

Feminism in the Works of Fawziyya Abū Khālid

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Muneerah Badr Almahasheer,
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Abstract: In her article "Feminism in the Works of Fawziyya Abū Khālid" Muneerah Badr Almahasheer examines how the Saudi poet Fawziyya Abū Khālid (1955–present) addresses feminism in her poems. Although distinct, Islam is frequently conflated with Arabic culture; consequently, women's role in Islam is commonly misunderstood. Therefore, following Western feminists, Muslim feminists have called for readings and understandings of the Qur'an, wherein the authority of the historically patriarchal interpretations is not assumed, and the sanctity of the text is valued. Through this lens, Abū Khālid's poems critically interrogate Arabic Muslim identity, particularly with regard to gender. A selected reading of Abū Khālid's works clarifies the division between patriarchal Arabic tribal culture and Muslim identity; she focuses on the possibilities of female oriented society and limitations of the existing culture. Abū Khālid is one of the most prominent Saudi figures addressing issues of Arabic culture, Islam, and gender, and their intersections.

Muneerah Badr ALMAHASHEER

Feminism in the Works of Fawziyya Abū Khālid

Understandings of gender norms of feminism are always rooted within culture. As cultural differences abound, so do different understandings about these aspects of society. In Western societies, Arabic culture is often vilified as anti-feminist and regressive in relation to gender; this is often blamed on Islam. However, this is an inaccurate assumption based on a misunderstanding of Islam and its role in Arabic culture. A more thorough investigation posits the possibility of an Islamic feminism, one which values religious traditions but challenges the patriarchal ideals of Arabic culture. Furthermore, the works of Fawziyya Abū Khālid (1955–present) consider this possibility; they critically juxtapose gendered identity against traditional Arabic culture, drawing on Muslim identity as a point of feminist resistance. Thus, Abū Khālid's works help in understanding a new Muslim feminism movement.

Many modern feminist ideas are believed to originate from French poststructuralist theorist Michel Foucault (1926–1984), who challenged the importance of the body and its regulation by the state. Foucault focuses on ideas involving power, the body, and subjectivity, and the impact that such regulations have on individuals. In many of his works, Foucault discusses the ways in which bodies are disciplined or subjected to rigid social expectations by the state and/or authorities. For example, as individuals are indoctrinated into the norms of society, they integrate mechanisms of control, so that they will self-regulate, an idea explained in Foucault's theory of the panopticon, in which prisoners who believed themselves to be observed through a structure at the center of the prison began to continuously behave as though they were being watched (*Discipline* 196). In other words, it is part of subjectivity that individuals will internalize expected social norms and monitor themselves accordingly; such self-regulation also applies to gender.

Poststructuralist feminists, such as Judith Butler, have used this framework to further gender theory. Butler posits the idea of gender as a social construct, one that is largely conceived through social norms and constituted through performance (*Gender* 4). Gender is created through individual actions and speech, and they can be done differently at different times. As an example, Butler uses the drag queen, who performs a gendered identity as part of a performance, but who is not a woman (174). Though the individual is empowered in these terms of performance, being able to perform gender differently or to choose a different identity, they are not truly empowered in this fashion due to the enforcement of gender roles (17). Though gender can be performed in ways that defy rigid norms, this is not always feasible or without consequence due to the mechanisms of power that control individual expression, particularly what individuals do with their bodies; this is correlated to Foucault's ideas of regulation.

These similar ideas have been applied to the lives and bodies of women; at some point in time, everything, from personal grooming to dress expression to reproduction, has been regulated by the state, and harshly sanctioned by society even when not overtly regulated. Such oppressions have a global history in both Eastern and Western countries. The feminist movement is a result of these systems of regulation and oppression.

From a Western perspective, modern feminism began with a focus on civil rights. The first wave of the American feminist movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, spearheaded by figures such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, sought to attain voting rights for women. Until then, women had slowly gained inheritance and personhood rights, but lacked full citizenship and were denied voting rights. This grew to be the central focus of these early feminists, or suffragettes.

The Western second wave of feminism in the early 1960s and late 1980s primarily originated in the United States, but became more global than the first wave of feminism. The second wave focused more on the problems of women living in patriarchy, beginning with Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique*, which focused on the difficulties of modern women. These women of the 1960s were attending college, but they were dropping out as they met and married their husbands. Women were essentially expected to marry, raise children, and have no other aspirations in life. Friedan noted that due to these expectations, many women felt like something was lacking in their lives; however, they were unable to identify the reason behind it. Through consciousness-raising groups and other efforts, women began linking their lack of life satisfaction to aspects of patriarchal oppression; they began lobbying for better job opportunities, equal pay at the workplace, greater sexual freedom (free of judgment), and reproductive rights, along with other issues. The second wave of feminism is credited with greatly influencing and improving the lives of women in Western countries and worldwide. However, this wave of the feminist movement has also been critiqued for excluding the priorities and needs of women of color, queer women, and those with disabilities, among others. Similarly, the

needs of women in emerging nations were often overlooked. Similar to the first wave of feminism, this wave addressed the needs and issues of middle- to upper-class heterosexual white women, focusing on the privileged and failing to uplift the less privileged.

Finally, the third wave of feminism, beginning in the 1990s, has sought to consider those who have been excluded from prior feminist movements and to question issues of identity, deconstructing the ways in which individuals have used socially constructed identities as oppressive mechanisms. Instead of combining specific action, this wave has focused on power and identity politics, questioning the ways in which gendered and sexual identities are created, with some being valued and others unvalued (Severson and Stanhope, "Identity" 44). Butler, whose works are largely influenced by Foucault, is cited as a primary inspirational figure of this movement. Furthermore, the major premise of third wave feminism is the idea of intersectionalism, wherein different identities and oppressions may exist. For example, while a middle-class, heterosexual white woman may encounter gender-based oppressions, an African American transgender lesbian with disabilities would presumably face more oppressions, stemming from the societal oppression of her many identities (Severson and Stanhope 46). Intersectional feminism assumes that various identities are equally important and that those who consider themselves feminists should consider all oppressions experienced by others to be equal to that experienced by a particular individual.

More importantly, third wave feminism emphasizes the value of differences between subject positions and identity formation. Although previous understandings of feminism may have excluded both sex workers and religious adherents for participating in patriarchal social elements, third wave feminism recognizes that individuals form their identities differently, and therefore it may have different or conflicting ideas of what is oppressive. The emphasis has facilitated the development of different understandings of feminism, resulting in much more diversity within the movement. This wave has sought to rectify some of the issues of the previous waves and their denial of diverse issues, which according to some has created division among feminists and hampered the success of the movement.

Unlike the first wave, which attempted to posit women as natural moral leaders and necessary contributors in a Christian society, these waves of feminism have been largely secular and have originated in Western countries. However, a fourth wave of Islamic feminism might be considered. Many Westerners, including feminists, have considered Islam to be essentially oppressive toward women, influenced by their perception of life under fundamentalist, theocratic governments. Many Westerners, for example, view images of women in *burqas* and mentally apply these expectations to all Muslim women in all Muslim-dominant countries. Although there are many Muslim-predominant countries with varying degrees and interpretations of religious and cultural enforcement, it is a widespread belief in the West that women in these countries are inherently oppressed.

This is largely based on a misunderstanding of Islam and gender and on how inequities are best resolved. "The place of women in an Islamic society is determined by the Qur'an, the tradition of the Prophet Mohammed (PUB), and the interpretations of Islamic law and traditions influenced by social customs and practices...Islam liberated women from unacceptable conditions that prevailed in the tribal society of pre-Islamic Arabia" (UNICEF, "The Academy for Peace and Development" 6). Though the culture of Muslim women in Arabic countries is often externally perceived as oppressive, Islam actually elevated the position of women within this culture. It can be argued that the outsider perception of Arabic women within Islam persists to such a degree because it aligns with Orientalist views of Arabic women and Arabic culture in general. However, women enjoy greater respect and equity within Islam than they did in traditional tribal culture.

Furthermore, any such oppression must essentially be addressed internally to avoid any violation of Muslim women's autonomy. For example, Azizah al-Hibri points out that though many Muslim women have concerns involving their rights and family law, they also desire to adhere faithfully to their religion, and therefore their concerns cannot be rectified through external, secular enforcement: if the women feel that it is their religious duty to live according to specific religious guidelines, they will wish to do so ("Islam" 3). It is not appropriate for outsiders to "free" the devout from their religious duties as they understand them. Al-Hibri also argues that a non-patriarchal interpretation of the Qur'an is possible and that women who lack religious education and are not able to read or consider the text, are most vulnerable to gender-based abuses in the name of religion (3). Finally, al-Hibri states that Muslim feminism is possible and Islam demands equality for women (3). Though abuses and oppressive interpretations can and do occur, these are not inherent to the Qur'an or Muslim practice.

Such feminist analysis has been underway and, as Priscilla Offenbauer points out, is not unique. Multiple Muslim feminist scholars have examined the foundations of gendered behavior and expectations assumed to be in the Qur'an: "In offering such analyses of Islam's sacred writings, the scholars subject to scrutiny the scriptural foundations customarily cited to justify restrictions on women's roles

and autonomy in the family and society. These scholars avoid questioning the sacrality of the scriptures, some out of personal belief and some out of conviction as to the strategic value of deploying a religious idiom to counter patriarchal religious discourse" ("Women" 28).

This is similar to the manner in which, for example, Christian feminists have interrogated their sacred texts to reconcile their religious faith and desire for social equity. In the case of Christian feminism, a common perception (among both religious adherents and secular people) is that many Christian groups, such as Evangelicals, are opposed to Christianity and the things it represents, such as abortion, and a general movement away from traditional values. However, it has grown as a movement since "[i]n 1983 Rosemary Radford Ruether published *Sexism and God-Talk*, which as a feminist systematic theology proved that a feminist reconstruction of the whole field of Christian theology was possible...Ruether's approach was historical: she sought the agents of political, social and cultural change within biblical religion, and analyzed the limitations of their reflection and praxis" (Briggs, "Resurrecting" 17). Islamic feminism has followed a similar growth pattern. In both cases, the scholars have contended that the religion and its text are not inherently oppressive to women; it is the patriarchal interpretation of the texts in an already-oppressive society that has resulted in rigid, sexist social codes.

Significant differences do exist between Islamic fourth wave feminism and general Western feminism, among which is the valuation placed on the Qur'an and its teachings; one can understand Islamic feminism as a movement against traditional patriarchal culture and in favor of equality, but also one that relies on a religious text to make much of this argument. In contrast, while secular Western feminism started off invoking morality, as in the temperance movement, it came to argue the rights of women based on natural law. Though these restrictions have been attributed to religious demands, feminist scholars assert that this is not so, but is rather a function of having primarily male-led religious interpretation in a society with a history of traditional patriarchy. Indeed, it is worth noting that many Muslim-dominant countries have actually had female leaders. While Arabic culture is patriarchal and can be oppressive in relation to gender, the various Muslim countries are not as oppressive as many Westerners believe, and the existing oppression is not a tenet of Islam.

Furthermore, it may be argued that many of the cultural aspects of Islam, perceived to be more oppressive actually stem from Arabic culture, particularly from the pre-Islam tribal culture which governs many gender traditions. However, this becomes clear when one considers that not all Arabic cultures are Muslim and that not all Muslim-dominant cultures are Arabic. The cultures of Arab countries tend to have more in common with each other than with the dominantly Muslim countries, which are diverse and some of which are very liberal. Islam can and does support equality for women, despite it sometimes being used as a basis for gender-based oppression.

Against this backdrop, Fawziyya Abū Khālid belongs to a new generation of female poets who live in Arabic society and write from a rich tradition of Islam and Arabic culture. Abū Khālid is among the Islamic feminist authors who focus on the subject of gender, such as Nawal El Saadawi, Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed. She is aware of the social and political problems in the Arab world, including those pertaining to gender, and seeks to address these through her works, blending various identities and combining Islam and the Arab culture with gender and modernity (Bourget, "Complicity" 31). Marcia Kutrieh states as follows: "Abu Khalid and other contemporary Saudi Arab women poets are developing and defining their own poetic tradition, their own poetics, one designed and developed with numerous traditional symbols like the caravan and narrative devices drawn from the earliest Arab poets" ("Speaker/Self" 22).

Though many of the themes and symbols used in Abū Khālid's works are traditionally Arabic, the form and much of the content of her poems mark her identity as that of a female poet (Kutrieh, "Speaker/Self" 22). It is this untraditional form of prose poetry that also informs the themes of gender and identity through her works. Abū Khālid's poetry provides insights into the emerging Muslim Arabic feminist subjectivity.

Born in 1955 to a Bedouin family of eleven children, Abū Khālid has been a professor at King Saud's University in Riyadh for thirty years. An essayist and a poet, she has published several volumes of poetry, and her works have been widely anthologized after the publication of *Until When Will They Abduct You on Your Wedding Night?* (1974). She earned a BA in Sociology from the American University of Beirut in Lebanon, MA from Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, and a PhD in Political Sociology from the University of Salford, Manchester, UK. Her mother, Sharifa Nur al-Hashemi, an advocate for women's rights, has been a major influence on her. Her poetry is notable for its themes of women's rights, particularly education issues and freedom of choice (Miller, *Who's* 384). Because she effectively uses her intersectional identities of Muslim, Arab, and woman throughout her works, she represents a Foucauldian-based fourth wave of Islamic feminism. Therefore, it is valuable to con-

sider the intersections of the Saudi Anglophone poet's (Abū Khālid's) identities and tribalism through an examination of her works.

In her poem "Mother's Inheritance," for example, Abū Khālid directly addresses her female ancestors by beginning the poem with "Mother." She juxtaposes markers of gendered tradition with political realities of living as an Arabic woman. For example, in the lines, "You did not leave me an inheritance of / necklaces for a wedding / but a neck / that towers above the guillotine" (Boullata, *Women* 162), Abū Khālid clearly invokes tradition by beginning with the idea of inheritance. An inheritance is an item of value that is passed down through generations: although this often involves physical items or wealth, it can also imply cultural inheritance. "An inheritance of necklaces" could signify a dowry, traditional wedding garb, or both. Most notably, the right of a female to an "inheritance" has been introduced through Islam and did not exist in the ancient Arab culture; ironically, this inheritance is "necklaces," symbols of chains. This marks her place in Arabic tribal community and its gendered traditions. Her neck "tower[ing] above the guillotine" signifies political unrest, which could be tied to involvement in regional political dissension and connected to the risks taken when one breaks the rigid gendered tradition (Boullata, *Women* 162). Rather than being decorated in a way that one might traditionally expect of a woman, it is in danger of being severed. This is also reminiscent of the ways extreme fundamentalists have used beheadings as a gruesome execution method, reminding the reader that such views are a perversion of Islam and are dangerous to all.

In the next stanza, Abū Khālid states that the "mother" figure has left her with "Not an embroidered veil for my face / but the eyes of a falcon / that glitter like the daggers / in the belts of our men" (Boullata, *Women* 162). This suggests that the narrator has, in some ways, been empowered by the women before her, as the "embroidered veil" suggests tradition and the expectation that women are to cover their faces, emphasizing modesty. However, a "falcon" is a dangerous bird of prey. The hard sound in "glitter" emphasizes the visual image of the eyes glittering, specifically like daggers. The woman's eyes indicate a threat and a danger, as do the knives. Therefore, though the woman is under threat, she is also dangerous and perhaps capable of defending herself.

The next stanza describes the inability of women to own and inherit property in the narrator's culture; a woman inherits "[n]ot a piece of land large enough / to plant a single date palm" (Boullata, *Women* 162). The narrator is not able to grow or nurture anything in her ancestral soil due to its oppression of her; the land does not present a nurturing, fertile soil. Nevertheless, her mother has left her with the ability to grow and nurture life in her body, as she possesses "the primal fruit of The Fertile Crescent: / My Womb" (Boullata, *Women* 162). Thus, although gender is a regulated and enforced external social construct, her biologically female body allows her to grow life.

However, this is also exploited by the surrounding culture, and to some extent, the women have historically been complicit in this dynamic. Abū Khālid writes, "You let me sleep with all the children / of our neighborhood / that my agony may give birth / to new rebels" (Boullata, *Women* 162). She describes a permissiveness with a daughter's freedoms in a culture that is traditionally more conservative; this permissiveness, however, has underlying political liberal motivations and is not interested in the daughter's desires or best interests. The "agony" of childbirth, unanticipated by a young teen who is experimenting sexually, is welcomed by the mother and older women, as is the experimentation, because it will result in additional fighters. Therefore, the interests of women, especially young girls, are secondary to the political climate and perceived needs of men within patriarchy, even in relation to other women. In this sense, the women have betrayed the women of Abū Khālid's generation, treating their reproduction as a commodity.

This theme continues through the rest of the poem, as the author asserts, "In the bundle of your will / I thought I could find / a seed from The Garden of Eden / that I may plant in my heart / forsaken by the seasons" (Boullata, *Women* 162). As the "will" of women has been subjugated within patriarchal culture, the speaker must look for a seed, a small bit of it with the power to germinate. This metaphor furthers the growth and birth themes. However, the narrator's mother did not leave her with a "seed" from her "will," "Instead / You left me with a sheathless sword / the name of an obscure child carved on its blade" and "Every pore in me / every crack / opened up: / A sheath" (Boullata, *Women* 162). The "sword," with the name of an obscure child, is presumably the fruit of her "agony," a boy who will grow up into a weaponized young man to defend the traditional patriarchal culture. It is with this expectation that the speaker was allowed to conceive at a young age. Furthermore, his name is "obscure" because the speaker does not have the connection with the culture of men that she does with the culture of women, she did not intend to have a child, and she may not even have named the child. Because the speaker is full of "sheaths," she is the holder of house swords, and perhaps other phallic objects. She is exposed and vulnerable, as the opened "pores" and "cracks." These images evoke injury and discontent.

Ultimately, the "sword," representing patriarchal inheritance and social influence, cannot be contained. The speaker states, "I plunged the sword into my heart / but the wall could not contain it / I thrust it into my lungs / but the window could not box it / I dipped it into my waist / but the house was too small for it (Boullata, *Women* 163). Here, the woman's body equates to a house, but it is not a house that can contain the violence and the social power affiliated with patriarchal cultural norms. The metaphor of the house also references women's historical integration into the domestic sphere. The domestic and the socially external are here at odds, with the woman trying, but having little success, in reconciling them.

Despite the efforts to contain the masculine violence with which she has been impregnated, the speaker cannot contain it: "It lengthened into the streets / defoliating the decorations / of official holidays / Tilling asphalt / Announcing the season of / The Coming Feast (Boullata, *Women* 163). Though children are raised at home and are largely under the supervision of their mothers, the boys who are created to serve as "new rebels" will go out into the streets in violent and destructive manner, as described. The domestic sphere, to which women have largely been confined, cannot contain external societal violence. Furthermore, the rebels "going out into the street" "defoliate" the "decorations / of official holidays," which are Muslim. Islam is often described as a religion of peace, and Abū Khālid reveals how cultural and political violence, driven largely by men, are contrary to the tenets of Islam.

In the final stanza, Abū Khālid again begins with an address to her maternal figure, followed by, "Today, they came to confiscate the inheritance / you left me." She describes the scene as "They could not decipher the children's fingerprints / They could not walk the road that stretches / between the arteries of my heart and the cord that feeds the baby /" and universalizes the suffering to be "in every mother's womb" (Boullata, *Women* 163). Though her "inheritance" was a child who would eventually fight for patriarchal interests, and not the desired "seed of hope," the speaker's words evince that those who view children and reproduction as a political commodity do not understand their value as individuals, or the sanctity of the mother/child experience. This equally applies to individuals on both sides of a political conflict.

This idea is continued as follows: "They seized the children of the neighborhood / for interrogation / They could not convict the innocence in their eyes" (Boullata, *Women* 163). Assumptions of corruption prevail as "They searched my pockets / took off my clothes / peeled my skin" (163). Here, the children, who are innocent in this conflict, are being interrogated, and the women who give birth to them are assumed to have nefarious intentions, despite their desire to safeguard the children from political conflict; innocence cannot exist in such a context.

However, the final lines of the poem reveal that the speaker is intent on maintaining peace and her sense of goodwill in a way that is consistent with Islamic religious values. Abū Khālid writes, "But they failed to reach / the glistening silk that nestles / the twin doves in my breast" (Boullata, *Women* 163). Even after the violent act of having her "skin peeled," the narrator maintains "twin doves," representing peace, nestled in silk, which is valuable and delicate; this represents a form of feminine strength and resistance as efforts of two political factions of men to fully marginalize and oppress the woman are unsuccessful. The ending emphasizes women's ability to keep themselves emotionally removed from violence and social turmoil, despite facing great hardships.

In this poem, Abū Khālid clearly addresses the oppression of women by men and the concerns specifically facing Arabic Muslim women living in war-torn regions. The references to tribal patriarchy throughout the poem suggest that she presents the commandeering of female reproduction and children for purposes of war as being expressly problematic. She also juxtaposes peace, which Islam expressly calls for, in the face of patriarchal tribal violence and the warfare of men. "Mother's Inheritance" then presents a worldview in which Muslim women can persevere in their faith despite the violence that traditional Arabic culture often involves, and which is sometimes perpetrated by women, as well as by men.

Abū Khālid similarly critiques culture and tribalism in "Tattoo Writing." She specifically correlates tribalism with violence toward women and oppression. She begins, "Not with your tribe's spears I write / for they are dull / but with my nails / words without walls (Boullata, *Women* 166). As spears are weapons and are supposed to be sharp and shiny, she mocks the dullness of the tribe's spears as a form of impotence. However, despite this impotence, if she does not use the spears to express herself, embracing a culture that is sometimes violent, she must impose violence and limited expression upon herself, writing with her nails, which is a painful image. Furthermore, the expression does not then have any grounding outside of the legitimacy of culture, as they are "words without walls," not having permanence or long-lasting affiliation, as do those with "walls" (Boullata, *Women* 166).

Abū Khālid also addresses a female figure in this poem, this time a "sister." The speaker states, "For you I have inscribed / Love-songs / weaving the sun's rays / to your latticed window" (Boullata,

Women 166). The "love songs" that have been inscribed could reference a familial "love," as suggested by "sister." The gender of the subject is a clear factor in how the speaker addresses her and how she understands her own as well as the speaker's identity. They are women within a particular social and cultural context. In the next segment, Abū Khālid critiques tribalism even more vigorously:

To tell me you accept
The tribe's traditions and prescriptions
is a concession
to being buried alive
The noble inch or two
of tattoo
over your skin
shall curve a bottomless night
into your flesh (Boullata, *Women* 166).

The brief, staccato lines create a sense of tension as the author seeks to convey the urgency of this matter to her tribal "sister." The titular tattoo is also a wound; tattoos are created through literally carving a wound into the flesh with a needle and filling it with ink. The tattoo in question is here obviously meant to be a tribal tattoo, one that will serve as a literal marker of identity on the subject's body. Therefore, in this symbol, cultural identification becomes a wound on the woman's body. Though both men and women wear tribal tattoos, which can be considered important signifiers of the wearer's identity, this becomes complex when juxtaposed against the fact that women do not have the same rights. Thus, the tattoo can also be understood as a symbol to mark the woman and her body as property, similar to animals.

It becomes increasingly clear that the speaker is addressing a subject who is a young, modern woman. Abū Khālid writes, "It pains me / to see the tribe dwell / in you sprawling / in your college seat" and "that "unlike your grandmother / who thought she was / a lottery ticket won / at home" (Boullata, *Women* 167). The subject assumes that she is empowered through her age and the time in which she lives; she can obtain a college education, unlike women before her, who did not have this choice. However, the speaker compares this subject to her grandmother, who assumed that she had more power than she actually had in patriarchal society because of her beauty, which made her a "lottery ticket" to be "won" (Boullata, *Women* 167). However, just as beauty is fleeting and does not equate to greater rights, even an education can fail to ensure equality if it is not valued or recognized. Abū Khālid highlights that it is easy for young or more privileged women to make assumptions about the value that they have in a patriarchal society. However, their assumption is not accurate; in fact, it is likely to be detrimental in the long term. Abū Khālid emphasizes that a modern female identity is inherently at odds with a tribal feminine identity.

The poet continues by invoking traditional markers of tribal identity. She writes, "A woman / in her twenties / sitting before some tent / shrouded with robes and veils," "carrying the spindle / but does not spin" and is talking about "a cloak / the clan's man bought" for her and boasting "about blue-blood the heirs / and chip off the old oak tree. / The Sheik's voice in your voice/cancels you" (Boullata 167). Here, it becomes evident that the young subject in the poem is privileged enough to receive an education due to the class privilege of her ancestors. The fact that she "carries the spindle" "but does not spin" underscores the fact that modern young women are expected to have affiliation with tradition and cultures that are not directly relevant to them. While this is true for young men to an extent, the roles of women have changed more in a secular, modern society, and it is the lives of young women that are negatively foreclosed by tribal culture. In the final stanza, Abū Khālid writes,

Sister
My kingdom does not claim
dowries of cows and cattle
thus the Tribe rejects me
For you are their legitimate child
I am the one disavowed
You belong to lords of virgin lands
I to seasons bleeding flames
How long will they keep raping you on your wedding night? (Boullata, *Women* 168)

The speaker is "disavowed" either through a lack of class privilege or through her truly modern identity, which has eschewed her tribal affiliations. However, the price of being "legitimate" is that the addressed subject is more valuable to the tribe, and therefore she is prepared for her wedding night.

The last line reveals several things: first, according to the speaker, Abū Khālid's logic, marriage within the tribe cannot truly be desired or a matter of informed consent due to the traditional subjugation of women. Second, the young woman, on the night of her wedding, is a very expensive property to be bought by "dowries of cows and cattle," as her husband represents masculine privilege and patriarchal power. However, another possibility is that the subject is not only one young woman; rather, she symbolizes a multitude of married women within the tribe. A third assumption is how women view and value themselves in categories according to the tribes they belong to, which highlights the significance of their tattoos.

Abū Khālid situates modern female identity against tribal identity, juxtaposing the two as inherently incompatible. As in the previous work, the poet presents tribal identity to be affiliated with patriarchy and detrimental power displays, as well as being inherently damaging to women who lack full civil rights within the culture. Though postmodern identity politics, and perhaps even intersectional feminism, would allow for the valid coexistence of both a tribal and a modern female identity, Abū Khālid believes that this is not possible due to the conflict between these two identities.

In "Two Little Girls," Abū Khālid again addresses a female figure, this time, her mother, who is identified as Noor. The poet's actual mother is named Sharifa, so it is safe to assume that this poem is not strictly autobiographical. Since Abū Khālid's mother is a social activist and "Noor" is identified as a poet, one can surmise that "Noor" is probably a maternal poet figure.

This poem creates a pastoral image of a girls existing together outside of oppressive social dynamics. Abū Khālid explains how she hangs on to "the hem of her dress like a child hanging / On to the string of an immovable kite / I climb her braid like a squirrel climbing a hazelnut tree" (Jayyusi, *Beyond the Dunes* 67). The imagery continues as "In the late afternoon we jump from one world to another / we play in the wind / like sparrows that opened the door to the cage" (67). Here, the metaphors evoke freedom and nature, as the female figures are compared to animals, trees, and rain. In this peaceful setting, they learn and grow their differences, as "She teaches me / names of flowers/the seasons of rain / love of our country" and "I teach her / stubbornness and mischief" (67). Unlike patriarchal power structures in which learning is a form of discipline, implemented by those with more power on those with less, here, the female figures learn and share freely, regardless of power and social roles.

Furthermore, this pastoral ideal also fosters a sense of feminine community, as Abū Khālid writes: "We share one apple and innumerable dreams / We paint a paradise of questions on the face of the desert / We spray each other with the water of the mirage / accompany a fleeting doe" (67). Though the little girls may not have a political agenda and may play as animals do in nature, this also accompanies "dreams" and "questions," important for community-building.

This poem seems to provide commentary on how girls and women interact when they are free to engage with each other, in contrast to tribal masculinity, which focuses on dominance and power. The image of the girls playing creates a possibility of a future in which people engage, dream, and question in a more cooperative manner. The poem evokes a peaceful society, which contrasts greatly with the poet's critiques of tribal masculinity. In fact, this poem is better understood when juxtaposed against the others.

The poem "A Pearl" also focuses on themes of inheritance and earlier culture, which are prominent throughout Abū Khālid's poetry. The speaker clarifies the history of a gift,

This Pearl
Was a gift of my grandmother—that great lady—
to my mother
and my mother gave it to me
And now I hand it on to you/
The three of you and this pearl
Have one thing in common
simplicity and truth
I give it with my love
and with the fullness of my heart
you excel in (Jayyusi, *The Literature of Modern Arabia* 135).

In "Mother's Inheritance," the speaker is left without any legitimate female legacy in a culture that is thoroughly arranged around tribal masculinity; however, here, the speaker inherits a simple but valuable pearl, which is passed from woman to woman until "The girls of Arabia will soon grow/ to full stature" (Jayyusi, *The Literature of Modern Arabia* 136).

The poem "Butterflies" addresses loss; it is different from the others as it focuses on a love interest and is not explicitly addressed to a woman. Though one might assume that as heterosexuality is more common, the poem is addressed to a male, this is not explicitly stated. However, the love interest has abandoned the speaker and is, therefore, a "truant" is compared to a mare, a female horse (Jayyusi, *The Literature of Modern Arabia* 137). This supports the reading of the love interest as female, as does, arguably, the image of "butterflies" in the heart of the speaker. The speaker's knowledge of her loved one is compared to tribal knowledge, to a Bedouin being able to track a horse that has gone astray. This also suggests a sense of ownership over the loved one. However, neither the loved one nor the speaker is clearly gendered in this poem. Therefore, though tribal identity and tribal knowledge appear in the poem, they are not clearly gendered. This situates "Butterflies" as somewhat unique among Abū Khālid's poetry.

Finally, "My Grandfather Attends a General Assembly" seems to invert Abū Khālid's criticism of tribal identity. The speaker in this poem seems to be a child, presumably a young girl, if the poem is to be construed as autobiographical. In this poem, Abū Khālid critiques postcolonial identity, or the rite of a formal assembly, in which "the rites of protocol with piety and reverence" involve "a button for clapping," "a button for smiling," and "a button for constant approval" (Jayyusi, *The Literature of Modern Arabia* 137). In this scenario, tribal identity provides a vehicle for escape, as the narrator "[emigrates] from this world," "following you to the equator/to the jungle of snakes / to the burning spices / and / the glittering daggers under your skin / without rites" (137). Exoticism is evoked through the "jungle," "burning spices," and "glittering daggers," in a way that contrasts with the sterility of the general assembly (137).

More importantly, however, the general assembly is also presumably dominated by men. Since most of the society is structured through patriarchy, these are the options that the speaker observes in formulating her experience of reality. A tribal, ethnic identity is juxtaposed against the possibility of an assimilated, postcolonial identity. However, both are problematic, as they have largely been structured outside of the experiences of women. Thus, the speaker has little to relate to.

Ultimately, Abū Khālid's poems provide insights into a modern female Arabic perspective that allows for the existence of an Islamic feminism, one that correlates to the work of Muslim academics who challenge the ostensibly patriarchal nature of Arabic culture, arguing instead that it is the interpretations of the Qur'an by men that have created this dynamic. This subject position relies not solely on the identity of a woman or Muslim to present its expression; rather, it is a product of both, highlighting the complexity of identity and the tensions that are allowed to coexist within the third wave of feminism, moving into something new.

The prose-poetry style adopted by the author is useful in telling stories of women negotiating the pressures of a highly traditional culture. Abū Khālid provides the representation of a subject position that has often been misunderstood and externally interpreted; she uses her word choice, symbolism, and themes to convey a woman's experience within this context as both a means of giving voice to these women and providing an understanding.

Abū Khālid seeks to present that the patriarchal oppression observed in parts of the Arabic world is more a function of pre-existing Arabic tribal culture than it is of Islam; such oppression is soundly critiqued in the poet's works, as she argues for the need of a contemporary feminist Arabic sensibility through her works. She presents Arabic women as victims of patriarchy and as unwilling participants in male-dominated power struggles.

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