratives strive to recover historical realities and illuminate collective identity through memory, bridging the past and present in order to engender a deeper connection with the experiences that shape the collective narrative of the Arab world.

These key findings emphasise the significance of the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative” in enriching broader literary and social discussions surrounding slavery and black identity in contemporary Arab literature.

Chapter two analyses themes in six selected novels against the backdrop of colonial and post-colonial history to explore slavery, its legacy, and its implications for social structures and cultural identities. By examining these works, the chapter identifies similarities and differences in how slavery and blackness are portrayed across different regions and time periods. The Key Findings Summary for this chapter is as follows:

(1) Historical Context: The selected novels illustrate similar attitudes toward slavery across different colonial and post-colonial settings (Libya, Bahrain, Hijaz). These works collectively highlight black Muslim Africans as commodities under white Arab dominance, while postcolonial narratives (Kuwait, Yemen, Egypt) reveal the enduring legacies of slavery, including ongoing marginalisation and discrimination against black communities.

(2) Themes of Slavery and Blackness: Slavery has a profound impact on social and economic structures, with links to religion’s interpretation, trade, and colonialism. While some narratives (Kuwait, Bahrain, Libya) suggest that skin colour determines one’s fate in slavery, others (Egypt, Yemen) advocate for inherent equality, yet all acknowledge cultural and economic systems that perpetuate oppression.

(3) Slavery as a Social System: The novels depict slavery not only as a legal condition but as a complex social and economic system that sustains ruling class power. Persistent racial biases continue to affect post-emancipation black identities, and concepts like “mystical spiritual slavery” and “slavery to colonialism” highlight the ongoing exploitation present during and after colonial rule.

(4) Values of Freedom and Emancipation: Themes of freedom, justice, and equality are present but often interwoven with traditional views that can perpetuate slavery. Critiques of these traditions appear in the Libyan, Yemeni and Egyptian narratives, which advocate for secular principles of justice. The impediments to emancipation, such as the lack of formal certificates, reveal the complexities surrounding liberation.

(5) Narrative Perspectives: The narratives employ diverse viewpoints, including those of both black and white characters, providing a multi-faceted understanding of identity and societal issues. These perspectives enhance the portrayal of black experiences and challenge prevailing

narratives, particularly in works from Saudi and Egypt, which underscore the importance of counter-narratives in amplifying marginalised voices.

Overall, the chapter emphasises the interconnectedness of slavery, blackness, and systemic inequality across different historical and cultural contexts while highlighting the essential role of narrative perspectives in shaping these themes.

Chapter Three addresses the topic of the re-presentation of the characters through two sections: theoretical and practical. The first section examines the fundamental components of re-presentation, including language, meaning, culture, perception, and stereotyping, within what is referred to as the “re-presentation circle.” Through concise conceptual introductions, the chapter highlights the role of culture in meaning production and its influence on our perceptions of the “other,” as well as the true significance of re-presentation and its connection to stereotypes, particularly how these elements shape readers’ perspectives. This foundational discussion sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the key factors influencing re-presentation processes: culture and meaning production, and their relationship to the concept of the “other.” The second part of the chapter was divided into two sub-sections. The first examines the works of authors of black cultural backgrounds from Egypt and Saudi Arabia, while the second focuses on the writings of white authors from Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, and Kuwait. This classification facilitates the extraction of the following key findings:

(1) Empowerment of Black Characters: In the novels *Dongola* and *Maymūna*, authors of African descent elevate black characters from the periphery to the centre, emphasising their suffering and significant contributions to civilisation. They portray heroic figures like ‘Awād Shalali and Omar al-Misk, who do not rely on white characters for help, showcasing their agency. The narratives critique societal conditions that exacerbate poverty and deprivation among black communities and promote pride in African heritage as a source of strength. These works aim to counter the dominant white narrative and challenge negative stereotypes about black individuals.

(2) Passive Re-presentation in White Authored Novels: In contrast, novels by white authors depict black characters, such as in *Li-annī Aswād* and *Zarayb al-Abeed*, as perpetually dependent on white characters for liberation, reinforcing the notion that whites are the sole agents of change. This portrayal fosters internalised racism and distorts the black characters' self-perception, leading to identity crises and marginalisation. The narratives suggest that freedom and equality for black individuals can only be achieved through the intervention of whites.

(3) **Stereotypes of Magic and Sexuality:** Novels by authors like al-Muqri, Ben Shatwan, al-Bassam and al-Da'as perpetuate stereotypes of black characters as inherently connected to magic and the supernatural, reinforcing notions of "Othering" and a perceived cognitive inferiority. Additionally, these works depict black individuals in a sexualised manner, reducing them to objects for white entertainment and diminishing their agency.

(4) **Mechanisms of Re-Presentation:** The six novels collectively highlight the mechanics of re-presentation, focusing on language, meaning, and stereotype. Authors striving for counter-narratives utilise the same cultural tools as dominant narratives to challenge prevailing perceptions, creating alternative re-presentations that aim to reshape understanding and promote a more nuanced view of black identities and experiences.

Chapter Four addressed the themes of ideology and slavery, structured into two sections. The first section analyses three novels based in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, exploring slavery and its legacy through a conservative ideological lens. The second section shifts focus to three additional novels set in Libya, Egypt, and Yemen, examining the topic from a secular liberal perspective. To establish a theoretical foundation for the analysis, the chapter begins with a discussion of ideology, including its main types and the relationship between ideology and slavery. It highlights how "belief systems" shape human perceptions across various stages. The conversation then transitions to the role and functions of ideology within society, particularly its connections to systems of re-presentation. In the second part, the chapter briefly explores the prevailing ideological foundations of slavery in medieval Arabic literature, providing context for the ideologies presented in the six selected novels. Through this examination, the chapter evaluates the similarities and differences between liberal and traditional conservative perspectives on the subject. The key findings are summarised as follows:

1. **Authorial Perspectives:** Each novel examines slavery and blackness through the unique lens of the author, shaped by their beliefs, experiences, and cultural backgrounds, making it suitable for Marxist analysis.
2. **Ideological Closure:** *Maymūna's* novel highlights "ideological closure," confining characters to narrow worldviews rooted in historical oppression. This leads to a sense of resignation and depicts antislavery sentiments as reflections of victimisation rather than ideals.
3. **Colonial Dynamics:** *Thaman al-Milh* explores power dynamics within colonial slavery, illustrating the contradictions of the "white saviour narrative" that presents colonisers as both

liberators and oppressors, which results in the internalisation of white supremacy by black characters.

4. Cultural Ideologies: *Li-annī Aswād* delves into societal ideologies in the Muslim communities of Kuwait and the USA, revealing how ingrained conservative beliefs rationalise discrimination, demonstrated through the protagonist *Jamal's* experiences.

5. Systemic Racism: *Ta'am 'Aswad, Ra'eha Swada* addresses the impact of white supremacy and the shortcomings of the "white saviour narrative," which reinforces stereotypes and highlights the struggle against systemic racism in Yemeni society.

6. Redefining Freedom: *Zarayib al-Abeed* critiques the perception of freedom as a privilege granted by white masters, encouraging a confrontation of white supremacy and fostering discussion on the rights of oppressed individuals.

7. Challenging Dominant Narratives: *Dongola* constructs a "black counter-narrative" that defies white supremacy, exploring themes of defiance, identity, and the pursuit of autonomy amidst cultural and political oppression.

In summary, these novels collectively engage with complex issues of power, oppression, and liberation, providing rich insights into the historical and ideological contexts that influence perceptions of race and slavery. By analysing a selection of novels from across the Arab world, the research highlighted not only the rich tapestry of narratives surrounding slavery and black identity but also the significant socio-political transformations that have influenced their emergence, particularly in the context of post-colonialism. Key findings reveal the narrative's transformative nature, characterised by a diverse range of perspectives and a critical engagement with pressing themes such as authenticity, agency, and systemic racism. The research indicates a necessity for sensitivity when addressing historical legacies and showcases how authors from various backgrounds utilise their works to confront stereotypes, challenge societal norms, and advocate for the reclamation of historical truths.

The analysis of re-presentation further distinguished between different authorial perspectives, illustrating the empowerment achieved by black characters in narratives by authors of African descent compared to the often-passive portrayals by white authors. This dichotomy underscores the importance of counter-narratives in reshaping perceptions of black identity and agency within literature.

Moreover, the intersection of ideology and narrative in these works elucidates the complex relationships between historical power dynamics, current societal beliefs, and the ongoing impact of colonial legacies. By engaging with both liberal and conservative ideological frameworks, the dissertation reveals how these narratives reflect, resist, or complicate dominant narratives surrounding freedom and identity.

All in all, this research contributes to the understanding of how the “Arabic Black Slave Narrative” enriches literary discourse, offering profound insights into the intersections of race, identity, and history in the Arab world while fostering a broader dialogue on the implications of slavery and blackness within contemporary society. As this genre continues to evolve, it holds the potential to further amplify marginalised voices and challenge entrenched ideologies, paving the way for greater authenticity and understanding in literary re-presentations of black experiences.

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2.3.1.1 Map of Libya, Benghazi

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2.3.2.1 Map of Bahrain, Manama

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2.3.3.1 Map of Saudi Arabia, Hejaz region: Mecca & Media

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2.4.1.1 The Map of Yemen, Taiz

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2.4.2.1 The Map of Kuwait

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2.4.3.1 The Map of Dongola, Sudan

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