

## **Feminine Body between Appropriation and Tyranny in Sulaiman al-Shatti's Novel "Silence Extends", "Semiotic reading"**

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### **Abstract**

This paper addresses the phenomena of appropriation and tyranny in the face of the feminine body in the novel "Extending Silence" by the Kuwaiti novelist Sulaiman al-Shatti. It depends on the analytical method that includes the following elements: the connotation of the title, the authoritarian woman, the oppressed woman, and the semiotics of the body. It discusses the key phenomena that surface the novel. As regards the connotation of the title, it is an efficacious element that shows up the theme of silence that extends throughout the novel and becomes a dominant element in the space of the narrative text.

Appropriation, tyranny, oppression and the body were evident in their miserable situation in which the duality of masculinity and femininity exposed the enormous persecutions that woman went through in a society that undergoes social and cultural restrictions. The woman in this novel reflects important attitudes within her social, daily and literary frameworks. She is reduced to a mere object and is unable to express her feelings and sensations or take possession of her body and soul, which are the exclusive property of an arbitrary and appropriating culture.

Physical signs stand out in the novel and constitute an additional language that interrelates with the verbal indications. Body was converted into a set of semiotic signs that disclosed the outlooks of characters and their distinguishing features as well as the woman's reality in the Arab society and what she suffers in her daily life. Women are a mere subordinate of men in relation to the authority of the patriarchal society.

**Keywords:** Appropriation, Tyranny, Body, Feminine, Silence, Extends.

## **Introduction:**

There are some important manifestations in the Arabic novels, which reflect the image of the woman in the modern Arab society in general, and the Gulf community in particular. At the level of the state of Kuwait, novelistic voices addressed the theme of woman and viewed her from different multiple angles. In Kuwait, for example, the works of Laila al-Othman, Sulaiman al-Shatti and other novelists tackled this important theme.

The presence of woman in novels comes in various forms whether the writer is a man or a woman, and in many novels, she turns into a human model together with its positive or negative denotations. Also disclosing the image of woman in novels can lay down the foundation for a writing project that seeks to reveal the social practices through history and writing at the same time. It is no accident that the novelist deals with the cares of the woman, the customs and traditions that control her behaviors and her presence in a social environment dominated by paradoxes and conceptions, which suggest that the woman comes out multiple forms in novels.

This study examines a complicated, social situation in which social heritage grants males' power and dominion and excludes females, body and soul, and plunges them into the abyss of ruin. Patriarchal authority influences man's thinking and personality, divests him of his humanity. It also leads him to freeze his emotions and feelings to convince himself of the fact that blood eliminates shame, commit honor crimes and condemn females to death without investigation and fact-finding, in the mistaken belief that a man satisfies his patriarchal authority in the first place and society and people in the second place. So, this study seeks to demonstrate the dimensions of woman's personality in the novel, the narrator of which asserts that females do not possess their bodies in the Kuwaiti society and that they are marginalized and controlled by males. From here arises the duality of femininity and masculinity in this novel, which builds up a social and artistic perspective at the same time. Violence that is practiced against woman is real, not symbolic; even symbolic violence that men practice against women is deemed to be real as well<sup>(1)</sup>.

In the space of this text emerges an important viewpoint that reflects the tense relationship between females and males who make up a supreme power over women. To show this situation the narrator employs a number of expressive aesthetic components within the narrative text<sup>(2)</sup>, and through these components he achieves his desired goals.

Sulaiman presents these events in a narrative language that combines well-formulated poetical text and overtones as a distinct, elevated language that was

chosen from the dictionaries of bitterness and emotion as mentioned by Laila al-Othman on the cover of the novel. This high-flown special language, which the writer uses, suggests many linguistic levels of aesthetic formulation. As regards the subjects of this piece of research, they can be divided into the following points:

1. The connotation of the title
2. The authoritarian woman
3. The oppressed woman
4. The semiotics of the body

### **First: The connotation of the title**

The writer entitles his novel "Extending Silence"; and this brief title has far-reaching dimensions and connotations and expands readers' horizons of expecting and exploring events to discover the hidden meaning behind it. The indication of "silence" which is described as extending means that it turns into a central motif, particularly when the indication of silence recurs remarkably in the text of the novel. In addition, the rate of its frequency shows that silence is the dominant actor, especially when it stretches throughout the narrative space.

The title is a basic key that an analyst employs to delve into the text<sup>(3)</sup> and discloses what is beyond the meaning. The connotation of the title generates a fundamental reaction with the readers through whose minds many questions run once they come across it. Therefore, their expectations multiply in order for them to explore the denotations of the title throughout the text. Silence is a pivotal factor as it connotes oppression and death.

The title structure, together with its linguistic and syntactic aspects, gives way to the novelist's linguistic and grammatical awareness, his deep understanding of the secrets of words and their expressive value with respect to individualization, attribution. It also reflects the writer's ability to use these words in a way that suits the perspective of his work and enables him to realize how far they affect it<sup>(4)</sup>. This is affirmed by the fact that silence which spreads through the narrative space has a profound connotation as it reflects the fears and worries of characters who feel helpless and deprived. Thus, they arm themselves with silence that remains overwhelming, and it can be temporary or permanent when it comes to death. It is repeated in many contexts in this novel and embodies the character of Saleh whose silence typifies one of the cases of the human psyche that feels that life is pulled from under his feet and plunges him into a deep abyss of defeat, pain and remorse. This is because the curse of the crime he perpetrated against his sister Mariam was on his mind all the time, brought about his self-hatred and dislike for life and extended over time.

The writer uses the indications of "Extending Silence" in various sentences to widen the circle of silence and ensure that it is engraved in the readers' minds while they read the text. Thus, the indications of silence occur on pages 7, 10, 31, 59, 61, 114, for example. Also, the verb "extends" recurs on many pages like pages 5, 6, 11, 192, and 195.

The denotations of silence assumed considerable attention in the plot, and Thus, they give readers a sense of disappointment, remorse and sorrow. They reduce many digressions and explanations to two expressive denotations like the expressions: "he waits for the lures of historical cities; it penetrates memory; he brings history; memories are evoked; grief extends"<sup>(5)</sup> Once this loathsome incident is recollected, sadness becomes overwhelming.

Sadness is not only a human feeling, but it also involves time as the writer says, "He sits serenely in the balcony of his apartment for a while, looking at greenery and wishing for trouble-free life"<sup>(6)</sup>. Her escape from painful memories is embodied; his stay away from the crime scene and seeing green hillsides in Rome provide him with passing clarity and get him to wish for rosy life.

The textual study demonstrates that "silence appears in multiple forms that should be taken into account in case they are to be interpreted. These forms are: a) temporary silence through which the person intends to convey a specific message and then continues to use the verbal system. For example, silence that is designed to portray the mental and emotional state of the person who receives the verbal message. b) absolute silence, not accompanied by body signals or gestures. the aim of that type of silence is to protect honor and grudge it ignorant fools. Another objective is to depress the recipient by not giving a verbal response, and the sender, on his part, asserts that his use of silence is symbolic and that it does not negate his ability to respond; rather, it is a unfeeling, rhetorical message that insinuates contempt and scorn and may be tantamount or superior to a verbal message"<sup>(7)</sup>.

The significance of silence must be reflected in the narrative space. This significance does not stop only with the characters, but it also exceeds the events of the novel in its various narrative forms, especially when it is a focal point on which the characters rely to confront the greatest event after Isa and Saleh committed a murder under the umbrella of honor. The victim was their sister Mariam. Both of them kept silent until the mother arrived and discovered that her daughter was consigned to eternal absence and that the crime had taken place. She raged and condemned this hideous act, and found no alternative but to remain silent to cover up this crime under the influence of honor, reputation and shame.

The following text could be an example of arming with silence in the context of persecution, repression, disappointment and helplessness when Saleh said to himself, "Unfortunately, after it was too late, I learned how to be careful about the effects of words and that my response should be deliberate. I also learned how to protect myself from being overcome by thoughtless responses. So, it suffices that one falls once into the trap of stirring words that could embitter his life. The path of my life could have been different if I had not responded in that way and listened to the narcotic words of my brother Isa that aroused my hateful manhood, but what's done is done..."<sup>(8)</sup>. This wish that came late after he fell into the trap of his brother's influence when he coaxed him into partaking in ending the life of their sister to eliminate the shame she brought down on them. He risked such an act immediately after masculine authority deeply entrenched in him was provoked. In the aforementioned text, the writer highlights his hero who blames himself, yet such blame does not occur except within himself. So, Saleh is always under the sway of remorse, blame, rebuke, and self-flagellation<sup>(9)</sup>. He sustains the agonies of the past that haunted him, and Thus, the inner dialogue reflected by Saleh's personality translates the tragic state that formed his permanent apprehension.

Silence affected not only the hero, but also all the other characters. Saleh kept silent and so did his brother Isa, the mastermind of the so-called honour crime, and their mother. It seems as if silence overwhelmed characters, place and time. The writer focused on the two significances of "silence and extending" with which he crowned his novel and the indications that circulated in many of its aspects. Saleh says, "Everything was rash and hasty, and you cannot ignore what is happening around you, so you are to take your final decision: you should either become a passionate revolutionary, be labeled as a reactionary who is torn between different or contradicting emotions, or pack your bags and leave"<sup>(10)</sup>. "You won't find anyone to listen to you; you don't give thought; this helped me later; but I listened a lot; I speak as all sounds and voices echo round me, so why should I stay silent? The writer exposed here the contradictions that pass through the mind of his hero, Saleh who is at a crossroads: he either joins the revolutionaries, or retreats, lapses into silence and is classified as reactionary or packs his bags and leaves. In the same vein, the author uses the significance of silence when Yahya reads to Saleh a sentence that gives various meanings and denotations. He pauses at weighty words, which he calls the miraculous meanings: "Greatness is a continuous energy, spiritual silence and a heavenly action..."<sup>(11)</sup>. Despite the conflicts that are inside Saleh and his attempt to get out of the bottleneck, hides into his soul, which used to wander in faraway places, as he feels no serenity inside him because the image of the past crime haunts him and troubles his life to an unbearable extent.

Silence in all its forms became one of the distinguishing features of Saleh despite the passage of years and long distances; silence haunted him in spite of all his attempts to get rid of it. "I have no answer. I told myself repeatedly that if only I had faced my brother Isa by saying "no", my own life would have changed... and I had not been here... but neutral silence, on my part, encourages Yahya to continue"<sup>(12)</sup>. Silence remained attached to Saleh's personality though it became neutral. However, neutral silence is a negative quality, not a positive one, because it creates an atmosphere of ambiguity, confusion and multiple contradicting signals. The silence that afflicts Yahya is a true equivalent to contrition, which he experienced and will continue to suffer from throughout his life. Because the connotation of "no" that he was unable to say to his brother Isa before their crime is that which tied him with the trap of silence that turned into something neutral.

Similarly, we find that the personality of Saleh, who took refuge in silence, feels inclined towards those who have this characteristic and comfortable with the characters that lack curiosity and tend to be silent. So, he says, "The driver who was sent to take me to the hotel comforted me with his silence"<sup>(13)</sup>. This is despite the fact that this incident happened twenty years after he kept away from the scene of the crime, but silence accompanied him all these years and extended with him over time.

Silence was also one of the distinguishing, inborn features of the mother, but the crime deepened it and made it extend and be a crucial mark of her personality. Describing his mother's reaction when the father went away and did not return from his voyage, Saleh says, "It was required that silence be restored and voices dwindle. The grief of Isa's mother was always blended with ferocious silence that closely resembled an internal combustion engine, but with no sparks that could fly apart from it or turn into ash... only flames remain and never vanish..."<sup>(14)</sup>.

The writer sums up the mother's frame of mind and her grief over her husband when she received the news of his death during his voyage by using the meaningful phrase "ferocious silence." The syntax of these two words creates a sense of astonishment for the recipient, as the very meaning of the adjective "ferocious" is contrary to the significance of the word "silence". Her sadness was a burning fire in her chest, but it was still dormant. This constitutes the pinnacle of pain, and the writer reaches the recipients through these two denotations to the pyramid of the tragedy and the sense of suffering and pain that befell this wife. She always feels a fire burning inside her, but she seeks to put it out, and silence penetrated deep into her and dwelled within her.

## **Second: The authoritarian woman:**

The fictional character may not be realistic, but it can be reworked and reshaped in a life and a realistic way that the reader can test in the life outside the paper<sup>(15)</sup>. The model of the woman in this novel is the one with a deeply significant emotional state, especially when the authoritarian woman is represented by the mother's personality. She is characterized by vigor, oppression and domination, the mother's voice in the novel is an oppressive, and thus it occurs in more than one context. The writer turned to the depth of history to recall an odd story that imparts sanctity, purity, wisdom, and sacrifice to the mother and shows us the other side of this personality and gives us different pictures that formed inside her. It seems as if this pattern became a legacy, so he wrote: "...Al Khaizuran, the mother of Mousa Al-Hadi and Haroun Al-Rashid, brought her bondmaids together, and two bondmaids entered, carrying two pillowcases, and put them over his face to suffocate him... We have become on a par, as history itself testifies that mothers kill their children. Killing resides in us all"<sup>(16)</sup>. Saleh, by reading this story, taken from the depth of Arab history, finds for himself and the story of his crime an objective precedent because it reduced all his tragedy. There is a clear tendency in this context for reduction at numerous levels and intimate coexistence with the traditional beliefs embedded in conscience"<sup>(17)</sup>. This is because it touched his innermost pains when he read that "killing resides in us", and that implies stillness and silence. He focuses on the clause "history testifies that mothers kill their children" because he sees it as a precedent that bears a close resemblance to the image of his mother who killed her daughter by her silence.

The image of the mother in Saleh's mind was not entirely pure, but it was a distorted picture, contrary to everything that is pure, gentle, and human, as well as natural disposition. So, it is supposed that the image of the mother is a symbol of tenderness, love, purity, and safety. Nevertheless, Saleh, on every occasion, had the odd image of his mother haunted him. When he was talking to his friend Yahya, he had a different feeling, so he said, "Eyes can be a clear token of one's affection, so I remember the face of my mother who used to speak to me without looking at me. Every mother stares hard at her son except my mother who crushes me when talking to me and looking downwards. As she speaks, she may turn to the other side as she holds a feather duster with her hands as if it drives away something that she does not feel like. But Yahya, when he talks to you, he turns towards you, gazing at you and searching for the echo of his words, and does not want you to escape from his own looks"<sup>(18)</sup>.

Isa likens his mother's turning away from him while talking to him to the mill that grinds and turns him into small scattered pieces. It is supposed that it is the mother who builds the personality of her son and instills in him confidence,

strength, and teaches him to unbosom himself freely and tactfully. But his mother converted him into a lifeless soul, slipping into eternal silence and fleeing from space and time, to live in places that are alien to his background and deepen his silence.

The character of the mother who transformed from a traditional woman into a domineering one went through definite stages. The death of the father was the reason for the transformation of her personality and attitudes, her doings, and characteristics. In this regard Saleh says, "Since my father's death, her final orders have increased, and she managed to put me under the influence of her looks and strictness and form me as she liked. I had no option but to listen to and obey her. She controlled everything and looked like a hammer with which she hit a piece of mangrove wood with strength<sup>(19)</sup>.

The mother's personality entered a new stage, namely strictness and resolution, and this formed the focal point of her transformation, so she wanted to control the situation wholly. This is because she played, after the father's death, the role of the captain of a ship carrying two young men and two girls. So, if she lost the helm of strictness, her ship would sink and its passengers would get lost.

The mother's voice is depicted in the narrative text as an authoritarian, repressive one in more than one context. The mother addressed her son Isa, saying, "I damn the moment when my breasts dried up; there was no goat or cow except that he lied down under it... I don't know how long you will remain a child!"<sup>(20)</sup>.

The mother's voice here expresses a state that does not harmonize with what is expected, because her protest here is indicative of her oppression. Her relationship with her son Isa was not a friendly one or reflected the mother's ordinary tenderness because the milk of her breast that dried up contradicts the nature of the mother. The milk flows into the child's mouth when the mother feels affection and compassion towards her child, so that the child could be fed on kindness before milk. But the model of the mother presented by the writer is the image of an authoritarian mother who is opposite to nature. The milk in her breasts was dry, and her son searched for love and warm-heartedness in the breasts of the cow and the goat so that he could find what he needed and lost in his mother. The portrayal of this unusual image that is contrary to human and animal nature indicates that the human structure upon which Isa was built is a weak, deformed, and flawed makeup. The deformations of these models will arise in the future when they run counter to his human nature and motivate him to kill his sister and convince his brother to take part in this crime only on grounds of rumors spread by an untruthful, spoiled young man.



The authoritarian mother represents a central case in this narrative space that indicates the strength of the mother who passes from a submissive mother to an authoritarian one. "The mother was passive and suddenly converted into a rock with grooved edges, like the ones that make up the Great Wall of Naqaa, rocks with sharp, scratching protrusions. The salty sea water used to bump against these rocks to the point that they resembled erect sharp knives..."<sup>(21)</sup>.

This text reflects the features of the mother's personality, who turned into a rock. This paradox indicated a grave situation, namely the transformation of the mother's personality. The submissive mother who is supposed to be a mass of affection, tenderness, and sympathy, turns into a sharp, rigid, and strong rock. Even the edges of that rock turned into upright sharp knives, which means that the mother shifted from passivity to cruelty. "We can count this shift as one of the keys that suggest converting the narrative logic to a new horizon, because it creates a semiotic sign in a dynamic and effective level of a narrative event"<sup>(22)</sup>.

One of the signs of authoritarianism in the mother's personality is that she was using some of the words that are appropriate for her characteristics such as the following expressions: "May God make him perish!", "you son of a bitch!", "you cuckold!", and "May God take revenge against all the oppressors one day"<sup>(23)</sup>. These denotations of hatred and spite show her wrath even in her speech, her body language and even in her way of choosing words. The novelist describes the way she speaks, which reflects her personality and the charges of anger that she contains. He says, "When my mother gives us orders, the words come out of her mouth specific, concise and decisive, and I have no choice but to hear and respond"<sup>(24)</sup>. The way of speaking does not only imply important features of the mother's personality, but it also reflects the impact of these words on the listener who says, "I used to hear and respond". This shows to us his absolute surrender to the mother's domination and oppression.

Another manifestation of the mother's authoritarianism is her attitude towards Mariam, who used to receive her orders. "The language of dos and don'ts between her and my mother takes a distinctive course. When she cries to her, Mariam responds with contrasting voices, but she answers and bursts into tears..."<sup>(25)</sup>. The dos and don'ts, crying, and all other incidents are all indications of the mother's manner of dealing with her children, male or female. So, Mariam is also prey to the mother's authoritarianism, and this represents a state of supreme oppression, unexpected oppression that does not only end at that of the mother, but it also depicts societal persecution overall.

Isa's relationship with his mother was not an ordinary one, as he describes it in a manner that reflects the characteristics of her personality. He expresses his feelings and says, "Your mother...is stubborn... cruel... she hates me"<sup>(26)</sup>.

Describing the mother this way: "stubborn, cruel, and hates me" reflects the tense relationship between them both and displays the hidden impression Isa has concerning his mother.

Examples of her authoritarianism and cruelty include her words about Isa when she heard about his severe illness, as follows:

- I have no duty towards him.

Her words are harsh, disdainful and vehement.

- His illness is serious. He may die.
- He made me die before.

She went on addressing herself:

- We all died that very afternoon.
- There is no hope that he will get better. He is in a great pain.
- This is a little bit of the suffering I have experienced<sup>(27)</sup>.

This conversation between her and Saleh, and between her and herself exposes important features in her personality as a mother who refuses to sympathize with her ill son, and her wrath against him seems to have intensified when he killed Mariam one afternoon. Her anger against her son in the aftermath of this heinous crime turns into schadenfreude because she believes that divine justice punishes him for his guilt. Sooner or later, the murderer shall be killed. This punishment satisfies her thirst for revenge because she could not punish him, but kept silent all these years, which converted her into a rock with sharp protrusions.

The mother's intense hatred for her son Isa shows us another dimension which the writer expresses by saying, "he did not realize that the flaming anger and loathing stand between him and his mother, representing a torrent of curses, the like of which I did not see in any rhetorical expressions. The word "curse" extended to the point that it had a long history in the family"<sup>(28)</sup>.

The novel perpetuates the distance and separation between the mother and her son Isa. The distance between them is not normal, as it is a blazing combination of anger, loathing and imprecation to the point that these curses became a repeated watchword in the history of the family. Because this grotesque crime became the obsession of the mother and the two brothers alike. The curse afflicted them one by one, and all of them followed a gloomy path, maintaining silence. Hence, silence turns out to be a philosophical and aesthetic concept, as it produces for us a verbal structure that, together with language and characters, forms a common foundation for producing meaning<sup>(29)</sup>.

### Third: The oppressed woman:

*Estilāb* is a verbal noun derived from the trilateral verb *s-l-b* (*salaba*) meaning "to take something by force, rob". The expression "salaba ash-shai'e salban" means "he extorted something from someone" while the expression "salabat fulānatun fu'ādahu aw 'aqlahu" means "he is besotted with her." To say "salaba fulānan" means "he divested him of his spoils during a battle", and to say "salaba ash-shagara wan nabātāt" means "he removed trees or plants from leaves and fruit"<sup>(30)</sup>. As far as women in the Arabic novel are concerned, different forms of them were depicted. One of these forms is the traditional, powerless woman who yields to the man, whether she is a mother, a wife, or a daughter. In a similar vein, George Tarabishi says, "The concept of masculinity and femininity does not only govern the relationship between men and women, but it also controls the relationship between man and the world"<sup>(31)</sup>. According to Turki Al-Maghid, "The character of the woman in the novel is merely a semiotic sign that reflects sociological and cultural dimensions, reflects the vision of society"<sup>(32)</sup>.

So, the human community in general and the Arab community in particular sank into the domination and control of men. We can also see the models of women who are either authoritarian, balanced, passionate, or liberal. Liberty was associated with physical freedom. As for the novel in question, it focused on different forms of women such as the traditional mother who turned into a hard-hearted authoritarian and the personality of Mariam, who was a victim of customs and traditions. She was unfortunately wronged and killed because of the male dominance prevalent in the Kuwaiti society in particular and the Gulf and Arab community in general. This means that the woman is one of the most oppressed members in society. So, wherever there are oppression and exploitation, the woman receives the major portion. Similarly, wherever there is room for humiliation and degradation, the woman is the first choice<sup>(33)</sup>.

The best example embodying the oppressed woman in the novel is Mariam. She is a girl who grew up in a traditional house with a father who worked as a sailor and used to be absent for days and months, a harsh and obstinate mother, and two brothers, one of whom was tyrannical, cruel, bad-tempered, and socially fanatic, who made her life a hell and caused death to be her fate. He used to prefer the language of power to that of reason and train his brother Saleh in his own way that says: "hit first and then think"<sup>(34)</sup>. This motto is indicative of the brutality of this person who believes that neutralizing reason is a way to win and succeed.

Mariam fell prey to this character and was also crushed and influenced by customs and traditions. So, his personality was built upon authoritarianism and the role of a traditional father who controlled the family and suppressed the

female voice. Mariam always had the bulk of his unjustifiable slaps and blows. "I saw her several days before my father traveled bowing over the basin, groaning, puking, after a swift, thoughtless kick by Isa who wanted to eliminate that rebellious side in her character. She was always laughing and singing. One day he heard her singing that song of "Send my regards to my adored lover"<sup>(35)</sup>. This manner that Isa follows with his sister does not only represent oppression, but it also symbolizes his rejection of the other, especially when this other is a female. He refuses to give her freedom even at home and kicks her because she was singing a song as if singing was forbidden to females. When asked about the reason for kicking her, he said, "I told her so many times not to uncover her legs or raise her voice when doing the washing"<sup>(36)</sup>. This is oppression in itself; the female is enslaved, as if she was a bondmaid who was obliged to work at home and serve her family members. However, she was deprived of her simplest rights and was not allowed to sing at home, uncover any of part of her body or raise her voice inside her own house, as if the female's voice was a terrible mistake in closed societies.

The aforementioned example is a good evidence of appropriation even though Mariam is the true owner of her body and her voice. She was not allowed to take a posture that can make her comfortable while washing clothes. Her brother kicked and hit her to the degree that she disgorged. This was because he saw her removing her dress from a part of her legs and heard her singing while she was doing the washing. The irony here is that the true owner of the body does not possess it in reality and neither does the owner of the beautiful voice possess his voice. This is as if ownership was confined to the female's family and society. So, the body "is a perfectly social product because the human body is driven behind the desires of society. Based on its contact with the external world, the body is part of it, and each body is one of the building blocks making up a coherent wall that translates the image of the community"<sup>(37)</sup>.

Isa did not stop kicking his sister even after his mother and father blamed him for doing so. "My father stepped into the house and saw Mariam, leaning over the basin and sobbing aloud. My mother seized Isa by his dress as he tried to kick his sister again"<sup>(38)</sup>. Mariam was the aggrieved girl in this traditional family. Nobody managed to stop Isa, the reckless, rebellious elder brother, who, according to the Kuwaiti traditions, was entitled to do whatever he liked. Even if he makes a mistake, his mistake and faults must be overlooked and covered up, and if he gives orders, he must be obeyed without hesitation. When the father entered and saw Mariam leaning against the basin and saw his wife taking hold of Isa by his dress to stop him from kicking his sister, he cursed the children and anyone who ever wished to have children. This negative role of the father and mother deepens the rebellion that overwhelmed Isa. He went to extremes to

harm his closest relatives mercilessly, imprudently, and inconsiderately, including his mother who was not safe from his evil at the time when he kicked her in her belly and caused her to have an abortion.

Mariam, the innocent and constantly vivacious girl, lives under the protection of her father who is one of the traditional examples of the Kuwaiti society at that time and who is the cornerstone of the house and the only breadwinner for his family. If he is absent, leadership automatically passes to the eldest son. In addition, this was what happened. When sailors returned from their voyage, they appeared unharmed while the father disappeared. Here the absence of the father constituted a turning point in the entity of this family, and the effect of his loss was heartbreaking for Mariam in particular. Saleh describes this very calamity saying, "Mariam's shriek coincides with the sound of her clothes which she began to rip up and uncover a part of her bony body, going about, but her steps were closer to the door... Is this fleeing from this house where death will dwell?"<sup>(39)</sup>. This shocking response by Mariam shows her apprehension of what will happen next, and it seems as if the ghost of death that affected the paterfamilias of the family was at hand for her as well. Because she knew that the heir of the domestic authority would be her tyrannical brother Isa, who all the time intimidated and terrified her. That is why we see her screaming, weeping and slapping herself.

This dramatic scene in which the writer used voices, body language, and states of mind to portray it produced an "array of symbols and rules used to represent expressions and describe the characters or the overall processes the author performs to establish his artistic vision"<sup>(40)</sup>.

Mariam, despite her apparent gracefulness and cheerfulness, was constrained by the restrictions of society in general and those of the family and her brother Isa in particular. Mariam and her family were in the habit of sleeping on the roof of their house during the hot summer nights. Saleh says, "The place which was designed for Mariam to sleep in was at the middle of the roof, and I often saw her, on the top of the roof that hid her entire body, turning her neck right and left and boldly moving her entire body forward. She used to hunt out few moments when she was splashing the roof with water, spreading out rags and mats, to see as far as she could a small world around her"<sup>(41)</sup>.

Mariam was lying under the hammer of family and societal oppression, for she was forbidden to even look at the street; thus, she used to have surreptitious glances because her will was missing and was behind the family bars. She was forbidden to relish her freedom, explore her emotions and choose her own lifestyle because she was destined to be killed since she came to this life. This is despite the fact that the time of execution was delayed. It was her sole fault that

she was a mere female living in a society based on masculine authoritarianism, oppression and the law of the jungle.

Saleh's self-speech gives us some snapshots of Mariam's doings so that he can find something that will justify what he committed on grounds of mere doubts in the mind of Isa without daring to ask him about the source of these doubts, which gnawed at him and turned his life into hell. The novel focuses on Saleh's being influenced by the places in which he lived and which were the scene of the painful incidents he experienced and remained engraved in his memory throughout his life. This is because places are the spatial scope of incidents that creates a reciprocal relationship and generates an intellectual reaction to parallel the actions of nature; and Thus, space turned out to be an emotional entity<sup>(42)</sup> and one of the elements of the scenes which his memory stored along with many questions that remained unanswered all his life. But instead of raising his questions in order to receive definite answers, he kept silent and curbed the questions within himself. He found no alternative but to remain silent. Suspicion was chasing him from one place to another. He sought to find a justification for his hideous, merciless crime whenever the instinct of manhood was provoked inside him. He says, "I glimpsed the head of Ghazy Shamar raised high, a thought that struck me. Is he the other side missing in the story of Mariam?"<sup>(43)</sup>.

The writer shows us a paradox when he depicts Mariam as a female in the prime of her life who is shackled, paralyzed, forbidden from expressing her own feelings and forced into leading a dull life. She possessed neither her body nor her soul; rather they were in the possession of her brothers, particularly Isa when he reproved and hit her after she uncovered her legs while doing the washing and put an end to her life when her name was mentioned dragged into an alleged romantic relationship with an untruthful spoiled young man. Sulaiman himself compares Mariam to a bitch that belonged to Saleh. He explains that many dogs used to run after it, but it did not hand over its body except to the dog it liked and chose. The author goes on recounting this scene, saying "I remembered the bustle; of the dogs when they were walking behind the bitch whose lust intensified and needed being satiated. A large number of dogs followed the sacred point that released the smell of lust, which let them to surround it. Each dog approached the bitch, taking out its tongue and raising its foreleg, without accomplishing anything, then turning away and giving way to another dog that proceeded and did the same... However, every dog was careful not to be away from the smell emanating from its sacred spot. No dog assaulted the other; the bitch alone had the right to grant its thing to whichever dog it likes"<sup>(44)</sup>.

The ironic paradox here is designed to show the scale of the deprivation suffered by Mariam and her peers in a masculine community where animals can

own themselves, their bodies, their sensations and their carnal pleasures. This is unlike the female who is deprived of all that and can lose her life without discovering the truth. The writer here recounts this scene as if he came out of the novel - to express personal opinions and reflections that he communicates to the reader in the absence of the characters and events of the novel<sup>(45)</sup>.

The novel represents the character of Mariam as a deprived case, so the novelist uses many ways to highlight the deep obsession with the oppression that women are exposed to in society. The man subdues the woman and suppresses her physically and linguistically. The man continued to speak in the name of the woman, and it was only after he appropriated all the linguistic capabilities that she used languages, and she was nothing but a symbolic metaphor or an imagination that the man writes<sup>(46)</sup>.

Philip Hamon says that the character is similar to the lingual sign "It is an empty sign, a semantic whiteness that is only valuable through its regularity within a specific format"<sup>(47)</sup>.

#### **Fourth: The semiotics of the body:**

The body is a thorny subject as it represents different connotations and questions. When the body is mentioned, different perceptions cross one's mind. Does it mean the physical body or the moral one that is composed of feelings and sensations? "The body is a primary factor that constitutes the source of life, activity, action and consciousness. It is a prior acquisition, and the soul is the essential foundation that drives the body controlled by a mind... and operates its relational spiritual capabilities, because it is the soul that functions as the dynamic force of the body"<sup>(48)</sup>.

Scientific and literary studies were conducted on the body, body language and its implications. They showed that "the traditional view reduces woman to her physical body, and Thus, her femininity decides her fate and is counted as an irreparable flaw"<sup>(49)</sup>. As for the writer, he addressed this issue from a different perspective and pointed out through his characters that the woman in his community did not possess her body. Rather it is common to society and the family alike. So, he used body language, overtones, and denotations to reach this conclusion.

The reader of this work of fiction finds competing semiotic signs that have associated connotations, as the body's expressions, shape, and state make up an important dimension in the context of this novel. The physical stations in the context of this novel carry the semiotics of communication and culture. The body semiotics is represented in several bodily parts and many forms. Saleh says, "My mother stands in the middle of the yard putting her hands over her

belly while Mariam is breaking apart some pieces of mangrove wood to prepare an evening fire. Whenever my mother bowed to collect dry palm branches, she leaned forward and then backwards with extreme caution. The fronds send out no sound to the point that not anyone who was close to her could hear anything. It looked like the caution by one who was looking for calm and tranquility. The combined bundle is broken apart by one blow. Moreover, when the logs are broken into pieces, you notice this thoughtful way, while the crackling of these pieces was too high for Mariam. My brother Isa liked my mother's way. Look! My mother never misses her blow. I usually succeed after my fifth blow"<sup>(50)</sup>.

The overtones that appear in this text reflect multiple indications. The signs are represented in the way of the mother's posture when she puts her hands over her belly, and the way of Mariam when she breaks apart mangrove logs with strength, in addition to the bend of the mother as she breaks apart the bundle of firewood by a single blow, which she never misses. These signs are indicative of the mother's characteristics, who does the daily housework with her daughter. The posture is a semiotic denotation, and the blow is another one. This indicates that she is a well-trained mother who is interested in her daily housework. However, the most important indication that is consistent with the context of the novel is the blow she never misses. This means that the mother's body language translates her mental dimension as a strong, skilled and authoritarian woman.

The writer shows, through the aforementioned text, that the human body in the narrative space is not a mass or a size, but rather points to a network of indicators. It is not a sign of a temporal space. All this indicates that the body is not a vacuum or a neutral inactivity, but rather it is an entity that embodies signs that lend it certain cultural values"<sup>(51)</sup>.

The semiotic signs of the mother's body never come to an end. He says, "My mother puzzles me, when she is alone, in the narrow corner between the big and small yards, she isolates herself from others, which suggests her resignation and resembles her to a poor Indian sitting on the ground and wrapping himself with dust. Her body curls up; her outer extremities overlap; her hands, legs and neck disappear; she seems to be a trunk taking up the smallest possible space. Even her looks are cloudy, so you do not know whether she is looking at you or the objects behind you. Her looks give you the sense that she is grieved and resigned. Her glances are separated from her surroundings. She hides some words behind her scrunched lips as if she was afraid that they would slip away"<sup>(52)</sup>.

There are semiotic signs that express the mental state of the mother, as she isolates herself and desists from communicating with anyone. Her image is close to that of a poor Indian, who sticks to the ground. Sticking to the ground



indicates that she is mentally and emotionally disturbed. The curling body is a suggestive image that coincides with the disappearance of the outer extremities so that the mother's body is reduced to a very small torso. Looks are also a semiotic sign of speechlessness and worries, as the body expressions translate the concerns and thoughts that run through the mother's mind. Scrunched lips are an expression of her refusal to disclose or give vent to her innermost feelings and thoughts. So, she presses her lips so tightly lest she should unbosom herself.

The writer depicts the mother's mental state through physical expressions after she learned that Mariam was murdered. "One day he sneaked a glance at her curling body that got smaller than usual. She suddenly held cylindrical piece of wood and hurled it at his shoulder. He moved away to sit around her again without she looking at him"<sup>(53)</sup>. This text reflects a deep transformation, as the physical signs translate the change in the mother's body, which curled up and shrank. The way the mother hurled a piece of wood towards the shoulder of Isa is indicative of her suppression and authoritarianism. The semiotics of looks is missing here because the mother did not want to look at her son who deteriorated into guilt and crime. So, he became too disgusting for her to look at. The physical states in this context translate many of the tendencies, aspirations and deep perspectives on which the novel was based.

The body stands out in the context of anger and death. "Her green spread dress displayed a body that was cohesive and strong. It was the first time I saw a part of her chest. She was so careful, modest, and sensitive when it came to her body. But that cohesive body was collapsing and producing a wounded voice like a muted howl, but I could not understand anything but the name of Mariam. I stand at the beginning of the yard and I do not know whether I should proceed forth or retreat"<sup>(54)</sup>. This text points to the mother's body such as the green dress, which may have a certain connotation here. The writer wanted to say that green symbolizing life and prosperity vanished when Saleh complied with his brother's orders and had a share in his hideous guilt, which brought an end to the life of his sister as well as the lives of all the other family members. The significance of this text is the mother's sensitivity to the body, as if it was one of the taboos in her mindset and her cultural and social background. The body is highly sacred for the mother because he sees a part of her chest for the first time. This means that uncovering the body, for the mother, is one of the things that are closely related to the customs, traditions and culture based on taboos.

The body language is evident in the writer's description of the mother's agitation when she learned about the killing of her daughter Mariam. "She looked up towards the heavens and let herself fall down. Umm Ahmad embraces her and tries to make her stand upright, but she falls down again and hits her with her hands. She tries to enter her into her room to stop her raging shouts. She

lifted her head, and I was standing at the intersection of the entrance with the basin; her braided plaits went in all directions, and her face darkened with the approach of the evening. I saw a very different face, then she screamed and stretched out her hands and supplicated, "May God curse you both in this world and the hereafter"<sup>(55)</sup>.

The gestures here give us multiple indications. For example, lifting the head towards the heavens shows that she seeks refuge with God, as she grew up in a religious family known for teaching linguistics and religious science to the people of Kuwait. Throwing herself on the ground is an expression of sadness and anger at the same time. As regards the gestures made by Umm Ahmad, they are physical signs because she tried to relieve her of her unspeakable affliction. The disheveled plaits are not a sign of beauty, but an expression of horror and grief. In other words, the body expresses the emotional state of the mother. Her face that darkened is a sign of the tragic sense that wrapped the place and the hearts of the characters involved. This is a signal of the forthcoming time that does not bode well. Also, the facial expressions show the deep mental details that are within the mother. The body, in its various expressions, embodies indications that are added to those of the words in the narrative text. Raising her hands towards the heavens signifies a negative supplication as the context suggests. Therefore, the physical codes give moral, mental and motor connotations within the framework of the communication process. Any attempt to establish a communication relationship between the sender and the recipient will be useless if one does not use visual cues and allusions"<sup>(56)</sup>.

The writer harmonized his characters with the body language in a way that is consistent with the time, place and representation. When describing the mother as traditional, he depicted her body language in proportion to the situation. Supposing that there is no voice and only the body language of the mother is available, readers will conclude the distinguishing feature of this character from the body language and the symbols of colors that overlaid characters and the setting.

As for the body of Mariam which made up the plot of the novel, the writer associated it with a special body language that was in harmony with the nature, culture and environment of this character. He says, "Mariam's specter is jumping as usual; she was filling the house with energy; she was speaking, singing, pouting or screaming at anyone who talked to her or crying. She had her own tone of protest. She always faced us while she was in the middle of the stairs and you did not know whether she was going upstairs or downstairs, and the basin she used to sit around was downstairs, washing and clinking her metal utensils. The clink of these utensils was familiar to us all. She used these utensils to let off her muffled, cracked voice. She came back to her loud whisper to me that

afternoon, saying with a cheerful wink, "Saleh, I have cooked a special fish for you"<sup>(57)</sup>.

The specter of Mariam, which was engraved in the mind of Saleh and haunted the corners of their unfrequented house resembled a giant that appeared once he opened the door for the appraisers. This specter translates Mariam's innocence and spontaneity when he describes to us her voice, laughter, and singing. The writer wants to portray the hero of his novel as an epitome of life, vitality, and activity through these meaningful expressions: she jumps; she fills the house with vivaciousness; she faces us while she is at the middle of the stairs; she clinks the utensils; she never keeps silent; her loud whisper. He focused on depicting Mariam as the center of energy and noise at her house to the extent that her whisper was described as loud so that readers would have the feeling that Mariam was the embodiment of life and by killing her that life was eliminated once and for all. Thus, they sense her absence, silence, and death.

Saleh's recalling of his sister's laughs and winks completed the picture that the writer gave us about Mariam. Laughter is a symbol of vitality and openness to life, and her wink is a token of her intimacy towards her brother Saleh, for whom she cooked a special fish one day. The body language in this scene formed, entrenched and heightened his agonies and remorse"<sup>(58)</sup>.

The image of Mariam was on-again, off-again in the conscience, mind and heart of Saleh. He recalls it on every occasion, and her specter appears to him everywhere in its own language, symbols and connotations. So, he says, "Dalal is absent and the last double image comes into being. Mariam was leaning her knees against the floor, and revolved around Dalal; the rays of the winter sun were fixed on Dalal's shiny hair, and the wooden comb went through her hair, making a sound that reached my ears. I saw that Dalal's hair was an embodiment of running life, and that morning was a beautiful start for the night kiss. Oh, poor Mariam. What was the right thing to do?"<sup>(59)</sup>.

Mariam's specter remained in Saleh's mind, as he remembers her in his most detailed memories though Dalal was a private memory. But this memory is associated with Mariam's specter as well. He remembers her when she was resting on her knees and raising her body to reach the head of Dalal and comb her hair. The body language in this scene highlights Mariam's vitality and her interaction with her brother and Dalal. So, Saleh concludes the scene by letting out a groan that reminds him of his playmates and painful memories and makes him feel his unforgivable sin and say, "Oh, poor Mariam." This is a clear acknowledgment that Mariam was a victim, and this is confirmed by his interrogative sentence.

I carried it (his dog) and rushed forth; the onlookers followed me; their cries and shouts accompanied me from the moment that I carried it after it was hurt and beaten. This damn dog that I took care of let me down and wasted the efforts I made in training and preparing it for the major competition. Most of the onlookers guessed what I intended to do to it; I waded into the sea water that reached as far as my navel. I searched for a suitable spot to inundate the dog into the water. I began to feel the cold water, but this increased my fervent desire to take revenge against it. I turned it in front of me and took tight hold of its neck; its eyes were broken, and yet its looks were reassured and tranquil; I doused it in the water; it began to groan and its limbs shivered; I tightened my grip on it. I heard screams from afar; were those who were giving these screams encouraging or denouncing me? Who knows at that moment? My hands shivered, but my grip was tightened. I withdrew the dog out, and it was resigned and exhausted; drops of salty water were dripping from its eyes; I kept pushing its body down and small bubbles surrounded it. The uproar of the onlookers sent me various messages; joy was mixed with admiration, blaming, and pity. There were among them those who were just afraid for the dog; some others sympathized with it while others were exultant.

For fear that the dog's broken eyes mixed with salt water would influence me, I plunged it into water again and again; it continued to tremble, then sank and vanished. At that moment, I stopped and I let it slip off my hands. I returned rapidly to the coast. I did not speak to any one of the onlookers. Did I escape from the sea or from the dog's eyes that reminded me of those of Mariam? Years passed by, and these eyes remained in my mind, and now the eyes of Isa are chasing me when he was screaming in pain...<sup>(60)</sup>.

The writer employed the body language, the conflicting misgivings, the mental overtones and reactions and their reflection on Saleh's milieu and community when he combined two equal scenes with all their elements, including the environment, reactions, body language and their repercussions on the external and societal framework. He used convergences and simulations to represent two scenes reflecting the crisis that Saleh was suffering from and the crime he committed. The writer made the scene of getting rid of the dog that Saleh trained extensively and then let him down at the showdown an objective equivalent of the scene of the killing of Mariam. The elements of the scene of eliminating the dog evoked that of killing Mariam with all its details, including the body language, apprehensions, emotions, astonishment and the absence of the human side. The two incidents reflected Saleh's baseness and cruelty. The well-trained dog let him down at the showdown after he pinned his hopes on it. He was surprised by his dog when it retreated and got scared. Likewise, he and

Isa assumed that Mariam forsook and brought down shame upon them. Hence, the inevitable end of the dog and Mariam was loss of life.

The use of the body language in the two scenes underlines the mental state of Saleh and his reaction at the moment of his dog's disappointment and retreat. His agitation and carrying the injured dog to the sea are tantamount to his rush to help his brother Isa in killing Mariam after Isa provoked his masculinity and manhood. He was full of burning rage and was toddling into the cold sea water which was supposed to extinguish his blazing feeling. The irony here was that the cold water fueled his impulsiveness.

The writer uses the body language to represent this tragic scene at the time of killing. He turned the dog in front of him, and it looked at him with tranquility and resignation. This scene parallels Mariam's indifference when Isa called out to her; she stopped washing her dishes and shook water off her hands, and then turned towards him with all submission just. She expected that Isa would tell her off for something she failed to do as usual, and it did not occur to her that he intended to kill her. Similarly, the dog looked at its honest owner with tranquility and submission because it thought that it was in safe hands. It was totally unaware of what these two hands would do to it. Saleh began carrying out his crime and immersed the dog into the water until it groaned. This scene resembles the scene of Isa's attempt to kill Mariam, when he pressed his hands around her neck. She resisted and so did the dog, but they both failed in the face of the malice and tyranny of the barbarous killer.

A crowd of onlookers followed Saleh to the sea to observe the incident from afar, which indicated their passivity and marginality. They gave their screams which were encouraging, approving or denouncing his act. The crowds that followed Saleh refer to the Kuwaiti society. Their screams that reached Saleh's ears were variant in their aims. Were these voices as denouncing, encouraging, or approving as the views of the members of the Kuwaiti community about honor cases and their relevant crimes? Some members of this society support and encourage these crimes because the concept of honor is still dominant. Another group of them condemn such crimes and reject them outright, but they are incapable of declaring their position. Moreover, their voices go unheard in the face of this oppressive society that is governed by distorted perceptions and beliefs. Sadly, those distorted perceptions are utilized to judge people outwardly and blindly, and the resultant decisions are based on rage and impetuosity. Consequently, the balance is tilted in favor of the most powerful side.

The writer concludes with the final implementation stage. The zero hour arrived. Saleh wants to accomplish the task before the voice of conscience overcomes that of savagery and before he is influenced by the dog's submissive,

imploring, fearful looks which were blended with salty water. Such salty water with which the dog's eyes were inundated is similar to the tears of sorrow and grief that came from Mariam's eyes. The tears of sorrow are acidic and thus, differ in their constitution from the tears of joy. Saleh submerged the dog three times until it breathed its last breath. At that moment he released his grip and let its dead body sink. That scene is similar to that of Isa's fingers that encircled Mariam's neck, suffocated her to death and turned into a lifeless body. As for Saleh's hastening to the coast and escaping from the scene of his crime, himself, his conscience, his humanity and the eyes of his dog, it is equivalent to his departure from his town and homeland and his aimless moving from one country to another. All this was the aim of getting away from his conscience, his crime and the eyes and specter of Mariam, all of which chased and disturbed him all his life. In both cases of departure he maintained silence.

### **Conclusion:**

The writer presented us with a narrative text that carries many signs and overtones through its characters, events and paradoxes. He delved into the human psyche to highlight for us its hidden relationships, distortions and components through narration and its techniques. He wanted to show us the dominance and influence of customs, norms and traditions and their impacts on the Gulf community in general and the Kuwaiti society in particular.

"Extending Silence" is a novel that gets us to ask the following questions: why silence? and in whose favour is this silence?; and to what extent will it end? It is an implicit call for revolutionizing the beliefs and obsessions that social concepts and norms implanted in the human psyches, and which mutilated souls, poisoned relations, and led to deviations, wrongdoing, and criminality.

This work of fiction focuses specifically on women and their status within their families and societies and lays the foundation for multidimensional significant questions such as the question: does the woman possess her body?

## الجسد الأنثوي بين الاستيلاء والاستبداد في رواية سليمان الشّطيّ

"يمتدّ الصمت" ، "القراءة السيمائية"

ختام الخولي، جامعة الكويت.

### ملخص

تتناول هذه الورقة ظاهرة الاستيلاء والاستبداد في وجه الجسد الأنثوي في رواية "تمديد الصمت" للروائي الكويتي سليمان الشطي. وتعتمد على المنهج التحليلي الذي يشمل العناصر التالية: دلالة العنوان، والمرأة السلطوية، والمرأة المضطهدة، وسيميائية الجسد. يناقش الظواهر الرئيسية التي تبرز الرواية. فيما يتعلق بدلالة العنوان، فهو عنصر فعال يُظهر موضوع الصمت الذي يمتد في جميع أنحاء الرواية ويصبح عنصراً مهيمناً في فضاء النص السردي.

كان الاستيلاء والاستبداد والقمع والجسد واضحاً في وضعهم البائس الذي كشفت فيه ازواجية الذكورة والأنوثة عن الاضطهاد الهائل الذي مرت به المرأة في مجتمع يخضع لقيود اجتماعية وثقافية. تعكس المرأة في هذه الرواية مواقف مهمة ضمن أطرها الاجتماعية واليومية والأدبية. لقد تم اختزالها إلى مجرد كائن، وغير قادرة على التعبير عن مشاعرها وأحاسيسها، أو الاستيلاء على جسدها وروحها، والتي هي ملكية حصرية لثقافة تعسفية وملكية.

تبرز العلامات المادية في الرواية وتشكل لغة إضافية ترتبط بالإشارات اللفظية. تم تحويل الجسد إلى مجموعة من العلامات السيميائية التي كشفت عن وجهات نظر الشخصيات وخصائصها المميزة. وكذلك واقع المرأة في المجتمع العربي وما تعانيه في حياتها اليومية. المرأة هي مجرد تابع للرجل فيما يتعلق بسلطة المجتمع الأبوي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستيلاء، الاستبداد، الجسد، المؤنث، الصمت، يمتد.

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