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Nation, State and Society in Literature:

*Representation in Contemporary Kuwaiti Novels*

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## Introduction

There has been a strong link between literature, on the one hand, and the state and concepts of nation, national identity and nationalism, since their emergence, on the other. This link is especially vigorous and active in the nation-building process, where the literature plays a significant, sometimes even a crucial role. The history of any national literature fuses with the history of its nation. Thus, it is not challenging to propose an assumption that a large portion of world's literature revolves around or contain the ideas of nation, "nation-ness"<sup>1</sup>, national identity and the sense of belonging to a nation. Moreover, it is important to point out the social role of literature. Namely, literature deals with the state, its people and their issues, and discusses crucial matters of the society. Over time, literature became an expression of a nation's spirit. It is a living social body that speaks a nation's mind. Therefore, it expresses all what is happening in the state, its progress and degradation, all the issues and changes, expressing, in other words, what the nation is going through. Hence, literature represents an ever-changing and constantly living phenomenon that goes in line with its nation, its history, with lives of its people and their daily activities.<sup>2</sup>

If one tends to understand the very nature of the relation between literature and the state and how they influence one another; to determine to what extent various elements of the state, such as the concepts of nation, national identity or nationalism, influence a certain national literature and how they appear in it; or to define and describe the role of literature and, more precisely, the role of authors and purpose of their works and in what way this could be significant or useful for the nation, one must comprehend the very beginnings of the notions of nation and state and detect their first emergence in literature, and, more importantly, to analyze the intended state itself, its development, social and political structure and its reality, and try to identify how these various state elements and issues appear in particular literary examples, what message they carry and what this means for the author and, eventually, for the society.

This paper seeks to analyse above-mentioned issues in the case of Kuwait and its literature, more precisely in contemporary novels. In order to analyse how the state of Kuwait, its social and political structure, its specific organization within the state, and certain social issues, distinctive for Kuwait, affect novels, which, along with short stories, currently dominate

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Julia M. Wright, "Literature and nationalism," *National developments in literary criticism* (2013): 108.

the Kuwaiti literary scene<sup>3</sup>, this paper will look at two novels from two Kuwaiti authors. The first is 2000 novel *The Trial: A Glimpse of Reality* (Arabic: *al-Muḥākama: maqta' min sīrat al-wāqi'*) from Laila al-Othman, while the second is *The Bamboo Stalk* (Arabic: *Sāq al-bāmbū*) from Saud Alsanousi, published in 2012. Here, I will present brief biographies of both the authors.

### *Laila al-Othman*

Laila al-Othman (Arabic: ليلي العثمان) is one of the most prominent writers of Kuwait. She is a novelist and short story writer. Al-Othman was born in 1943 in a small coastal town in Kuwait. After her parents' separation, Laila ended up living with her father, his new wife and stepbrothers. The life in this environment was not easy for Laila. She was always called 'the daughter of another woman' and was mistreated by her stepmother and stepbrothers. In addition, her father, Abdullah al-Othman, was absent very often, hence this affected Laila's childhood. She began writing and drawing on the walls at an early age, as a means of resisting the torture and mistreatment at home and showing her feelings and turmoil that she was going through.

Othman's entering the school represented a shift in her life. Her teachers embraced and supported her talents. She became a heroine of simple plays which she wrote for the acting team in her school. However, she fell short of the education and was withdrawn from school because she did not fall into a framework of the old Arab tradition that 'inscribed' women to stay home after marrying their siblings. Her father's decision to withdraw her from school made Laila desperate. She was crying and insisting on receiving her education. This led her father to open his library for her, but, at the same time, refused to let her attend his literary forums and to publish articles under her real name, so that people would not know that his daughter writes in newspapers. In her biography, *I Dusted Myself Off (Anfuḍ 'anny al-ghurāb)*, being the only Kuwaiti female author to write her own biography, al-Othman writes about her troublesome childhood and her problematic relationship with her father.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Shimon, "Fiction from Kuwait," *Banipal 47 – Magazine of Modern Arab Literature*, Summer 2013, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Mahmoud El-Wardani, "Kuwaiti's Laila al-Othman's autobiography: Writing is a profession of hardship and happiness," September 27, 2017, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/18/277859/Books/Kuwaiti-Laila-ALothmans-autobiography-Writing-is-a.aspx>

The biggest milestone of the Kuwaiti writer's life occurred in 1965, when she moved away from her conservative father. Marrying a Palestinian doctor, al-Othman ignored the conservative Kuwaiti tradition which imposes marriage within the family. In her words, for the first time she felt truly free. Her husband encouraged her to write and publish. Even after she got married, her father tried to restrict her from publishing. However, he died shortly after and al-Othman's name started appearing in several newspapers. Moreover, she started writing columns for a famous daily newspaper *Al-Seyassah* (Arabic: السياسة).

Laila al-Othman is considered to be one of the founders of short story and novel genres in Kuwait.<sup>5</sup> She published her first short story collection *A Woman in a Vase (Imra' a fī inā')* in 1976 and, furtherly, her first novel *The Woman and the Cat (al-Mar' a wa al-qīṭṭa)* in 1985. She also wrote travel memoirs, for instance *Days in Yemen (Ayyām fī al-Yaman)* and about Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in her novel *Diary of Patience and Bitterness (Yawmiyyāt al-ṣabr wa al-murr)*. However, her best-known work, certainly, is her second novel *Wasmiyya comes out of the Sea (Wasmiyya takhruj min al-baḥr)* published in 1986. This novel gained critical acclaim and was selected as one of the best 100 Arab novels in the twenty-first century so far and was turned into a television series. Her other significant novels are *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality (al-Muḥākama: maqṭa' min sīrat al-wāqi')* and *The Tail (al-'Uṣ' uṣ)*, both being banned in Kuwait. The latter has been called 'provocative' because of its complex, 'hidden messages' and unclear main idea of the novel, dealing at the same time with family matters, criticizing patriarchal order of Kuwaiti society, following a family romance, and using humor and parody to draw the reader's attention, thus displaying her mastery in short story writing.<sup>6</sup> Al-Othman wrote several short story collections, such as *The Departure (al-Raḥīl)*, *Fifty-five Short Tales (Khams wa khamsūn ḥikāya qaṣīra)*, *Fathieh Chooses her Demise (Fathīyya takhtār mawtahā)* and the latest *Aba'at al-Maqam*, published in 2012. Her works have been translated into many languages, including English, Spanish, French, Italian, Russian, German, Serbo-Croatian, Polish and others. In 2004, *Laila al-Othman Prize* was established, recognizing and awarding young male and female fiction writers.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mahmoud El-Wardani, "Kuwaiti's Laila al-Othman's autobiography: Writing is a profession of hardship and happiness," September 27, 2017, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/18/277859/Books/Kuwaiti-Laila-AlOthmans-autobiography-Writing-is-a.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Hager ben Driss, "Women narrating the Gulf: A Gulf of their own," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XXXVI, no. 2 (2005): 153.

<sup>7</sup> "Laila al-Othman," Banipal – Magazine of Modern Arab Literature, accessed May 7, 2019, <https://www.banipal.co.uk/contributors/392/laila-al-othman/>

Laila al-Othman has always been vocal throughout her career about various social and political issues in Kuwait and the rest of the Arab world and, unsurprisingly, this brought her much criticism and resentment. Few of her books were inspired by several significant events in the Arab world, such as the Persian Gulf War, already-mentioned Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Israeli aggression in Lebanon in 2006 and others. She is, especially, critical of Islamists and religious fanaticism in general (including Salafi Islam). Al-Othman was sentenced to two months imprisonment in 2000 for publishing a book that, allegedly, contained elements of blasphemy and immoral phrases and ideas. Despite her enormous influence and fame throughout all the Arab states, six of her books were or have been banned in Kuwait.<sup>8</sup> Laila al-Othman addresses and reveals various aspects of Kuwaiti society in her autobiography, focusing on and criticizing the conservative nature of the state.<sup>9</sup>

### *Saud Alsanousi*

Saud Alsanousi (Arabic: سعود السنعوسي), born in 1981, is a journalist and one of the leading young novelists in Kuwait. He is a member of the Association of writers in Kuwait and the Association of Kuwaiti journalists. Alsanousi started writing in order to express and bring personal painful experiences through his literature. He states that he wants to create an empathic relation between him and the reader; thus, to replicate the same experience he had and to transfer it to his readers, who would then ‘try to find a cure’ for it. Saud explains that he does not belong to any specific literary stream but tries to implement and absorb different elements from different genres in both Arab and international literature.<sup>10</sup>

His first novel *The Prisoner of Mirrors* (*Sajīn al-marāyā*) from 2010 won the *Laila al-Othman Prize*. In 2011, his story *The Bonsai and the Old Man* (*al-Būnsāy wa al-rajul al-‘ajūz*) won in the *Stories on the Air* competition, organized by the Al-Arabi newspapers and BBC

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<sup>8</sup> “Laila al-Othman: Kuwaiti writer who skipped the walls of harem,” El-Ekhber, last modified December 27, 2011, [https://www.al-akhbar.com/Last\\_Page/99697/%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AB%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%82%D9%81%D8%B2%D8%AA-%D9%81%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A](https://www.al-akhbar.com/Last_Page/99697/%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AB%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%82%D9%81%D8%B2%D8%AA-%D9%81%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A)

<sup>9</sup> Mahmoud El-Wardani, “Kuwaiti’s Laila al-Othman’s autobiography: Writing is a profession of hardship and happiness,” September 27, 2017, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/18/277859/Books/Kuwaiti-Laila-ALothmans-autobiography-Writing-is-a.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> “Saud Alsanousi [Kuwait], Biography,” Internationales Literaturfestival – Berlin, accessed May 7, 2019, <http://www.literaturfestival.com/autoren-en/autoren-2013-en/saud-alsanousi>

Arabic. Alsanousi's biggest success came in 2013 when he won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction for his novel *The Bamboo Stalk*, making him the youngest winner of the prize at the age of 31. The novel follows a story of a young boy named Jose, who struggles to find his own identity. The novel provides an image of Kuwait in the eyes of a Filipino, reveals various social issues present in Kuwait, especially regarding the issues of identity, citizenship and (in)tolerance, and presents a comparison between Kuwait and the Philippines on different levels. Many literary figures and critics in the Arab world, notably in the Gulf region, claim this book as controversial.<sup>11</sup>

His work has been published in several prominent newspapers in Kuwait, including Al-Watan, as well as in many Kuwaiti magazines, such as Al-Arabi, Al-Kuwait and Al-Abwab. He currently lives and works in Kuwait, where he regularly writes for Al-Qabas newspaper.<sup>12</sup> Also, he works as a writer at the Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed Cultural Centre and is involved in dramatizing and scripting of various plays.<sup>13</sup>

There are several reasons why exactly these two authors and their novels were chosen for this analysis. Firstly, the intention was to achieve gender equality and include both a female and a male author. Although male writers dominate the Kuwaiti scene (as it is the case mostly in the whole Arab world), there is a large number of prominent female Kuwaiti writers who have contributed to the development of Kuwaiti literature and its excellence, thus it would not be fair not to include a female author in this analysis. As far as Laila al-Othman, as mentioned in her biography, she has been one of the most outstanding female literary figures in the last few decades. She belongs to the so-called 'fourth generation' of Kuwaiti writers, in which women played a significant role and earned their position within the male-dominated literary arena in Kuwait.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, she is among few writers that freely express her mind through her literary work, criticizing the state, its authority, the society, religious fanatics (Islamists) and addresses the lack of respect of human rights. The fact that six of her books, including the one being analyzed in this paper, were banned by the Ministry of Information in Kuwait, and that she was convicted and has been sued several times throughout her career, means that Al-

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<sup>11</sup> "Saud Alsanousi [Kuwait], Biography," Internationales Literaturfestival – Berlin, accessed May 7, 2019, <http://www.literaturfestival.com/autoren-en/autoren-2013-en/saud-alsanousi>

<sup>12</sup> "Saud Alsanousi," International Prize for Arabic Fiction, accessed May 7, 2019, <https://www.arabicfiction.org/en/Saud-Alsanousi>

<sup>13</sup> "Saud Alsanousi: Mama Hissa's Mice," The Susijn Agency LTD, accessed July 20, 2019, <http://www.thesusijnagency.com/SaudAlsanousi.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Shimon, "Fiction from Kuwait," *Banipal 47 – Magazine of Modern Arab Literature*, Summer 2013, 14.

Othman had to 'pay' for speaking her mind. Therefore, it was important to look at an author who can, clearly, express themselves and, thus, present a realistic image of the state and certain issues in it and, at the same time, preserving their high status and literary influence. In addition, I intended to examine a work from the relatively near post-Gulf War era (*The Trial* is from 2000) and look at how this atmosphere was pictured in the Kuwaiti literature.

On the other hand, there is Saud Alsanousi, a young novelist who has gained fame only recently but already showed high quality in the novel genre writing that was proven by winning the International Prize for Arabic Fiction. Compared to Laila al-Othman, I aimed to look at how a young Kuwaiti author looks at the state and society and to see whether he/she can express his/her mind freely and analyze various issues of the state through writing. Alsanousi started to write after the Arab uprisings broke out (after 2010), and, knowing that these events woke young people's minds and encouraged them to start expressing themselves and to fight for a better future, one can assume that Arab Spring, also, influenced Alsanousi's way of thinking and his literary work. Another reason why I chose Saud Alsanousi and *The Bamboo Stalk* is the topic that he analyzes here, which is the question of identity, citizenship and the issue of being different in Kuwait. Moreover, *The Bamboo Stalk* gained critical acclaim and, for this work, Alsanousi became the youngest winner of the Arabic 'Booker'. Related to this, I intend to examine if he, as a young author, was able to express his ideas and opinions openly in this novel and address serious social issues in Kuwait. Also, I will try to expose whether the fact that he won this prestigious award means that he was not courageous or direct enough in his expression or that the critics had to turn a blind eye to this controversial novel, as many call it, and recognize its excellency and quality.

As mentioned above, this paper seeks to analyze the mutual relation between the state and the notion of the nation (and its related concepts), on the one hand, and literature, on the other, in the case of Kuwait. It intends to look at how the state and nation are presented in Kuwaiti literature, more precisely, how various social, political and religious issues are reflected in modern Kuwaiti novels. It will try to prove that certain social and political structures, as part of the Kuwaiti nation, are deeply imbedded in the nature of the state and its society and that these issues, as a part of the Kuwaiti nation, are widely covered and reported in Kuwaiti literature.

## Chapter 1

### *Nation, State and Literature*

#### 1.0 *The concepts of nation, nationalism and nation-state*

When examining the relation between the concepts of nation and literature, more precisely, how nation and nation-state, as closely related terms, on the one hand, interact with literature and literary expression, and how these national and state elements merge into national literature, it is essential to go back to the emergence of these concepts and try to define and understand them.

According to Benedict Anderson, nation, nationality and nationalism are terms extremely difficult to define. He calls them ‘cultural artefacts of a particular kind’. On the way to understanding the concepts of nation, (nation-)state, nationality and nationalism, one needs to look at how they have come into historical being in the first place. Moreover, one, also, must analyze if and to what extent their meanings have changed throughout the time. Anderson proposes his own definition of the term *nation*, in a more anthropological tone. He suggests that the nation is an imagined political community. As he explains, it is *imagined* because the members of a community called ‘nation’ cannot all know, meet or hear about each other, even within the smallest nations in the world. Still, there is an image of a shared community and imagined sense of belonging to that community. On the other hand, it is imagined as a *community*, because even though there is an evident inequality, possible exploitation and actual power hierarchy among its members, the nation is believed to be a deep, horizontal ‘companionship’ or a ‘fraternity’. If we look closer, it is this imagined idea of a companionship or fraternity that drives its members to strive for common goals and ambitions and even to die for such an imagined union. The idea of this rather imagined unity has been fundamental and vital for millions of people over the past two centuries in order to establish or create an organized nation or nation-state where one does not exist, or its existence needs to be strengthened or proven.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, Anthony D. Smith, a British sociologist, sees the concept of nation as a community that occupies its homeland, with its members having common myths and a

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<sup>15</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 3-7.

shared history, a common public culture and common rights and responsibilities for all the members within the community. Julia Wright recognizes the insistence on terms ‘shared’, ‘common’ and ‘public’ and argues that this is related to the modern requirements of a full and complete participation of the nation’s members (citizens). Even though, as mentioned above, equality cannot be achieved in practice among the citizens, this modern understanding of nation highlights the importance of the people, not the ruling elite, for grounding the concepts of sovereignty and national identity. Therefore, for the basis of the nation and its institutions, the people, their total participation and striving for equality were given the advantage as opposed to obedience to the head of the state.<sup>16</sup>

While Anderson provides a solid definition of the concept of nation, as it is indeed imagined and abstract to a certain extent, his ideas represent a rather ideal view on this term and its use (e.g. seeing nation as a horizontal fraternity), thus it seems that it is hard to apply it to the modern age. However, further discussion on the Kuwaiti state and selected novels may show us to what extent our understandings of nation go in line with Anderson’s definitions. More contemporary views on nations, as mentioned above in Julia Wright’s words, perhaps seem to be more practical and more related to what we know of nation-states today, thus, in the following chapters, I will try to examine these views, i.e. to see how they fit in the particular case of Kuwait, its state and society, and whether ‘the importance of the people’ is valued and practically achievable in the state. Although, according to Antonio Gramsci, true democracy and full participation of the people in the state are not possible<sup>17</sup>, it is important to look at the development of the term *nation*, its relation to other concepts (such as state, society or literature in this case) and what it means in a specific example, i.e. within a certain state, in order to obtain more concrete image.

### 1.1 *Emergence of nations, nation-states and nationalisms and their relation to literature*

It is important to emphasize the fact that nation, as we know it, is relatively young concept. The conception of a modern state goes back to European Renaissance, when some nations, notably France and England, managed to create a sense of unity based on few confluent factors, such as territory, language, political ideology, religion, etc. Concepts such as national identity and patriotism emerged in Europe even before the age of Enlightenment, however, modern

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<sup>16</sup> Julia M. Wright, “Literature and nationalism,” *National developments in literary criticism* (2013): 98.

<sup>17</sup> Dylan J. Riley, “Hegemony, Democracy, and Passive Revolution in Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*,” *California Italian Studies*, vol. 2, issue 2 (2011): 19.

streams of nationalism are usually considered as ‘products’ of the late eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Generally, the eighteenth century in Western Europe indicates both the dawn of the era of nationalism and the dusk of strong religious streams and thoughts. In contrast, the new period that arrived, the so-called *Enlightenment*, was characterized by nationalist secularism.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, neo-classical and Enlightenment views highlighted the importance of the unity of cultural and ethical realms, and these were the realms from which neo-classicists drew their inspiration for political and social reforms. “These movements’ elevation of culture as the source of politics, ..., makes the culture the basis of both national identity and individual membership in the nation...”<sup>20</sup> Thus, culture could play a significant role in bringing people together and reassuring their national identity and sense of belonging to one nation, based on common and shared elements. Over the past centuries and today, we can see many state-leaders and state-institutions referring to and using these common cultural (and, in many cases, religious) elements in an attempt of reassuring the status of the nation, or justifying certain state-decisions or even their personal choices. For instance, many leaders of states with Muslim-majority population often refer to the common Islamic heritage, tradition and values, or Arab origin (in the case of Arab states) in order to emphasize the reputation and excellence of their nation, especially in contrast to the West, when trying to turn away from the ‘Western values’.<sup>21</sup>

Early manifestos of nationalism in Western Europe in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries provided the direct connection between nation and literature, which served as a cornerstone for a process of nation-building. These *new nationalisms*, or, in other words, numerous nationalist movements in Europe, represented some kind of “awakening from sleep”.<sup>22</sup> At this point, it is crucial to spot the role of literature in this “awakening”. The earliest beginnings of national and cultural realms being brought together go back to middle 18<sup>th</sup> century Western Europe (primarily England, France, and Germany). This period coincides with neo-classical movement and the Age of Enlightenment. In this atmosphere, the first ‘official’ contact between ‘national’ and ‘cultural’, in a literary form, occurred in the 1748 essay “*Of National Characters*” from a Scottish philosopher and historian, David Hume. Although here,

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<sup>18</sup> Luiz Carlos Moreira da Rocha, “Literature and its role in the formation of the nations,” *Literatura e Sociedade* 22 (2016): 69.

<sup>19</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 11.

<sup>20</sup> Julia M. Wright, “Literature and nationalism,” *National developments in literary criticism* (2013): 103.

<sup>21</sup> Darko Tanasković, *Islam: dogma i život* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 2010), 37-38.

<sup>22</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 195.

it is still difficult to talk about concrete examples of *national* elements or dealing with social issues regarding the nation through literature.<sup>23</sup>

Related to this, it is worthwhile to explore the scope of meanings around the term *nation* and its derived adjective *national* in this period and this very context. Namely, a century and a half after Hume, a French philosopher and critic Ernest Renan proposed that the nation is not defined by geography or race, as it was commonly thought, but by its past and that the national character remained strongly associated with history and culture. Thinking in this direction and using Renan's theory, it is logical to assume that, since its emergence, the national consciousness has always been embodied in literature of any nation in the world. This national consciousness may bring together diverse national feelings, like the sense of national identity, nationalism, patriotism and others, not only in literature, but also in other forms of human activities, such as all kinds of art, science, politics, etc. More importantly, this 'national consciousness' brings about self-consciousness, social and political consciousness, it awakens a need to express oneself through literature. Therefore, it is not only about nationalism and patriotism expressed in literary works, it is a need that emerges from these national feelings, a strong need to discuss and deal with the nation, the state and its issues and sharing one own's thoughts and ideas. Strongly supporting this assumption, it is important to go back to Hume and his views on this matter. Hume suggests that "the spirit of the age affects all the arts; and the minds of men, ..., carry improvements into every art and science."<sup>24</sup> In the already-mentioned period of Enlightenment, the nation was tightly connected to the ideas of education, ethics, and culture; thus, related to the previous sentence, literary deeds may be seen as a tool to promote these ideas and elevate the national character, as they (literary deeds) contribute to the education of citizens of a certain nation and their cultural excellence.<sup>25</sup> Anderson, providing his own views and description of the nation – literature relation, points out that the concept of nation inspires multiple feelings, both positive and negative, shared and expressed by people in various ways, most notably in so-called "cultural products" (poetry, prose, music...). Thus, he concludes that from the beginning, the nation was created, developed and expressed through language. The language became a tool for spreading not only strict and clear national or

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<sup>23</sup> Julia M. Wright, "Literature and nationalism," *National developments in literary criticism* (2013): 98-103.

<sup>24</sup> "Of Refinements in the Arts by David Hume (1711-1776)," Bartleby – Great Books Online, accessed May 9, 2019, <https://www.bartleby.com/library/prose/2754.html>

<sup>25</sup> Julia M. Wright, "Literature and nationalism," *National developments in literary criticism* (2013): 104-105.

nationalist ideas, but more importantly, it, also, became a tool for raising people's consciousness and awareness.<sup>26</sup>

When analyzing the relation between the nation and literature, one must come across the term *national literature*. In the 19th century, William E. Channing explained what we mean by national literature, relating it to the fact that every nation expresses its mind through literature. Furthermore, this 'national literature' places its nation into an international space or plateau, where the nation can be recognized as such, among all the other nations in the world. Taking this into an account, it is evident how literature managed to 'fight' for its own status and held a prominent place in the public realm. Thus, the nation flows within its own literature's expression and, at the same time, national literature fuses within the nation, occupying a significant position among its people. And because national literatures are the carriers of their nations' spirit, they carry what is inside the nation and the state and deal with it. Writers, poets, novelists, thus, narrate this spirit.<sup>27</sup> According to a Serbian expert on Arab literature, Rade Božović, national literature is a literature that deals with themes and morals of the ruling ideology of the nation. When the ideology shifts, the stream within the national literature shifts as well and includes all the pieces that characterize that shift. This argument goes in line with the assumption that literature absorbs various elements of the nation, i.e. the state, and that literature depicts its nation's social, political and cultural spirit.<sup>28</sup>

Yasir Suleiman, professor of Modern Arabic Studies at the University of Cambridge, has, also, dealt with the relation between nation and literature and provided his own views on this matter. Namely, he explains that national identities and national literatures are intertwined in many complex ways and points out that the relation between literature and nation is not unidirectional (criticizing Aldous Huxley who writes that nations are to a very large extent 'invented' by their writers<sup>29</sup>), but he sees it as a reciprocal relation, where nation and literature shape one another. However, Suleiman does not follow the 'reflection' theory of literature, much followed in the Arab world, which assumes that literature represents a 'reflection' of the national character of people. He points out that the reflection theory relies on a naive perspective and is based on stereotypes, thus he considers it outmoded and vague. He, further,

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<sup>26</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 141-145.

<sup>27</sup> Julia M. Wright, "Literature and nationalism," *National developments in literary criticism* (2013): 108-109.

<sup>28</sup> Rade Božović, *Istorija arapske klasične i narodne književnosti* (Belgrade: Utopija, 2013), 7-9.

<sup>29</sup> Yasir Suleiman and Ibrahim Muhawi, *Literature and Nation in the Middle East* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 1.

explains that this perspective prevents the reader from his/her own interpretation as it looks at a text as a closed semantic system.<sup>30</sup> Suleiman's views pose a crucial question on whether literature reflects the national character or it only covers certain issues of the society and addresses personal views of the author. This view makes us question above-mentioned theories that go in line, at least to a certain extent, with the reflection theory. Thus, how can one explain the relation between nation (and state) and literature in a more practical way and, accordingly, in what ways is the nation represented in a certain national literature? Suleiman's ideas will be useful to reflect on when making conclusions about specific literary works in the later chapters.

### 1.2 *Nation, nationalism and state in Arab literatures*

While literature and nation in Europe joined in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the situation in the Middle East, or more precisely in the Arab world, was somehow different. According to Suleiman, the concept of the nation-state is culturally, politically and sociologically fragile in the Arab Middle East. Although this concept had to compete with other, pan-national (*pan-Arabism*) or, even, separate, regional nation-building movements, the development of various national literatures was a sign of cultural independence. In this very 'war' between the nation-state and pan-Arab nationalism, lies the link between the nation, nationalism and literature. Suleiman explains that 'the nation is entrenching itself as a fact of our social and political worlds.'<sup>31</sup> He mentions that this is particularly true of the Middle East, where these multiple national literatures act as symbols or indicators of the nation both regionally and internationally. Here, it was very significant for most of Arab states, including Kuwait, to find various ways to establish themselves as distinct and independent, as the Arab nations were seeking their independences from the colonial empires throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the post-colonial period, it was crucial for every state (nation) to build up its independence and this was carried out, among other ways, by highlighting the nation's distinguishing characteristics and elements, not only in contrast to the Western world, but among each (Arab) state as well. Related to this, Suleiman states that each form of nationalism strived for its authenticity and tried to find its way into the literature. In this context, pan-Arabism, as an ideology and a form of nationalism, lacks political expression in a nation-state and, thus, underlines and highlights culture as an outstanding aspect of the nation. Supporting this statement, Stephen Brockmann points out that culture is the major tool for nations without political boundaries to establish

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<sup>30</sup> Yasir Suleiman and Ibrahim Muhawi, *Literature and Nation in the Middle East* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 2-3.

<sup>31</sup> Yasir Suleiman and Ibrahim Muhawi, *Literature and Nation in the Middle East* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 4.

themselves among others. This goes in line with what was mentioned earlier about emphasizing common Arab origin or Islamic heritage, which can be conducted through literature, in order to distinguish oneself from other nations.<sup>32</sup>

Thomas Mann and Günter Grass, prominent German writers and literates who worked and produced mainly in the twentieth century, made some points about Germany and its national literature that can be compared and applied to the Arab case and the role of literature in the Arab world throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Namely, regarding the issue of two separate German states in the previous century, both writers highlighted the importance of the language and literature for the process of unification of the two states. What Mann and Grass expressed about Germany is true and applicable to pan-Arabism, which views the differences promoted by the Arab nation-states as clear similarities between them. What is also comparable in these two situations, German and Arab, is that, for instance, in the German Democratic Republic, literature served as a ‘surrogate channel’ through which different ideas and views were shared without censorship, due to the lack of public space where these ideas would have been expressed and exchanged among the people. This is especially true of literature in Arab nation-states, where the state itself is generally intolerant of national ideologies that oppose the official one of the state, thus literature, both poetry and prose, became a means for spreading various ideas among the people and served as an open discussion that would spark national and self-consciousness in the society.<sup>33</sup>

Poetry has always represented the central pillar in Arab literature, due to its colossal importance since the pre-Islamic era, hence, leaving prose in the shadow. Pan-Arabism largely benefited from poetry, which was used to reconnect the past with the present, emphasizing the Arabic origin, culture, and heritage. In the period called *nahda* (modern Arab renaissance), in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, literature played a significant, or even a crucial role in the reinforcing the Arab identity, by lauding Arab culture, literature and common Arab origin, emphasizing the significance of returning to the past as a way of reaching a better future.<sup>34</sup> In later decades, the novel, as a new genre in Arab literature and a new means of literary expression, began to serve the same role in a great manner. The Arabic novel, as Wen-chin Ouyang explains it, has aligned

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<sup>32</sup> Yasir Suleiman and Ibrahim Muhawi, *Literature and Nation in the Middle East* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 4-5.

<sup>33</sup> Yasir Suleiman and Ibrahim Muhawi, *Literature and Nation in the Middle East* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 6-7.

<sup>34</sup> “Ibrahim al-Yazigi,” Al-Hakawati, accessed May 6, 2019, [http://al-hakawati.net/en\\_personalities/PersonalityDetails/7413/Ibrahim-alYazigi](http://al-hakawati.net/en_personalities/PersonalityDetails/7413/Ibrahim-alYazigi)

with the (Arab) nation, participating in imagining, building and allegorizing it, due to the coinciding period of the development of the Arabic novel and the nation-state in the Arab world, around the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Ouyang concludes that the Arabic novel, throughout its development, wrote its own (hi)story along with narrating the emergence, modernization and downfall of the Arab nation, in a wider sense, and the Arab nation-states, in particular. Consequently, the novel placed itself at a very outstanding position within Arab literature(s) since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in many Arab states, such as Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, and in the Gulf region, including Kuwait.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, since the Arabic novel coincided with the evolution of the Arab nation, one may suggest that Arabic novels reflect various elements and aspects of the nation more easily than other literary genres, e.g. poetry, and, thus, distribute this reality to a wider audience in a more direct way, especially due to its more realistic and ‘welcoming’ language, again, compared to the sublimity of Arabic poetry. If we take a look at contemporary events in the Arab world, particularly, The Arab Spring, we know that the uprisings did not affect the political landscape only, but it awakened new self-consciousness among people and stimulated a new wave of cultural thought. Hence, it replaced the focus onto the language and literature as channels through which the society would understand the ongoing changes in the region.<sup>36</sup> In chapters 3 and 4, I will seek to investigate whether and in what ways this reality is represented in the Kuwaiti novel and whether it fits within the domain of the Arab world and Arabic novels in general, based on Suleiman’s and Ouyang’s views.

To sum up, we have seen how the concepts of nation, nation-state and nationalism emerged and how their meanings may have changed throughout the centuries. As analyzed above, these concepts have always been directly related to language and various forms of human expressions, most importantly to literature. All the above-mentioned definitions, understandings and views on the relation between the nation and literature suggest that literature has ever played a significant role in the state and within the nation (since the emergence of these concepts), and that literature, as an ever-changing body, embodies all what the nation undergoes over the time. Thus, it grows with the nation and evolves within its conditions, where an author becomes a narrator of its nation who expresses himself/herself through a poem or a novel, engaging in and dealing with various issues concerning any

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<sup>35</sup> Wen-chin Ouyang, *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013): v-66.

<sup>36</sup> Nahrain al-Mousawi, “Literature after the Arab Spring,” Middle East Institute, last updated February 5, 2016, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/literature-after-arab-spring>

individual in that 'community'. These views follow the so-called 'reflection' theory, as Yasir Suleiman refers to it. Regarding my approach on this matter, I will try to mediate between these two perspectives, assuming that literature does represent an image of its nation, in a sense that it addresses state's important issues, directly or indirectly, and it follows lives of its people, their stories and deals with various social aspects of the population. However, at the same time, it is important to pose a question regarding Suleiman's understanding of the term *nation* and what he means by it, thus, it is relevant to determine whether this means that literature reflects the nation as whole or only an aspect of it and whether the *nation* here coincides, at least loosely, with the *state* and *society*. Perhaps it is difficult to answer to these questions since the concept of nation is not strictly defined and the scope of its meanings is not fixed, as analyzed earlier, thus the relation between nation and literature is, also, a subject of debate and can be interpreted in many ways, depending on particular examples that need to be examined and taken into account (such as the state itself, its society, particular authors and their literary works). Finally, even though each nation is different, as already mentioned, it was important to look at the case of Arab literature(s), since Kuwaiti nation and its literature are part of the greater Arab world and went through, saying at least, similar conditions in the nation-state building processes (colonial and post-colonial periods) and other significant historical and social events as other Arab states. Therefore, if one focuses on literature, one can suggest that they all share numerous historical, cultural and social elements, not only the Arabic language. However, in order to understand or analyze a particular author and his/her work and to obtain an image of a particular nation through its literature, it is inevitable to look at a specific case and particular circumstances in the intended state and its nation. More precisely, to look at the very nature of the state, its reality, social and political structure and organization, and certain historical points. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, it is crucial to examine the case of Kuwait, as every state and every nation are a case on its own and cannot be compared to another.

## Chapter 2

### *The State of Kuwait and its Political and Social Reality*

In this chapter, I will analyze the very nature of the Kuwaiti state, its political apparatus and the social structure, in attempt of showing how the Kuwaiti population is divided and heterogenous, furtherly analyzing the political and social hierarchy within the state, to what extent human rights (related to democracy and citizenship) are respected or violated, how the Kuwaiti Government and other national institutions channel their power and, at the same time, spread nationalist ideas. Finally, using all these points, this chapter will show diverse aspects of citizenship in the State of Kuwait, i.e. what it means to be a Kuwaiti national and how these specific political and social structures of the state affect citizens of different backgrounds, i.e. coming from different ethnic groups, or based on their gender, age and religion.

#### *2.0 Democracy, tribalism and kinship ties*

According to the Constitution of Kuwait, “the System of Government in Kuwait shall be democratic, under which sovereignty resides in the people, the source of all powers.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, one can assume that all the citizens have substantial and equal rights and power in making political decisions. However, the rules and the practice are somewhat different. Namely, the Emir’s person is inviolable and immune, and Kuwait and its nation are rather a multi-level hierarchy, with its Emir ruling the state. The ruling family, Al-Sabah dynasty, holds a constitutional protection and a number of informal privileges that exceed those of other, ‘regular’ citizens, whose rights are, in this way, limited.<sup>38</sup> While individuals in the State can achieve their own interests and, nominally, participate in the political life to a certain extent, the ruling family makes major governance decisions. Moreover, members of the family receive monthly stipends and occupy major positions in various academic, public and private sectors. Here, the issue of ‘informal nepotism’ and kinship is imposed. These kinship relations on the political scene of Kuwait continue to be noticeable and active, given the fact that they provide the royal family members with plenty of privileged accesses and resources. These issues of nepotism and kinship in Kuwait lie in the tribal origins of the state itself, i.e. tribal principles

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<sup>37</sup> Kuwaiti Constitution, Article 6, accessed on May 19, 2019.

<https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/kw/kw004en.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Mary Ann Tetreault and Haya al-Mughni, “Gender, Citizenship and Nationalism in Kuwait,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1/2 (1995): 67.

on which the Kuwaiti state and its society were founded, according to Souad M. Al-Sabah, a member of the ruling family.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, hierarchy and inequality in political and social spheres in Kuwait, topics that will be further elaborated later, can be, also, explained by these tribal origins of the nation.

According to Al-Naqeeb, tribalism, as an organizing conception, remained alive in the states of Arabian Peninsula, not only in rural, but in urban areas as well.<sup>40</sup> And although, today, by theory, only significantly small portion of societies in the Middle East can be considered as tribal, still, “the tribe as a referent for social identity and loyalty has persisted.”<sup>41</sup> As the Gulf states were undergoing the state formation process, they went through certain changes, on different levels. It is, surely, known that these states rapidly developed, mainly economically, however, those immaterial (social and cultural) changes were coming about more slowly. For instance, issues concerning various marital values and choices did not change that promptly. Moreover, all the Kuwaiti tribes recognize Al-Sabah family as the ruling family of their state, and respect the legitimacy and authority of the Emir, who is commonly considered as ‘the father of the Kuwaiti people’. Here, the respect of the state ruler by the tribes can be linked to the typical tribal characteristic that emphasizes a grand respect of tribal leaders among the people.<sup>42</sup> In fact, in more traditional and nationalist circles, Kuwaiti children are taught to call the current Emir ‘*baba Jaber*’ (father Jaber) as a symbol of referring to the head of the state as the father of one, united family.<sup>43</sup>

Al-Kandari and Al-Hadben point out that the major issue concerning the Kuwaiti political and parliamentary system is the very role of family in a person’s political life. Furthermore, various economic components and personal ties represent an important factor for a citizen’s opportunity to be a part of the Kuwaiti parliament. The nominee must follow different rules or fulfill specific requirements in order to increase his/her chance to enter the Parliament, e.g. respect issues concerning family authority and tribal loyalty, or possess a certain position in the society. It is notable to point out that these kinship ties, more precisely,

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<sup>39</sup> Souad M. Al-Sabah, *The Foundation of Kuwait* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2014): 66.

<sup>40</sup> Yagoub Y. Al-Kandari and Ibrahim N. Al-Hadben, “Tribalism, Sectarianism, and Democracy in Kuwaiti Culture,” *Digest of Middle East Studies*, vol. 19, issue 2 (Fall 2010): 270-272.

<sup>41</sup> Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 128.

<sup>42</sup> Yagoub Y. Al-Kandari and Ibrahim N. Al-Hadben, “Tribalism, Sectarianism, and Democracy in Kuwaiti Culture,” *Digest of Middle East Studies*, vol. 19, issue 2 (Fall 2010): 272-274.

<sup>43</sup> Mary Ann Tetreault and Haya al-Mughni, “Gender, Citizenship and Nationalism in Kuwait,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1/2 (1995): 71.

the role of personal and social ties, belonging to a certain ethnic and religious group, combined with various economic factors, all lead to the creation of power hierarchy within the state. Those closest to the upper ancestor are more likely to benefit from it, having the opportunity to enjoy higher status and gain a more considerable access to resources and power. These kinship ties or groups are a type of 'hierarchical organized groups', which continue to be politically visible in the political scene of Kuwait, as they provide their members with various advantages.<sup>44</sup> The elections held in 2009 showed that tribal and sectarian elements have not disappeared in modern society and that they are deeply rooted in the Kuwaiti tradition due to the constant need of extremists to maintain their power and control. This, certainly, affects and threatens democratic values in the state. There is a number of recent initiatives that aim to create and adopt educational programs that would undermine these sectarian and tribal distinctions and strengthen national identity. These programs are being created in different spheres, such as within the family, schools, media and other cultural realms where the cultural and individual elements are 'awake'. In this kind of environments, these new programs would reinforce the notions of national unity.<sup>45</sup>

### *2.1 Different forms of citizenship and 'being Kuwaiti'*

In the previous section, it was shown how the issue of tribalism in the political and social organization affects the society and individuals, in terms of democracy and equality; thus, creating the system of hierarchy and emphasizing the differences among citizens. This tribal element enables and strengthens the imposed authority and political limitations and, most importantly, it emphasizes the differences (ethnic, religious, economic, familial...) within the nation. In addition, the Kuwaiti constitution, also, actively restricts certain groups on different levels, which affects the realm of human rights. Therefore, if citizens are not treated equally, different forms and levels of citizenship are created and, subsequently, individuals have different understandings of belonging to one, 'united' nation.

According to Rania Al-Nakib, the concepts of citizenship, nationalism, human rights and democracy are all directly related to one another. Citizenship is defined by some scholars as a status, feeling and practice. However, generally, and especially in Kuwait, the first does not necessarily provide the latter two. In fact, there are tensions around these notions within

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<sup>44</sup> Scott Weiner, "Enduring Authority: Kinship, State Formation, and Source Distribution in the Arab Gulf" (PhD diss., George Washington University, 2016), 1-156.

<sup>45</sup> Yagoub Y. Al-Kandari and Ibrahim N. Al-Hadben, "Tribalism, Sectarianism, and Democracy in Kuwaiti Culture," *Digest of Middle East Studies*, vol. 19, issue 2 (Fall 2010): 278-282.

the concept of citizenship. In general, the concept of citizenship and its status represent a point of struggle in all democracies, since citizenship is a political and legal subject, notably when it comes to the context of migration, which is absolutely true in the case of Kuwait.<sup>46</sup>

In Kuwait, citizenship as a status is based on three elements and these are nationality, gender and age. Women, children, naturalized citizens, expatriates and *bidūn* population are all denied certain rights, freedoms and services. As we saw earlier, according to the Constitution, the Government system shall be democratic, aiming to provide all the citizens equality and freedom. However, the Constitution, at the same time, issues various restrictions based on the three above-mentioned elements, creating, to say at least, a complicated situation regarding the citizenship status in Kuwait. The interplay between the Constitution and the legal system is another problem here. Even though the Constitution guarantees numerous rights and freedoms to its citizens, there are laws, on the other hand, that can restrict these rights. There are many distinctions within the category of citizenship, between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis, males and females, Sunni and Shiite etc. For instance, a Kuwaiti man who is married to a non-Kuwaiti woman can give his citizenship to his wife and children. Also, he is eligible for various services, such as government housing and a social allowance for his children. By contrast, a Kuwaiti woman married to a non-Kuwaiti man cannot pass her citizenship to her husband and children. Moreover, she is not eligible for government housing, and her and her family have restricted political, civil and social rights (e.g. limited access to different social services).<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, in Kuwait, only male nationals are considered as full participants of the civil society. Male foreigners and *bidūns* face many political and economic restrictions and limitations, based on the interpretation that they ‘belong’ to another society or nation, thus, they are not members of Kuwait’s nation and civil society. Clearly, the Government here propagates nationalism through various laws and constitutional restrictions. On the other hand, this interpretation cannot be applied to the case of Kuwaiti women, since they are not included as participants in the civil society even though they have the Kuwaiti background and are full citizens by the law and Constitution. Therefore, a Kuwaiti woman is not an autonomous citizen; she is a Kuwaiti national by having her Kuwaiti father, but she can easily lose her status and certain rights as a Kuwaiti, if she, for instance, marries a non-Kuwaiti man. Moreover, only in 2005 did Kuwaiti women gain the right to vote and run for office. Some theoreticians explain

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<sup>46</sup> Rania Al-Nakib, “Citizenship, nationalism, human rights and democracy: a tangling of terms in the Kuwaiti curriculum,” *Educational Research*, vol. 53, no. 2 (June 2011): 165-167.

<sup>47</sup> Rania Al-Nakib, “Citizenship, nationalism, human rights and democracy: a tangling of terms in the Kuwaiti curriculum,” *Educational Research*, vol. 53, no. 2 (June 2011): 165-167.

this lack of human and civil rights for women as the result of tradition, which, subsequently, became a synonym for religion. It is more likely that it is the selfishness of those who are on the top of the state and already hold the monopoly of social, political and economic power that ‘controls’ the Kuwaiti women and the whole civil society, making them subjected and preventing them from many rights and freedoms.<sup>48</sup>

Children are, also, negatively affected by certain constitutional restrictions and laws. For example, it is not possible for children to obtain the country’s legal citizenship documents (*jinsiyya*), even though they are, by the law, regular citizens and have the right to hold the Kuwaiti passport. Thus, they are, as Osler and Starkey call it, ‘citizens-in-waiting’. Research workshops conducted among 10, 11 and 12 grade students in Kuwait in 2009 and 2010, where students were questioned about their knowledge and feelings about democracy, citizenship and human rights, showed that Kuwaiti students generally do not have much knowledge about their own rights and that they do not feel equally engaged in the society; therefore, ‘no *jinsiyya*, no voice, no agency’.<sup>49</sup>

However, the biggest disparity regarding the citizenship status in Kuwait is between Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti nationals. Citizens with Kuwaiti background are favored in many areas, where, by contrast, non-Kuwaiti citizens lack some fundamental social and political rights. As the result of the development of the oil economy in Kuwait and its general economic prosperity, Kuwaitis became a minority in their own country, being outnumbered by a large non-Kuwaiti population that forms the country’s labor force. According to the latest census held in 1985 by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Planning, Kuwaitis represent 27.7 % of the population. Even though the number of migrants and naturalized citizens exceeds the number of the national population, the legal and welfare systems favor the latter. This can be seen, for example, in the wage differences which go in favor of Kuwaitis. Thus, foreign workers represent a large majority of the private sectors since they are cheaper to employ. As a result, the Government and state agencies are aiming to increase the number of employed Kuwaiti nationals by designing and initiating different, rather ambitious, ‘*Kuwaitization*’ programs.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Mary Ann Tetreault and Haya al-Mughni, “Gender, Citizenship and Nationalism in Kuwait,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1/2 (1995): 74-77.

<sup>49</sup> Rania Al-Nakib, “Citizenship, nationalism, human rights and democracy: a tangling of terms in the Kuwaiti curriculum,” *Educational Research*, vol. 53, no. 2 (June 2011): 167-176.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Ann Tetreault and Haya al-Mughni, “Gender, Citizenship and Nationalism in Kuwait,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1/2 (1995): 68.

Those who moved to Kuwait after 1945 faced many obstacles towards getting the nationality and had to fulfill various prerequisites, such as residing in Kuwait for at least twenty years, being fluent in Arabic, being economically stable, being Muslim, among others (these prerequisites needed to be fulfilled only in order to apply). The law limited the number of naturalized citizens to fifty per year and even when they obtained the nationality, they were not allowed to vote or run for office. In later years, the law and some points regarding the application for citizenship loosened to a certain extent. What remained as the rule up until today is that, according to the law, only citizens with Kuwaiti origin are eligible for positions in the National Assembly.<sup>51</sup> On April 7, 2019, according to *Kuwait Times*, the National Assembly passed a draft law to the government calling it to grant Kuwaiti citizenship up to four thousand people during the current year (2019). In Kuwait, the Assembly has been drafting similar laws every year for over a decade to help the government in finding a solution in the ever-going problem of 120,000 stateless people. Meanwhile, MP Bader Al-Mulla stated that they filled a proposal for organizing a special committee that would deal with issues of citizenship, explaining that there is a need to limit granting citizenship in order to stop what he calls ‘fooling around with the Kuwaiti society’s social fabric’ by granting the nationality to people who do not fully deserve it. Moreover, it is stated in the article that the lawmakers seek to set more restrictions on granting citizenship to Kuwaiti citizens’ wives, their children and bidūns.<sup>52</sup>

As the country saw a high rate of development throughout the second half of the twentieth century, an increasing number of people sought the Kuwaiti nationality. Mid-1980s saw more rigid and strict restrictions for both refugees and those seeking naturalisation. This contributed to emergence of a distinct ‘layer’ of the population – bidūns (from the Arabic بدون, meaning ‘without’). They do not have official state documents, but only special ‘passports’ which, under specific circumstances, allow them to exit and re-enter the country. By the definition, bidūns are the state’s subject, but not its citizens, who have no political rights and limited access to social services.<sup>53</sup> According to the latest government estimations, there were around 88,000 stateless people in the country, while Human Rights Watch estimated the bidūn population at more than 100,000 in 2018. The process of providing citizenship to bidūn people is not simple and, more importantly, it is not transparent to the bidūn population itself, due to

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<sup>51</sup> Mary Ann Tetreault and Haya al-Mughni, “Gender, Citizenship and Nationalism in Kuwait,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1/2 (1995): 68-69.

<sup>52</sup> B. Izzak and A. Saleh, “Panel approves giving citizenship to 4,000 people,” *Kuwait Times*, April 8, 2019, <https://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/panel-approves-giving-citizenship-to-4000-people/>

<sup>53</sup> Mary Ann Tetreault and Haya al-Mughni, “Gender, Citizenship and Nationalism in Kuwait,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1/2 (1995): 69.

the lack of authority by the judicial system (the Government holds the authority), a big number of bidūns in the state and the bureaucratic organization of the state's institutions, which only prolong these processes. Bidūns are, in overall, facing various difficulties and troubles during these long processes in attempting to obtain the Kuwaiti nationality. For instance, they are obliged to take DNA tests in order to prove their Kuwaiti origin, they face discrimination from the Kuwaiti government which refuses to grant stateless people some fundamental rights and services, e.g. education, employment, health care etc. As a result, many bidūns are forced to take other nationalities, such as Saudi, Syrian, Iraqi etc. According to some sources, as of March 2019 more than 12,000 bidūns declared other nationalities.<sup>54</sup>

As it was shown and explained in this section, the Constitution, the legal system and the Government in Kuwait all highlight the differences among the citizens and residents in Kuwait, with various regulations, restrictions and laws that strongly favour the Kuwaiti nationals, i.e. those of Kuwaiti background. This way, different forms of citizenship are created; citizens of diverse ethnic, familial and religious backgrounds, with different economic and social statuses, develop their own feelings of belonging to the nation, their own national identity, according to the way they are treated. Therefore, there are many levels of 'being a Kuwaiti'. The authorities actively participate in the creating of 'us' and 'them' discourse, that only makes its citizens grow apart from each other even more. More importantly, it slows down the process of democratic development in many areas and threatens the respect of human rights of the state's population. It, also, contradicts the state's goals of creating a democratic environment and the unity within the nation.<sup>55</sup>

## 2.2 *The Government, nationalism and human rights*

Related to what was discussed in the previous section, it is argued that the Government reinforces 'patriotism, state-centered nationalism and feelings of loyalty to the state' by distributing social services to Kuwaitis and restricting them to non-Kuwaitis. The Kuwaiti welfare system, thus, helps to preserve the sharp borderlines between those of Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti origin, and between citizens and foreigners, thus, creating a specific superior-inferior relation in the society, which is a significant element of Kuwaiti national identity. Some believe that the Government 'has used' the non-Kuwaiti population as a means for trying to

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<sup>54</sup> "Govt policies limited foreigners' access to basic services," Kuwait Times, March 14, 2019, <https://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/govt-policies-limited-foreigners-access-to-basic-services/>

<sup>55</sup> Rania Al-Nakib, "Citizenship, nationalism, human rights and democracy: a tangling of terms in the Kuwaiti curriculum," *Educational Research*, vol. 53, no. 2 (June 2011): 168.

justify its regime and secure its power.<sup>56</sup> According to the report released by the US Department of State, an existing anti-expatriate-feeling environment in Kuwait led the Government to pass numerous policies that made the health care and education more expensive for foreign workers compared to citizens. The report, furtherly, explains that the immediate result of this policy was the withdrawal of many foreign workers and their families from hospitals due to inability to pay the new costs.<sup>57</sup>

The state has been struggling to provide a sense of united national identity due to its ongoing and dynamic propagating of the concept of *'al-usra al-wahīda'* (Ar. الأسرة الوحيدة, 'one, united family'). The concept is based on the traditional image of Kuwaiti family, whose members lived closely together with a centralized patriarch on top of the family, thus it resembles the state with its ruler at the head. Halim Barakat points out that there is a similarity between the images of the father in the family and God in Islam. Related to this, some see the circular patterns of patriarchy in religion, society, family and state as supporting factors in the continuation of authoritarianism in the Arab world. Islam and various Islamist movements started to play an increasing role in the Government's politics with years. It was pressured to identify and relate itself more closely with Islam and Islamist reformers for a couple of reasons. One of the most prominent reasons was that the popular devotion to Islamic values and principles suited the regime in a great manner. The Islamists mainly bolster the concepts of *intimā'* (Ar. انتماء, '(cultural) belonging'), discipline, traditional family values and submissiveness to the political authority. All these concepts strengthen authoritarianism and patriarchal hierarchy in the state. Moreover, several demands made by Islamist reformers were related to restricting women's rights and freedoms (e.g. limited work choices or compulsory veiling).<sup>58</sup>

The education system is another field affected by the authoritarian policies of the Government. Namely, according to the Government, the education is supposed to be democracy oriented. However, the system continues to promote nationalism and patriotism, along with perpetuating the non-Kuwaiti category. In addition, it is religiously homogenous, with Islamic discourse dictating the program and, thus, deleting the line between religious and

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<sup>56</sup> Mary Ann Tetreault and Haya al-Mughni, "Gender, Citizenship and Nationalism in Kuwait," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1/2 (1995): 71.

<sup>57</sup> "Govt policies limited foreigners' access to basic services," Kuwait Times, March 14, 2019, <https://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/govt-policies-limited-foreigners-access-to-basic-services/>

<sup>58</sup> Mary Ann Tetreault and Haya al-Mughni, "Gender, Citizenship and Nationalism in Kuwait," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1/2 (1995): 71-72.

secular within the education. The citizenship status influences the education system since only 1/3 of the population has free access to public schools. The government schools are homogenous and are segregated by several lines: Sunni/Shiite, *hadhar*/Bedouin etc. Hence, the Government fails to promote diversity and inclusion and, thus, highlights the above-mentioned ‘us and them discourse’.<sup>59</sup> Another area where the Government imposes its authority and power is the role of civil society in the state. Although there is an increasing number of official civil society organizations (NGOs, labor associations, scientific bodies...) in Kuwait in recent years, their role within the society and the state is greatly limited. Here, the Government introduces laws which restrict organizations’ activities and occasionally carries out political harassment of the NGOs’ members. This leads to an assumption that the state fears of the possible impact of these organizations on the society, which would, subsequently, mean the weakening of the (political) role of the ruling family. Kuwait is, evidently, facing struggles in its development process and, thus, numerous efforts must be made, and solutions must be found in order to change this situation.<sup>60</sup>

In this atmosphere, with the Government imposing authority, the constitution imposing numerous restrictions to non-Kuwaiti people, women, stateless people, children, etc., the lawmakers passing different laws that restrict certain, allegedly, guaranteed rights, many basic human rights are being violated. According to the US Department of State’s Report on Human Rights in Kuwait for 2017, many human rights indeed have been violated. Even though women were granted the right to vote in 2005, still they face many barriers to political participation. The Report states that discrimination against noncitizens and *bidūns* occurred on many levels of the daily life, such as education, health care, housing and employment, among others. For instance, *bidūn* people faced problems with traveling. Namely, the Government restricted them from foreign travel by not issuing travel documents, so-called ‘Article 17’ passports that allow *bidūns* to travel abroad. Other restrictions relate to citizenship, such as depriving non-Muslims from acquiring Kuwaiti citizenship.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Rania Al-Nakib, “Citizenship, nationalism, human rights and democracy: a tangling of terms in the Kuwaiti curriculum,” *Educational Research*, vol. 53, no. 2 (June 2011): 168-169.

<sup>60</sup> Ali Z. Al-Zuabi, “Civil Society in Kuwait: Challenges and Solutions,” *African and Asian Studies* 11 (2012): 350-367.

<sup>61</sup> US Department of State’s Report on Human Rights Practices in Kuwait for 2017 – Part I, II, *Kuwait Times*, April 22, 23, 24, 2018, <https://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/us-department-of-states-report-on-human-rights-practices-in-kuwait-for-2017-part-i/>  
<https://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/us-department-of-states-report-on-human-rights-practices-in-kuwait-for-2017-part-ii/>

Freedom of expression is largely limited. Namely, it is stated that many people were convicted for expressing their opinions, mainly on social media. According to the source, the Government blocks any Internet content related to LGBT+ topics or material critical of Islam. The Press and Publications Law sets a series of topics that are banned for publication and discussion, which include religion (particularly Islam), criticizing the Emir, compromising classified information, etc. The law authorizes jail terms for anyone who ‘defames’ or ‘insults’ Islam. In fact, any Muslim citizen or resident can file charges against a person that, according to the complainant, has defamed Islam. Moreover, the law, also, allows any citizen to file criminal charges against someone who is believed to have insulted the ruling family or have abused public morals. Related to this, the law introduces penalties to those who send ‘immoral’ messages. Press and media freedom are affected to a great extent as well. For instance, reports on human rights in Kuwait state that a person who uses any means, including media, to undermine the state may face large fines or a jail term up to ten years. An interesting fact, as well, is that the Ministry of Information received around nine thousand books to review as of October 2017 up until April 2018; 951 of these books were banned based on their content ‘violating religious, political and public moral guidelines’. In some cases, the authors whose books were banned for publishing had to face various trials and to go through the appeals process in order to obtain permission to publish their works.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, the Report emphasizes its concern about women’s status in the society, mentioning that they often face different kinds of discrimination, and verbal and physical harassment. The law restricts women in terms of judicial proceedings, marriage, freedom of movement, children, inheritance. For example, in Sharia courts, which deal with personal matters, such as family and marriage, the testimony of one man equals that of two women. As already mentioned, Kuwaiti Family Law Code forbids marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man, as well as it does not allow women to pass their citizenship to their non-citizen husbands or children. In addition, gender partition is further strengthened by the law which requires segregation by gender in schools and universities, although this is not always respected.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> US Department of State’s Report on Human Rights Practices in Kuwait for 2017 – Part II, *Kuwait Times*, April 22, 23, 24, 2018, <https://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/us-department-of-states-report-on-human-rights-practices-in-kuwait-for-2017-part-ii/>

<sup>63</sup> US Department of State’s Report on Human Rights Practices in Kuwait for 2017 – Part III, *Kuwait Times*, April 22, 23, 24, 2018, <https://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/us-department-of-states-report-on-human-rights-practices-in-kuwait-for-2017-part-iii/>

With these facts, one can easily see that the State of Kuwait still faces many challenges towards the full development, on different levels. Deeply rooted tribal and kinship ties are still very salient in the state. Issues around the citizenship status and different laws that restrict rights and freedoms of non-Kuwaitis, stateless people and foreigners do not seem to be resolved anytime soon. Instead, '*us*' and '*them*' discourse is being strengthened by various state policies and laws, which only make the differences among citizens even larger. The Constitution only nominally grants freedom and equality to every citizen, while the practice, as presented in this chapter, is much different from what is 'on the paper'. The Government, even though it states it promotes democracy and equality, contradicts its own statements and promotes these social problems with its political system, its programs and imposed authority, creating deep fractions within the society, on gender, ethnical and religious levels, violating its citizens' fundamental human rights and moving away from creating one united nation, that should celebrate diversity and inclusion.

## Chapter 3

### *Authority, Oppression and Lack of Freedom: Representation in the Kuwaiti Novel*

The following chapter will try to reveal whether and how the issues analyzed in the previous chapter are mentioned and discussed in the Kuwaiti novel, i.e. how these state elements penetrate the Kuwaiti literature and in what ways they are felt and displayed by Kuwaiti authors. As mentioned in the introduction, the paper will study two novels from two different Kuwaiti authors – *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* by Laila al-Othman (2000) and *The Bamboo Stalk* by Saud Alsanousi (2012). Taking into account that the novels were written within a span of around twelve years, this insight seeks to unveil different images of the society and the state, and tell, on the one hand, what has changed in the period between the years of these two publications and, on the other, what has remained the same throughout this course of time. Moreover, issues and topics that will be examined in these two novels represent issues characteristic of Kuwait and may prove or disprove information and points made in the previous chapter regarding these very issues. These selected issues will be explored through both novels, where one topic may be more transparent in one novel and another topic more visible in the second one.

One of the issues standing out in Kuwait surely is imposed authority. As a matter of fact, imposed authority, whether religious or political, is not an unusual phenomenon in many other states of the Arab world and the Middle East, where these different forms of authorities govern and dictate numerous spheres of everyday life.<sup>64</sup> The issue of hegemonic authority in Kuwait and other significant issues that are brought with it, such as lack of freedom on many levels, were examined in the previous chapter. Laila al-Othman's *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* could give us a substantial insight into the problems of authority in the state and the lack of freedom of expression (and other violated human rights cause by this political regime), as she reveals what may occur to one who speaks their mind or to an author who openly expresses themselves in a literary work and writes about various topics that may be 'explicit'

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<sup>64</sup> Darko Tanasković, *Islam i mi* (Belgrade: Partenon, 2000), 8.

or 'controversial' according to the state. Alsanousi's *The Bamboo Stalk*, also, tackles the issues of authority and freedom to a certain extent, among other issues.

In her novel, as the title reveals by itself, Laila al-Othman reflects on several events from her life that follow the accusations and the author's trial as a consequence of previously publishing two books that were considered blasphemous and immoral, where she, allegedly, insulted Islam and threatened the public morality. She describes these and other relevant events and raises several notable questions on social and political conditions in Kuwait. The state, society, homeland and freedom are just few of the concepts that pervade Al-Othman's novel, as she delivers a realistic portrayal of the authority in Kuwait and of the social conditions in the state, depicting them through her personal, candid experiences and offering her own feelings, views and thoughts on the present and the future of Kuwait.

Laila al-Othman recalls a day in 1996 when she received a phone call from the police, being asked to show up at the Palace of Justice to speak with the general deputy. After consulting with her son Ammar, she found out that there had been an appeal against her related to press delicts. On a Monday morning, Laila appeared at the Palace of Justice, accompanied by her son, worried and impatient, not knowing what to expect. A man with initials S. J. (ص.ج.) explained the situation; he had al-Othman's two books with himself – *The Departure (al-Raḥīl)* and *The Eyes Come in the Night (Fī al-layl ta'ī al-'uyūn)*, saying that four people have submitted an appeal against the writer and the reason were these two works of hers. He, also, added that another author, Al-Othman's colleague, Alia Shuaib was a subject of the same appeal. Namely, the reason of the appeal was the questionable and problematic content of the books, more precisely, it was stated by the complainants that the books contain 'phrases that conflict the law and contradict with the public decency' (<sup>65</sup>عبارات مخالفة لقانون. خادشة للحياء العام'). Moreover, an interesting fact is that the four complainants belonged to the Islamic streams and that all of them were men. As mentioned in the introduction, Islamist-oriented theoreticians and scholars have always criticized some of al-Othman's statements and, as we see now, her books as well; and, on the other side, al-Othman has never hidden her negative stances toward Islamists, as she openly criticizes them and their influence in all over the Arab world. One can suggest from this that religious authority is very much present and powerful in Kuwait and that

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<sup>65</sup> Laila al-Othman, *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* (Damascus: Al-Mada Publishing Company, 2000), 34.

Islamic streams manage to maintain a substantial influence within various spheres in the State.<sup>66</sup>

It is necessary, here, to focus on what is essentially meant by ‘conflicting and contradicting with the law and the public decency’ according to these four ‘tradition-oriented’ complainants. Namely, in the investigation report it is stated that Al-Othman’s short story collections contain elements that encourage and propagate the practice of prostitution or debauchery (‘ممارسة الرذيلة’). Moreover, they, allegedly, contain sexual phrases in an explicit form. This is, they explain, incompatible with Islamic law (*Sharia* law/Ar. الشريعة الإسلامية) and the State’s legal and social systems. The complainants demanded for the appeal’s setting in motion and called for censorship of the books. When asked to explain what, in particular, is ‘incompatible’ in these short story collections and to give concrete examples, they responded accordingly and mentioned following points. Namely, in her book *The Eyes Come in the Night*, they highlighted two stories, of which one of them alludes to so-called ‘distortion of the image of mother’, where a woman herself discusses ‘committing an adultery’ and expresses her content with her young son practicing ‘perverse or deviated acts’ abroad. While the second story is, completely, about women involved in lesbian acts. As for the second problematic book, *The Departure*, the complainants pointed out to stories with ‘disgraceful’ phrases and topics about homosexual deeds. In addition, they all had the same position toward the author’s purpose of writing those stories, stating that Al-Othman’s aim was to weaken the state’s values and its social customs. She tends to promote what is, considered to be, an ‘irregular sexual practice’ and what violates general morality and modesty. Laila al-Othman responded to these accusations by clarifying that her aim was not to spread aforementioned ideas and to conflict the law and pointed out that she had obtained an approval from the Ministry of Information for publishing these books, and even confirmation from various Islamic scholars and academics that what she had written was not profaning Islam or tradition by any means. Related to this, al-Othman added that she believed she was a good Muslim and that she truly loved her country. She explained that the content of these stories was the society and that ‘a creative human being has the right to write what serves the subject’.<sup>67</sup> Her style, which was called ‘direct’ and ‘daring’ in the least, simply goes in line with the topics she covers and the problematic phrases

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<sup>66</sup> Laila al-Othman, *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* (Damascus: Al-Mada Publishing Company, 2000), 21-34.

<sup>67</sup> Laila al-Othman, *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* (Damascus: Al-Mada Publishing Company, 2000), 38.

she used in the books are merely a segment of the whole context, thus, they cannot be extracted from it and analyzed solely.<sup>68</sup>

Here, it is very important to identify and to emphasize the real purpose of these books and the author's aim of writing them. During the hearing session, Laila al-Othman argued that the goal was to serve the country by tackling and dealing with the leading social issues in the state. Moreover, Laila added that the Kuwaiti society is like every other Arab society, with its virtues and flaws, and that, in this case, she focused, to a certain extent, on the negative sides of the society because, by highlighting them, she intended to find and develop solutions for these issues. She continued by explaining that the topics she covered in these two books, such as various sexual practices and adultery, are part of every society in the world and the fact that she addressed them in her works does not mean she propagates or supports them, as it is stated in the appeal, neither that she degrades Kuwaiti tradition and customs. Al-Othman insisted on the fact that the two books do not contain any content that conflicts with the law and that 'we live in a democratic country that allows us to write and express our opinion' (نحن نعيش في بلد 'ديمقراطي يسمح لنا بالكتابة والتعبير عن الرأي'). On the other hand, if an author neglects or does not write about a certain issue in the society, it does not mean that the issue does not exist.<sup>69</sup>

Therefore, one can come to a conclusion that there is a severe violation of freedom of expression, press and speech, not only in literature, but in other spheres of public life in the country, even though freedom in any form shall be guaranteed by the Constitution, as we could see in Chapter 2. In March 2018, there were several protests held by Kuwaiti activists due to the rise of government-sponsored book-censorship in the country. The reasons for banning books differed, including what some in the government consider 'indecent exposure', especially when images are included (for instance, a Disney book *The Little Mermaid* was banned because it displayed the mermaid in a bikini), or because of an 'inappropriate content', such as a scene where a wife sees her husband without clothes. Activists and the society, in general, have been expressing their outrage and frustration on the social media about violation of freedoms in the country. Fatima Matar, a law professor at the Kuwait University, states that there are two major factors that contribute to decrease of freedoms in Kuwait. The first is Publication law no. 3, which put various restrictions on what can and cannot be written about and published in Kuwait. The second factor is the increasing political power of Islamists,

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<sup>68</sup> Laila al-Othman, *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* (Damascus: Al-Mada Publishing Company, 2000), 35-39.

<sup>69</sup> Laila al-Othman, *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* (Damascus: Al-Mada Publishing Company, 2000), 39-40.

according to whom art and books are the factors blamed for the rise of number of atheists in Kuwait and for ‘corrupting the youth and poisoning morals’. Matar adds that the young activists continue their struggle not only against the banning of books, but against any kind of violation of freedoms as well.<sup>70</sup>

When it comes to hegemony and authority, one might have to consider Antonio Gramsci’s theories and ideas on this topic as they may help the reader to better comprehend the matter. Gramsci saw hegemony as a form of social domination executed not by the state directly, but by various social groups or classes through state institutions.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, Gramsci’s concept of the *subaltern* (subordinate groups) can be applied to the case that is discussed here. He explains that the theory on domination and power inequality in the state includes not only hegemony based on class, but, also, based on gender, race, religion etc. This hegemony is conducted depending on a person’s position vis-à-vis the state and the masses.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, if one considers the very example that is presented in *The Trial* and compare the two authors analyzed in this paper, one may prove the presence of hegemonic authority and social hierarchy in Kuwait. On the one side, we have Laila al-Othman, who was accused and sentenced to prison because of what she had written in her books and, in addition, six of her books were banned in Kuwait; while on the other side, there is Saud Alsanousi, whose publications were featured in several newspapers in Kuwait, including the official government newspapers, *Al-Watan*, and who works at a state cultural center. Based on these facts, one might suggest that these two Kuwaiti writers belong to different classes or come from different positions within the nation. Perhaps, here, we can speak of gender-based hegemony and discrimination, but what is clear from al-Othman’s case is that she confronted ‘the state’ firstly by explicitly expressing her mind and openly discussing topics such as sex, adultery and homosexuality in the two problematic short story collections, and, secondly, by writing an autobiographical novel about her experience with prosecutions and trials due to the aforementioned issues. The authorities simply concluded that al-Othman’s writings and actions were against the law, thus, unilaterally deciding what is acceptable and ‘normal’ and what is outside of that imagined frame. In his theory, Gramsci explained that the ruling class can manipulate the system of values and mores of a society, in an attempt of presenting their views

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<sup>70</sup> Terrance J. Mintner, “The Politics Behind Kuwait’s Rising Book Censorship,” accessed June 15, 2019, <https://themedialine.org/news/the-politics-behind-kuwait-rising-book-censorship/>

<sup>71</sup> William I. Robinson, “Gramsci and Globalisation: From Nation-State to Transnational Hegemony,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, vol. 8, no. 4 (December 2005): 561-564.

<sup>72</sup> Alessandro Olsaretti, “Croce, Philosophy and Intellectuals: Three Aspects of Gramsci’s Theory of Hegemony,” *Critical Sociology*, vol. 42 (2016): 340-342.

as appropriate and legitimate. Hence, Laila al-Othman did not respect this imposed system of values and was, consequently, victim of hegemonic authority in her country. She is, then, placed into the subaltern category, which, according to Gramsci, marks oppressed people who struggle against the hegemony in the state.<sup>73</sup> In addition, according to Gayatri Spivak, being a subaltern as a woman is even more difficult, mentioning that women are ‘even more deeply in shadow...’.<sup>74</sup> Based on the information from Chapter 2 on women’s position in the state and society, we can, surely, consider gender issue as a possible factor for al-Othman’s status and her difficulties.

The concepts of hegemony, authority and, most notably, the subaltern are present in Saud Alsanousi’s *The Bamboo Stalk* as well. The novel examines issues of citizenship and different identities in Kuwait (which will be more discussed in the following chapter), narrating a story of a young boy José, who is of a mixed descent (Kuwaiti-Filipino), and his struggle to find his own identity. The term *subaltern* describes the lower social classes, ‘of inferior rank’, and other (often referred to as *The Other*) social groups placed to the margins of the society. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, a Portuguese sociologist, went in line with Gramsci’s ideas and explained that these subaltern classes struggle against hegemony and resist various types of discrimination, dispossession and exclusion.<sup>75</sup> José can be seen as a subaltern, trying to fight for his place within the nation and seeking acceptance from higher classes. Here, we have an example of what was proposed and analyzed earlier about differences among citizens in Kuwait. Nationals that are ‘100 %’ Kuwaiti, i.e. of both parents of Kuwaiti origin, look at those who are not ‘pure’ Kuwaitis in a different and discriminatory manner, next to the fact that they face various restrictions and limitations according to the constitution. When José first got in touch with Kuwaitis, which was in the Philippines, he realized that nice things he had heard from his mother about Kuwait were not too easy to believe in. Namely, he met five Kuwaiti young men at a beach and when he told them he was Kuwaiti, they burst into laughter. José was surprised, he felt hurt and wanted to convince them to believe in what he was saying, but, finally, one of the young men pointed out that José was right, he was Kuwaiti, but ‘Made in Philippines’.<sup>76</sup> Alsanousi, here, manages to show the reader José’s inner thoughts and a real

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<sup>73</sup> Dylan J. Riley, “Hegemony, Democracy, and Passive Revolution in Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*,” *California Italian Studies*, vol. 2, issue 2 (2011): 7-11.

<sup>74</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988): 28.

<sup>75</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Law and Globalization from Below* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 310.

<sup>76</sup> Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk* (سائق البامبو) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2018), 155-159.

disappointment through a monologue in his head, realizing that he cannot convince them that he, actually, is Kuwaiti, thus leaving them as they continued to laugh heavily (‘واصلوا ضحكهم’) <sup>77</sup>.<sup>77</sup>

Yet another aspect of the hegemony and subaltern categories discussed in Kuwaiti novels are stateless people (*bidūns*). The issue of *bidūns* will be more covered in Chapter 4, however, it is significant to mention this matter when it comes to social hierarchy and the concept of subaltern. *Bidūns* are at the bottom of Kuwaiti society, at its furthest margins. Having been acquainted with this specific social category, in José’s eyes, Kuwaiti society was a network of different social layers or categories, where each category seeks another, lower category to ‘climb its shoulders’ and feel superior in relation to it. This way, being on top of an inferior social category, the superior one releases the pressure caused by another, superior category that is standing on its shoulders. Therefore, we have a complex social order, as if it was a battlefield, where each participant searches for their own ‘victim’, in an attempt of proving their status. In this battlefield, José was trying to find himself. He looked at his feet and could not see anything but the ground beneath them. He felt the pressure on his shoulders and realized that this very pressure led him to his place among people in his supposed homeland. In the moments of thinking about this, he noticed his turtle next to him. A deeply strange idea came to his mind; however, he feared that the turtle’s shell would smash if he did what he had imagined.<sup>78</sup> As G. Spivak explains in her essay, the subaltern cannot speak against the dominant categories and there are no ways that these marginalized groups can voice their resistance, thus they lead battles inside as they seek alternative ways to show this resistance.<sup>79</sup>

One of the most prominent motifs in al-Othman’s and Alsanousi’s novels is the issue of freedom; freedom of expression, freedom for women, freedom of movement, freedom of loving the homeland in one’s own way. Laila al-Othman in her novel addresses a severe issue of lack of freedom in Kuwait, not only for authors, but for anyone who steps outside of the frame, who creates and speaks from their mind. As she explains: ‘من العقل تبدأ حرية الإنسان.’, meaning ‘A man’s freedom begins from his mind’. Clearly, there is no freedom if one cannot openly express oneself and if one cannot share diverse ideas and thoughts; ultimately, there is no freedom if there is fear. Moreover, both *The Trial* and *The Bamboo Stalk* address the issue

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<sup>77</sup> Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk* (ساق البامبو) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2018), 159.

<sup>78</sup> Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk* (ساق البامبو) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2018), 278-279.

<sup>79</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988): 24-28.

of restriction on freedom of movement; Laila al-Othman was banned from traveling because of her trial sessions and investigation processes, where she was once prevented from taking a flight to Beirut and was forced to stay in the country.<sup>80</sup> Saud Alsanousi, in his novel, addresses the lack of freedom of movement for bidūn people, who are faced with rejections on obtaining special travel documents which allow them to leave the country. Namely, José's friend in Kuwait, Ghassan, was a bidūn and, when explaining what it means to be a *bidūn*, admitted, with lament, that he could not travel 'because he was not Kuwaiti' ('...لست أستطيع السفر. فأنا لست... 'كويتيا...').<sup>81</sup> These are just some of the two books' examples where basic human rights, mainly freedom of expression and movement, were violated, caused by the imposed hegemonic authority in the state. Generally, both novels studied in this paper warn, through distinct central topics and with different examples, about a severe violation of human rights in Kuwait, that, as we were able to see, affect various social categories in the state.

Laila al-Othman was sentenced to two months of prison, which was, subsequently, reduced to a fine and a mandatory confiscation of the two problematic short story collections.<sup>82</sup> In *The Trial*, al-Othman shows how she was accused of spreading and promoting debauchery and immorality, only because she was studying and writing about different social issues in her country, that were in conflict with traditional and conservative minds, mainly for members of various Islamist streams. As she explains, her crime was writing, and her instrument was writing as well. In the two contemporary Kuwaiti novels analyzed here, the state and one of its main issues were very well displayed. Al-Othman and Alsanousi managed to show the state and certain conditions in it, which coincide with what was analyzed in Chapter 2 about Kuwait's social and political organization, its conditions and reality, but most notably the hegemonic authority that affects citizens on various levels. The freedom of expression (among other kinds of freedoms), even though guaranteed by the constitution, is not provided in practice. The authority imposes oppression and, hence, creates a 'home for terror', as al-Othman calls it. Throughout the turmoil that she had to go through, Laila al-Othman realized that she was not only defending herself and her work, she was defending and fighting for a higher purpose – freedom.

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<sup>80</sup> Laila al-Othman, *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* (Damascus: Al-Mada Publishing Company, 2000), 85-89.

<sup>81</sup> Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk* (سائق البامبو) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2018), 191.

<sup>82</sup> Laila al-Othman, *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* (Damascus: Al-Mada Publishing Company, 2000), 235.

## Chapter 4

### *Different Forms of Citizenship and National Identity: Representation in the Kuwaiti Novel*

As it was examined in Chapter 2, the issue of citizenship, discrimination and restrictions for non-Kuwaitis in numerous areas represents one of the major obstacles for achieving equality in Kuwait. These so-called different forms of citizenship, backed up by the constitution, various laws and rules, create a deep cleft among the population, more precisely between Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti nationals. Due to these practices and in this atmosphere, the sense of (national) identity and love for the homeland are questioned, certain human rights are violated and, most notably, discrimination and intolerance prosper within the state.

Due to the importance and the effect of these and related issues in the state and within the society, it is not surprising to assume that they have been studied and discussed in contemporary literature of Kuwait, especially in novels, which, going in line with Ouyang's views mentioned earlier, represent a medium that absorbs different components of the reality in the state more easily than other literary genres, especially in the Arab world. One of the novels that covers these topics, certainly, is Saud Alsanousi's *The Bamboo Stalk* (2012), for which the author won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) in 2013. This daring novel examines the phenomenon of foreign workers in Kuwait (which, also, applies to several other Arab countries, mainly in the Gulf) and, as mentioned earlier, depicts a struggle of a boy to find his own identity and the sense of belonging to one of his parents' nations, being torn between the Philippines and Kuwait. The novel is written in a form of autobiography, as if it was written by José himself.

There are many children of a mixed origin in the Philippines, most notably from a Filipina mother and a Kuwaiti (or from another Arab country) father, and José was one of them. In the Philippines, most of the people have not heard about a country called *Kuwait*, thus they called him *Arabo* (Spanish for 'Arab'). His mother, Josephine Mendoza, came to Kuwait to work as a maid, where she met Rashid al-Tarouf, José's father. Josephine and their child were not accepted in the family because they were from a 'different race', even being called 'a curse' for al-Tarouf family. Rashid was, thus, forced to send his wife and son back to the Philippines when José was only a baby. Thus, José grew up and spent his whole childhood listening to

stories about his ‘promised land’, Kuwait. He was aware of his ‘delicate’ status and started reflecting on his identity and national status at an early age. He used to imagine what his life would have been if he had been born to Kuwaiti Muslim parents; he would live in a big house, waking up every morning to go to work that he chose by himself, wearing those white and wide clothes with a traditional headcover. He would have many Kuwaiti friends and would go to mosque every Friday, enjoying in what imam would say in the prayer, having no troubles in understanding Arabic. On the other hand, he imagined the reversed situation. If he had been born to Filipino parents, from the same descent, he would be raised as a Christian and lived in a Christian environment in Manila with the rest of his family. However, none of these two scenarios was true, hence José had to deal with a different reality throughout his life.<sup>83</sup> When telling stories to her son about his fatherland, Josephine would compare it to *Alice in Wonderland*, where José would, following his mother’s promises (instead of rabbit’s), hop into a hole which would lead him to his own ‘wonderland’ (‘بلاد العجائب’) – Kuwait. Josephine convinced her son that they lived in hell, while Kuwait was heaven that he has always deserved and has been entitled to. She believed that Kuwait provides its citizens (and José was one, at least by definition) what many other progressive countries do not provide and that he would enjoy many rights there. However, this was rather a dream, and José would face the reality when he moved to Kuwait.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, in the novel, José’s case is even more complicated due to his mother’s occupation and status. Because of the great significance of social and economic status and family honour in Kuwait, as examined earlier, many foreign workers are being discriminated and maltreated and cannot integrate into the Kuwaiti society properly. As aforementioned, Josephine Mendoza was not accepted in her husband’s family because of her different origin, occupation and status. She would be often called a ‘Filipina maid’ (‘جادمة فلبينية’).<sup>85</sup> In the recent years, the issue of foreign workers’ status in Kuwait has gained more attention as many are concerned about their safety and well-being in the country. Namely, two Filipina maids were maltreated and killed in the last two years in Kuwait, which resulted in a diplomatic crisis between Kuwait and the Philippines and an outrage in the latter, leading to a temporary prohibition of Filipinos going to work in Kuwait.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk* (ساق البامبو) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2018), 17-64.

<sup>84</sup> Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk* (ساق البامبو) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2018), 71-72.

<sup>85</sup> Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk* (ساق البامبو) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2018), 201.

<sup>86</sup> “Kuwait death sentences for murder of Filipina maid,” BBC News, April 1, 2018,

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-43612778>

Furthermore, there is another example of division among citizens in Kuwait in the novel *The Bamboo Stalk*. When José travelled to Kuwait, in order to find out more about his father and to get to know his fatherland, an unpleasant situation occurred to him at the airport. Namely, there were two columns at the passport control, one with a sign saying ‘G.C.C. Citizens’<sup>87</sup> and the second one being for ‘مواطنو الدول الأخرى’ (‘Citizens of other countries’). José was wondering whether he should join the line where all other Filipinos were standing or to go to the line where Kuwaiti people were waiting, because after all, he was one of them. He joined the line with the sign ‘G.C.C. Citizens’ and waited for his turn. However, even before reaching the desk, an officer shouted at him and pointed to the line where other Filipinos and citizens of other countries were standing, even without seeing his passport. Based on his physical characteristics, the officer assumed José could not be a Kuwaiti national. Therefore, he was viewed by Kuwaitis as a ‘Kuwaiti made in the Philippines’. This made him feel lost, uncertain about his identity and left him with no idea of where he truly belonged. Years passed as he was listening to stories how ‘one day he would go back to his father’s land’. And when he finally reached Kuwait, he saw some of them being happy that he returned, some of them were confused, some wanted him there and some did not, while others wanted him back to ‘his mother’s land’. In these moments, he was standing on a land that he did not truly know and feeling torn between his mother’s and his father’s land. After a certain amount of time, he officially obtained his ‘new name’ – Isa al-Tarouf, and in this desperate searching for his own national identity, he expressed his pride of having a Kuwaiti father, felt a strong desire of belonging to al-Tarouf family, and, ultimately, deeply yearned to be a Kuwaiti.<sup>88</sup>

As shown through different examples in this chapter and Chapter 2, being Kuwaiti does not mean one, clear thing. As José’s half-sister Khawla points out, in Kuwait, people do not deem the word ‘*Kuwaiti*’ (Ar. كويتي) appropriate. She further explains that if one considers a man as Kuwaiti, this does not have a specific and unique meaning because ‘الكويتيون أنواع’<sup>89</sup> - there are different types of Kuwaitis. They represent different levels of the human race and belong to mixed layers that are distinct from one another. While talking about his mother’s country, José felt proud. Thus, he wondered if he could truly feel the same way about Kuwait one day and concluded that this could only happen if the society accepts him as their member. However, he felt that they were refusing him, but, on the other hand, if they accept him, he

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<sup>87</sup> Citizens of Gulf Cooperation Council states (Ar. مجلس التعاون الخليجي)

<sup>88</sup> Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk* (سائق البامبو) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2018), 185-225.

<sup>89</sup> Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk* (سائق البامبو) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2018), 276.

asked himself, ‘which social category will I fall into?’; ‘Will I be able to feel proud of ‘being Kuwaiti’ if they place me at the bottom of the social order?’ José, thus, questioned his identity and was left with doubts and fears in the land in which he did not feel welcomed.<sup>90</sup>

One of the most salient issues of the social structure in Kuwait, related to the questions of citizenship and nationality, is the problem of *bidūns*. They are at the bottom of this social order and hold the lowest position among these ‘many types of Kuwaitis’. As previously explained, they face numerous limitations and lack of certain human rights. Alsanousi addresses this issue, among others, in his award-winning novel. Rashid’s close friend Ghassan was one of the members of this ‘layer’ of the population, he was a *bidūn*. In a conversation with José, when Ghassan informed him that he was not able to travel because he was not Kuwaiti, José was confused and, naively, could not perceive the relation between not being able to travel and not being Kuwaiti. When José asked him where he was from, Ghassan only replied with: ‘بدون’ (*bidūn*). José, confused and not knowing anything about this matter, foolishly responded that he thought Ghassan was Kuwaiti and that he was not familiar with a country called *Bidūn*. Ghassan only laughed, but later explained everything José needed to know about this marginalized group. Thus, José learned about a whole new and quite unique kind of residents in Kuwait. He did not fully understand the concept of the people without nationality (Ar. ‘بدون\ابلا جنسية’). He was wondering how someone can be a *bidūn* if his predecessors were born in Kuwait, he serves the state’s military and defends the only land he knows. In fact, there were many things that José did not understand in his father’s country, things that made him question his identity and existence.<sup>91</sup> In addition, al-Othman, when writing about her homeland Kuwait and its citizens in *The Trial*, goes in line with what José was wondering about. Namely, she writes that she felt the pain and tragedy of *bidūn* people because ‘their origins are deeply-rooted in the heart of their homeland (Kuwait), ... and still, they are denied the honor of belonging to it.’<sup>92</sup>

Discrimination based on the social status and racial prejudices are not a rare phenomenon in Kuwait. The police often conduct sudden and random check-ups on foreigners and migrants in the country, motivated by discrimination and treating them as if they were

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<sup>90</sup> Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk* (ساق البامبو) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2018), 276-278.

<sup>91</sup> Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk* (ساق البامبو) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2018), 191-193.

<sup>92</sup> Laila al-Othman, *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* (Damascus: Al-Mada Publishing Company, 2000), 205.

citizens of a lower status. In *The Bamboo Stalk*, Alsanousi depicted such a situation where this discrimination is visible. Namely, when José was riding in a car with a local driver, the police stopped them to ask for the driver's license and other relevant documents. Before giving the documents back to the driver, a policeman asked José for his identity. He realized that he had forgotten his wallet at home, having no documents to prove his identity. The policeman kept repeating: 'إقامة... إقامة', referring to the residence permit. José was confused and wondered why the police asked him to prove the validity of his residence when he is Kuwaiti and does not need the permit. He replied that he does not have one, so the policeman aggressively requested from him to leave the car. They placed him in a small van that was packed with migrants, who either were not carrying their personal documents with themselves or did not possess valid residence permits for stay in Kuwait. José was stunned, frightened and was feeling lost. The police assumed he was not Kuwaiti based on his appearance and lack of knowledge of the Arabic language. The police and the state officials performing authority and showing little understanding and objectivity were displayed in Laila al-Othman's *The Trial* as well, as analyzed in the previous chapter. José felt powerless and discriminated, explaining that there were other Arabs, Indians, Filipinos, Bangladeshis in the van, and himself, a Kuwaiti that does not look like other Kuwaitis.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, who is a 'Kuwaiti' citizen and how does he/she look like, what is the Kuwaiti nation and who belongs there? Based on what we have learned so far, a 'real' Kuwaiti, thus, must be Muslim, must speak Arabic, must have parents of Kuwaiti origin and have a certain familial and economic status in the society. Even though there are 'numerous Kuwaitis', as it was mentioned in the novel, there is, evidently, no space for diversity in Kuwait and the reality is that the Kuwaiti state (nation) radiates nationalism and is intolerant to those who do not have 'common' features and characteristics as those who fit in the aforementioned frame. Related to this, Laila al-Othman was not considered as a 'good citizen' or 'good Muslim' because she stepped out of the imposed frame, that meant she was not supposed to write about 'forbidden topics', thus, she opposed the state authorities.

Because of its complex and hierarchical social order, its diversity and heterogeneity, and visible intolerance and discrimination toward migrants, foreign workers and those of non-Kuwaiti origin, José explains that 'للكويت وجوه عدة'<sup>94</sup>, i.e. that Kuwaiti has multiple faces. He feels that Kuwait hates him and refuses to get to know him. He sees Kuwait as a society that

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<sup>93</sup> Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk* (سائق البامبو) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2018), 315-316.

<sup>94</sup> Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk* (سائق البامبو) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2018), 324.

resembles his family al-Tarouf; every time he approaches it, he grows apart from its members. He admits he does not know what Kuwait is and cannot comprehend how the country can carry all those faces. He deliberately seeks to discover which of these faces is the real one. José's life in Kuwait was not only about finding his family and his roots, by trying to find the way to be accepted in the society of his father's country, he was, also, seeking his own identity. The fact that he did not feel welcome and was not completely accepted in his family and the society, made him leave the country, on the advice from his own family in Kuwait. Even though his blue passport and his nationality certificate said he was Kuwaiti, he did not belong there. Most of the members of al-Tarouf family rejected him based on the fact he was son of a Filipina maid. Before leaving Kuwait, José wrote a letter, where he expressed his loneliness and feelings about being rejected in the country where he was born. He pointed out that even though he was entitled to many rights, he did not feel equal to other Kuwaitis. José added that he felt as a stranger in Kuwait, as a lower human being and, thus, lost his humaneness, in the country where people do not agree on everything but unanimously agreed to refuse him as their equal member.<sup>95</sup> Related to this, because of all the investigation sessions that she had to go through, the way the state officials conducted them, because of the state of freedom and an ongoing trend of censorship in Kuwait, and the main reason why she was accused in the first place, Laila al-Othman poses a central question and, with a feeling of nostalgia and concern, asks herself: 'هل يتحول وطننا إلى وطن للرعب؟' ('Is our homeland turning into a home for terror?'). She, furtherly, cites a fellow writer Walid Najim's views on this topic and says: 'In this land of terror, all life dies. In the land of oppression, a dream dies; the heart goes out and the fear thrives; the policeman and detective shine, while the home is torn.' Al-Othman reflects on Walid's views and, thus, concludes: 'هل تموت أحلامنا يا – وليد – وتنطفئ قلوبنا فنكره الوطن الذي أحببنا؟' ('Do our dreams die, oh Walid, and our hearts go out while we despise the land we once loved?').<sup>96</sup> Therefore, due to the oppression and the lack of freedoms, al-Othman was faced with different feelings toward her nation and her homeland, wondering in what direction her country has headed and what it has become.<sup>97</sup>

In her novel where she described personal events from her life, shared her thoughts, fears and doubts, Laila al-Othman engages in an inner monologue about the nation and love

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<sup>95</sup> Saud Alsanousi, *The Bamboo Stalk* (ساق البامبو) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2018), 324-387.

<sup>96</sup> Laila al-Othman, *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* (Damascus: Al-Mada Publishing Company, 2000), 90.

<sup>97</sup> Laila al-Othman, *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* (Damascus: Al-Mada Publishing Company, 2000), 89-91.

for one's homeland, using a poetic language with numerous metaphors. With sadness she asks: 'Do we not feel the arms of our homeland holding us? Do we feel as strangers in it? Thus, is our homeland only a territory, a sea or a piece of grass? Or is our homeland our children and the people in it?' She continues with thoughts on what it means for her to be a 'good citizen', saying: 'a good citizen is not the one who was born to two citizen parents; a good citizen is the one who tears the insides of his/her clothes to resist the danger, not the one who fills the insides of his/her clothes with the country's money and is comfortable.'<sup>98</sup> Regarding earlier definitions and views on the nation, based on what we have learned from the two novels about Kuwait, the emphasis is not on the importance of the people, their activities and participation; the state rather chooses to focus on the elite and to function through a nationalistic and homogenous regime that highlights the differences among its citizens (based on their gender, ethnicity, economic and social status, beliefs and opinions, religion, etc.), instead of celebrating and respecting them, and providing an environment where every individual has equal opportunities. Therefore, the Kuwaiti state perhaps imagines the Kuwaiti nation as a group of nationals who meet certain criteria, as mentioned above, and who act according to the state's regime and its rules in order to be treated equally and with respect.

Saud Alsanousi and Laila al-Othman discuss various concepts, such as nation, national identity, citizenship, discrimination, (in)equality, among others, as we were able to see throughout Chapters 3 and 4, at least to a certain extent. All these concepts are intertwined in the novels and examined through discussion about various features of the Kuwaiti state and Kuwaiti society, such as discrimination based on social status and race, inequality, the issue of bidūn population, family honor, and several others. Alsanousi managed to present the exclusivity and tightness of Kuwaiti society based on ethnicity, family honor and tribal origins, which are ones of the main factors for the creation of seclusion within the society, where there is a substantial emphasis on the 'pure' Kuwaiti origin and high class. Perhaps one can try to look at the Kuwaiti nation-state as an imagined (political) community, as Benedict Anderson describes the nation. However, based on his definition, and using what has been discussed here, Kuwaiti society is hardly a community where its members feel the common sense of belonging to this very community or 'fraternity', as they can hardly feel equal on many levels. This, also, conflicts with contemporary views on the concept of nation, which emphasize the importance of common people and their equal participation in the state, in contrast to the ruling elite and

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<sup>98</sup> Laila al-Othman, *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* (Damascus: Al-Mada Publishing Company, 2000), 204-205.

imposed obedience to it. Al-Othman, through her personal experience, also, tackled the topic of national identity and patriotism, and highlighted that being a 'good citizen' does not depend on birthplace of an individual and his/her status. However, based on what can be concluded from these two literary works, in order to be treated as equal, with respect, and, ultimately, to hold a stable place within the society, it is necessary to have a Kuwaiti descent, to be Muslim, to have a long family history and tradition, to be financially prosperous, preferably male, not to criticize anything that is related to the state, and, thus, obey the rules. This is how equality wakens and so-called different forms of citizenship are created, in a society where any type of diversity is not accepted and rarely celebrated, which, thus, gives the opportunity for nationalism, discrimination, seclusion and racism to thrive.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to examine the relation between the concepts of state and nation, on the one hand, and literature, on the other. This relation and the range of meanings and concepts it includes are very wide and difficult to analyze all at once. Thus, it was essential to focus on several points within this relation, such as how the state influences its (national) literature, i.e. how and to what extent various state elements infiltrate into a certain literature, both in a direct and indirect way, to what extent a certain genre in literature covers different features of the state, its nation and society and in what way. Based on different theories and definitions, such as that of William E. Channing, proposing that literature's role is the 'public good' and that the nation expresses itself through literature, one can assume that a certain national literature deals with its nation through discussing significant issues of the state. Therefore, by addressing these issues, it seeks to raise the general consciousness and serve the public.<sup>99</sup> In addition, it was important to include other views, such as that of Yasir Suleiman, who, by contrast, suggests that we cannot look at literature as a mere reflection of its nation.

Building upon aforementioned assumptions, this paper intended to study the case of Kuwait, more precisely, to analyze the state, its social and political structure and important features of its society, and to implement this into contemporary Kuwaiti novels, i.e. to see how these state elements feature in these novels, whether this coincides with the assumed reality in the state (based on what has been studied from different sources) and whether the novels used in this case display the same 'reality'. As shown throughout this thesis, Kuwait as a state is very distinctive in its social and political organization and the constant clash of tradition and modernity in various aspects within the country. It was important to provide a reasonably detailed representation of the nature of the State of Kuwait in order to be able to look at whether this reality is present in the most prominent literary genre in Kuwait, the prose, and to try to detect the origin of certain points addressed in the novels.

Analyzing two contemporary Kuwaiti novels, *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* (2000) by Laila al-Othman and *The Bamboo Stalk* (2012) by Saud Alsanousi, this paper has proved some of its intended assumptions, at least to a certain extent, and, ultimately, several

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<sup>99</sup> Julia M. Wright, "Literature and nationalism," *National developments in literary criticism* (2013): 108.

conclusions have been made. A general image of the Kuwaiti state and Kuwaiti society was presented in these two novels. There, the reader had an opportunity to perceive and comprehend some of the most prominent features of the society and state in Kuwait through a number of issues that were addressed in the selected works, such as authority, both political and religious, lack of human rights (e.g. freedom of expression, movement...), discrimination, intolerance, inequality on several levels (between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis, male and female citizens, based on social and economic status etc.) and others. In addition, concepts such as national identity and citizenship were tackled as well, mostly in Alsanousi's work. Therefore, one may conclude that writers, here, serve as the mind of their nation, dealing with the state's crucial issues and addressing them in a form which can easily serve anyone. As Laila al-Othman stated about the purpose of writing her controversial works, saying that she intended to serve her nation and her home country by discussing significant concepts, such as freedom of expression among others, which can concern any individual in Kuwait. She added that it is an author's task to, by addressing these issues, raise the society's awareness and present the reality, and, most importantly, to do such a task with freedom of expression and openness, because, otherwise, the author's creativity is suppressed and cannot serve the subject.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, in *The Bamboo Stalk*, the reader can detect similar purpose; Saud Alsanousi narrates José's story of battling against discrimination and seclusion while attempting to find his own identity in the Philippines and Kuwait, respectively. José can be any other boy or a girl, or even an adult, who is struggling to find his/her own place within the society, and even in the nation. Thus, Alsanousi openly conveys the story of a suppressed, discriminated and secluded social category, the subaltern of Kuwait.

Furthermore, both novels discuss matters that overlap to a certain extent and that can be linked and build upon among one another, even though their central motives are distinct. These topics usually revolve around few points, including imposed authority in the state, human rights, freedom and intolerance to diversity. What is crucial to point out here is that because of these overlapping issues within Kuwaiti society that the two authors discuss, one might propose that, due to the fact that there is a time span of twelve years between publishing these novels, there are still certain aspects of the society that have not changed throughout this time and that more than a decade after the first novel, abovementioned issues are still present in the state, at least to an extent that these works allow us to make such an assumption. Related

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<sup>100</sup> Laila al-Othman, *The Trial...A Glimpse of Reality* (Damascus: Al-Mada Publishing Company, 2000), 38-39.

to this, the image of the state in the two works, displayed through discussing these social issues in the fine Arabic language, coincides with what has been analyzed in Chapter 2 of this paper. Points made in that chapter, mostly about the social and political nature of the Kuwaiti state and from various reports conducted by United Nations (on human rights, freedom and equality), appear and are widely studied in these novels. Laila al-Othman presented Kuwait, its nation and society by writing about her personal experience, which provided the reader with a direct insight into the writer's life in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century; on the other hand, Saud Alsanousi dealt with these topics from a different perspective, narrating a fictional story of a discriminated boy, however, as we have seen in the previous chapters, this very story could likely be a story of any child in Kuwait nowadays. As mentioned, although the two authors deal with different central topics in their novels and from a different perspective, they, nevertheless, coincide in various points and, even, complement one another. Ultimately, both novels show us what might happen to those who do not fit into the imposed 'frame' of the state and, thus, the authors pose a question: does this mean that they are not good citizens, that they love their nation less and do not belong to it?

Taking all of this into account, there is an assumption that contemporary literature in Kuwait, in this case novels, provides an image of the state and society in Kuwait. One must take into consideration that this paper examined only two such literary works, thus, any wide generalizations should not be made and concluded easily, for instance that majority of Kuwaiti authors discuss these topics in their works or that they share same or similar views regarding these issues. However, what can be concluded is that contemporary novels in Kuwait do examine and study the society and the concepts of state and nation, sometimes not directly but, more visibly, through addressing issues that are strongly related to them. Reflecting on Suleiman's ideas, I argue that Kuwaiti literature does reflect its nation, at least a substantial portion of its characteristics and its conditions. It is, surely, not a simple task to explain and understand the concepts of nation and state, however, this paper intended to relate these concepts to terms such as 'reality', 'society', 'people', 'homeland' and others, in order to obtain a more concrete understanding of the relation between nation/state and literature. Therefore, I argue that an author creates a connection with his/her nation by studying the reality of the state and its society, and by doing this, he/she seeks to raise and strengthen the population's individual, social and political consciousness and to emphasize the crucial role of knowledge, freedom and intellect, which are ones of the major notions that lead to the prosperity of a nation.

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