

# Migrating through Cultures, Deconstructing Masculinities and Gender Identities in Modern Islamic Literature

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## Abstract

Matters arising around feminism, sexualities and masculinities, male dominance and hierarchies, gender identities and the configuration of patriarchy in religion and literature have constituted some major trends in modern women's writings, particularly women's writings in the Islamic enclave. This work probes the motifs of women's marginalisation, cultural masculinities, and gender constructions as they affect some selected modern Islamic fictions around the world. The work utilises Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction to delineate and redefine women's subjugation and freedom by foregrounding the political, cultural, social, and moral elements redefining the pragmatic Islamic societies arising from technology. Constant division and the discriminatory roles assigned to women in the Islamic enclave have had some negative influences in literature, which can be found in some analyses of Frantz Fanon's works and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. These discriminatory and divisible roles for women can sometimes have negative cultural and social implications for an economic and political understanding of Islamic literature. This work reconfigures and redefines gender performance, masculinities, and Islamic metaphysics in the selected Islamic fictional works of Saudi Rajaa Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh*, Sudanese Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* and Kuwaiti Randa Jarrar's *Map of Home*.

**Keywords:** feminism; gender; masculinities; deconstruction; Muslim literature

## Introduction

Different Islamic religious writings have critically discussed the weaknesses and strengths of both Muslim women and men and have grossly affected literatures which emanated from these enclaves, particularly in Africa and among the Arabs. Moreover, Islamic religious writings vary “from one society to another” and are “noted for the complexity of culture and the contradictions created on differences in women’s oppression” (Nkealah 2009, 28; see also, El-Solh and Mabro 1994, 2; Kolawole 1997, 11). In most Islamic societies, the motifs of sexualities, masculinities, gender identities and male hierarchies in social and political lives are very sensitive and complex because the Islamic religion gave some leverage to men and made them superior entities in most interactions with women, as enshrined in some sections of the Qur’an, with reference to Verse 36 beginning in *Surat 3*. In most Islamic cultures, the philosophical belief in nature and some projected evidence of order and design in the reconstruction of various roles assigned to men and women were frequently emphasised. Also, Islamic traditions place particular emphasis on selected uses of language, behaviour and disposition, which are constantly projected in the mode of dressing and public show. That is why Nkealah admits that we should not ignore the different social realities that inform the creativity of Muslim women; at the same time, it should be noted that the writings of Muslim women sometimes lend credence to those weaknesses and strengths and also explore various challenges women face in their own societies. Moreover, women’s writings in this situation attempt to articulate the problems they face in many aspects of life, such as in civil societies, marriage, childbearing and childrearing, and in their other contacts with men, such as employment etc. (Nkealah 2009, 28).

The preoccupation of this article is to examine some of these realities by deconstructing the motif of masculinity, which axiomatically lends credence to some specific behavioural tendencies physically and socially displayed by men, and also to examine how gender identities and configurations were displayed where women’s complacency and subservience were expected. For a proper understanding of Islamic women’s writings, feminist writers assume that if the gender binary is revised, multiplicities of meanings arising in the understanding of women’s rights and roles could be made more applicable to contemporary societies and their significance more overt.

## Derrida and the Concept of Deconstruction: A New Direction for Muslim Women

Derrida’s method of deconstruction is deeply rooted in the concept of materiality, textuality, history, and multiplicities of meaning, which feminists and women writers frequently use in their works. However, the manner in which Derrida’s thinking places the term “woman” has generated a lot of debate among feminist critics. Some feminist critics believe that Derrida’s deconstruction does not appreciate the place of women in his various assumptions. Teresa de Lauretis, for example, argues that deconstruction erases the “embodied subjects” of women by not appropriating a proper place for her in her space (de Lauretis 1984, 4). Papadelos in his writings observes that Derrida creates

the image of “neutralised sexual difference” (Papadelos 2006, 5) when he fails to explain the proper classification of women with reference to deconstruction. What both feminist critics are saying is that Derrida’s failure to address sexual difference makes women inferior objects that are of no significance (Papadelos 2006, 76).

In contrast, some feminists are not comfortable with Derrida’s concept of “no origin” or a “fixed centre” in his explanation of language and its meaning. They are not comfortable with the idea that language does not reflect coherent meaning (Papadelos 2006, 77). They view these assumptions with great concern because they believe that meaning is the effect of language. Derrida believes that no element of discourse can have any meaning in itself, because meaning is only possible through “the inter-significative relationship” that exists between the elements (Derrida 1982, 17). These relationships are intricate, and the elements are chains of signification that denote that meaning is not independent. Flax (1990, 12) observes that the concept of woman has no meaning for Derrida, and at the same time she is not independent because she relies on other elements in the chain of signification.

Similarly, a radical change can occur when the process of displacement takes place and binary logic is transformed. Derrida supports the view that “sexual difference is determined by opposition in the dialectical sense, one appears to set off the war between the sexes but one precipitates the end with victory going to the masculine sex” (Derrida 1981, 16). By so doing, the metaphysics of presence has predetermined Being; consequently, it is necessary for feminism to displace phallogocentrism and constantly displace any dominant discourse, so that it is not a matter of replacing one dominant discourse with another. Similarly, Kristeva, in her paper entitled “Women’s Time,” observes that while women vie for equality with men, Derrida’s metaphysics of presence is a relegation of women and attempts to weaken women’s struggle (Kristeva 1986, 14). She continues that many things fall under binary thinking, whether an attempt by women to strive for equality or their attempts to claim their inalienable rights from their male counterparts. She recommends a readoption of dichotomies such as identities/difference, masculine/feminine to substantiate binary replacement, which will favour the woman and restructure her being in the hierarchical placement (1986, 17). However, Kristeva’s submission is not new to Derrida as he recognises the binary representation in feminism, but nevertheless projects some categories of women as undecidable. This has generated a lot of criticism from feminists who feel that this statement is a relegation of the image and status of women. Although Derrida believes that feminism works in opposition to deconstruction, he does not outright condemn feminism, because he believes that though feminism is necessary, feminist activities are basically a recurring repetition of the past (Derrida et al. 1985, 29–30). Some feminists, such as Kristeva, accept the position that they should attempt to rethink their premises so as not to go on repeating the past endlessly; however, critics like Drucilla Cornell and Elisabeth Gross hold a contrary view, arguing that when the infrastructure is displaced there will not be anything like repeating the past, which Derrida holds

fastidiously to, and this new development will prepare women for a challenging future (Kristeva 1986, 87).

### Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity and Gender Performance

The idea of performativity in gender and the feminist tradition places more emphasis on the woman's "being," which is most essential and integral to the socio-psychological understanding of women. Performativity in gender, therefore, is a product of "being" and not of "sex" and the "body," which have been the preoccupation of extant literature inherited from the colonial dispensation in Africa. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler criticises some existing feminist theories and suggests that issues surrounding women should be accorded a proper appraisal. In the analysis of the place of women, she asserts that the "unproblematic unity" of women evokes a "solidarity of identity," which leads to a distinction between sex and gender. For her, gender is a creation of "sexed bodies." She rejects the concept of oppression in place of new ideas that better explain identity configuration and gender. In her discussions of various categorisations of gender and sex, she prefers the "performative" aspect rather than "the illusory" aspect, which is found in Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir's phallogocentric view of women in contemporary literature.

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler questions,

If gender is a construction, must there be an "I" or a "We" who enacts or performs that construction? How can there be an activity, a constructing, without presupposing an agent who precedes and performs that activity? How would we account for the motivation and direction of construction without such a subject? As a rejoinder, I would suggest that it takes a certain suspicion toward grammar to reconceive the matter in a different light. (Butler 1993, 7)

She continues that, "if gender is constructed, it is not necessarily constructed by an 'I' or 'We' which stands before it in any spatial or temporal sense" (Butler 1993, 7).

According to Butler, "gendered bodies or features" is what postcolonial African and Arab literatures attempt to examine. This aforementioned factor is an "attribute which facilitates the field of discourse and power that orchestrates, delineates and sustains that which qualifies human activities" (Butler 1993, 8). However, in most African communities, family inheritances are handed down from generation to generation to male children. Butler's *Gender Trouble* underscores the configuration of gender perceptions about the pre-patriarchal state, which could not justify cordial relationships among men and women. However, the pre-patriarchal period could not emphasise the performative aspect of gender and this situation led to some internal reactions among women which she regards as "internalized prohibition" (1993, 8). The effects of the display of gender also lead to what she regards as "cultural melancholy," which is a portrayal of sorrow among the victims (1993, 70). She presents "gender identification" as something that shows the degrees of segregation African women sometimes

experience (1993, 63), which could occur in contemporary African society. Butler's point is that the pre-patriarchal state does not recognise the performativity of gender. Rather, the period recognises the act of gender identification and classification into various forms. The situation has led to the creation of artificial metaphors that many critics transfer from one level to the other. However, artificial metaphors are said to be a display of "illusion" that is not "performative," because of the role which the male gender sets out to play—the role of limitation which demonstrates the socio-economic importance of the female gender (Butler 1990, 10).

In *Exciting Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), Butler redirects her interest to the different allocations of language use and their specific application in the formation of values that do not promote performative elements, like the "injurious speech" which is fixed. By implication, she implies that one is not fixed by the name that s/he is called. In being called an injurious name, one could be derogated and demeaned. "But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call" (1997, 17). For Butler, the reconfiguration of these experiences could possibly be regarded as "rituals," because if "the temporality of linguistic convention, considered as ritual, exceeds the instances of its utterance, and that excess is not fully capturable or identifiable (the past and future of the utterance cannot be narrated with any certainty) then it seems that part of what constitutes the 'total speech situation' is a failure to achieve a totalized form" (1997, 17). The quest for protest and the ability to compel society are among the crises she attempts to demonstrate when she says that "every society is subject to crises" (1997, 5). This situation emphasises the fundamental relationship which can be found among people of different places and languages. According to Butler, "[t]o be addressed injuriously is not only to be open for an unknown future, but not to know the time and place of injury, and to suffer the disorientation of one's situation as the effect of such speech" (Butler 1997, 4). However, in *Precarious Life* (2004a), Butler views the effects of violence on society. "She observes that there is always a course for retaliation when pushed to the wall" (Ogunyemi 2014, 51). As mentioned in the article "The Configuration of Gender and Identity in Nigerian Literature" (Ogunyemi 2014), the opinion here is that human beings fail to accept their own fault on most occasions; rather, they see the perpetrators of outside aggression as "terrorists." The observation here is that "[w]e do not, however, take the signs of destroyed life and decimated peoples as something for which we are responsible, or indeed understand that decimation works to confirm the United States as performing atrocities" (Butler 2004b, 6). The United States of America is viewed in this context and also denoted as that which represents violence in a larger society (Ogunyemi 2014, 52).

So, for Butler identities are illusory social perspectives and projections that are constructed in society. Oyeniyi, on the other hand, in "Dress and Identity in Yorubaland, 1880–1980" (2012), states that identity is a conceptual phenomenon that incorporates both sociological and psychological perceptions about society. This means that the

representation of different identities is an attempt to describe the distinct personality of a group of people or individuals and their characteristic behaviours as well. Likewise, the concept of identity consolidates the social construction of the individual and the group and these manifest in various ways (2012, 14–15). Oyeniyi's taxonomy of identity encompasses cultural, religious, and ethnic imperatives, which are also embodiments of the collective memory of the Yoruba people in Nigeria. This taxonomy tellingly excludes gender and also transgendering, which Butler ascribes to those persons who cross-identify or who live as another gender, but who may or may not have undergone hormonal treatments or sex reassignment operations. Butler (2004b, 4) further explains that among transsexuals and transgendered individuals, there are those who identify as men or women and there are others who in the long run identify as trans, transmen or transwomen; however, these social practices carry distinct social burdens and promises. Notwithstanding, "transgender" can apply to the entire range of these positions as well.

Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005) is a moral and philosophical re-evaluation of values that are cultural and heritage relating to morality, where morality is accepted as a way of life. Butler suggests some level of punishment for anybody who indulges in moral breakdown, referring to both "Nietzsche's account of punishment" and "Foucault's account of disciplinary power in the prison" (2005, 15), which justifies an excellent way of behaviour because "bad conscience" cannot "manufacture good values" (16).

The performative drama is examined in Butler's *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (2013), where she views the plight of those who have lost everything in their lives to societal dispossession. "[L]ost things include cultural rights, citizenships, properties and personal possessions to the powers that be" (2013, 14). Some African women have lost their possessions in the course of being mothers and wives in different societies. But the need for reorientation of marriages and family settings could reposition African women in the proper place. Butler again clarifies what gender means from the performative perspective: it is not a stable identity or an act where various acts are seen. It is preoccupation in time and space, a "crystallized repetition of acts," where the totality of the body is a realisation of a bodily style that could be demonstrated from the various performative acts of gestural movements and various kinds of enactments. She diverts from Simone de Beauvoir's appropriation of gender for the phenomenological tradition, which treats gender as a "stable identity" (Butler 1988, 519). According to Butler, gender cannot be limited to an ordinary substantial model with a temporal image, but is an act that is internally constituted and a constructed identity that is performed over time. Gender transformation is arbitrary in nature because the constituting act is only the performance of the actor. Gender identities are performative realisations that are forced by social activity. However, feminist theory often projects the naturalistic explanations of sex and sexuality to denote that feminine existence can be attributed to the African woman's physiology.

The phenomenologists view sex as that which resides in the body. Simone de Beauvoir shares the same view in *The Second Sex* (1949) by saying that “woman,” and by extension “gender,” is an historical fact rather than natural. Although both de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty understand the body as a vehicle for the realisation of cultural and historical embodiments, Butler moves a step further in examining the performative acts of gender and the possibility of generating cultural transformation through these acts. The historical possibility of the body is what Merleau-Ponty sees as that which explains the historical expression of the world. The body is an entity which signifies the appearance of the world and the perceptions of understanding in the world. The body is not projected as self-identical but is material through which meaning is achieved. For Butler, the body is an embodiment of possibilities that are both conditioned and historically conventional since it consists of intentionally organised materials that are not externally created. Some of the structures of the embodiments of the body are seen in the act of dramatising and reproducing actions. However, doing gender is not a matter of the exterior, but a perception that manifests strategies, which Jean Paul Sartre refers to as style of being or Michel Foucault regards as the “stylistic of existence” (Butler 1988, 520). It means that style itself is not a self-styled phenomenon; it has history which conditions its history and therefore limits its possibilities. Gender is “corporeal” and an “act” because it brings into existence the intentional being and the performative activities that give it dual meaning “of dramatic and non-preferentiality” (1988, 520).

## Deconstructing Masculinities and Gender Configurations in Women’s Writing

In the Islamic world, most women’s writings protest against social violence and moral inequality, aggressive distinctions between male/female responsibilities and patriarchal power being exercised against women in their social and political space. Nkealah views the consequence of masculinities and patriarchy, as a result of which, through the “passage of time,” the woman “has come to accept her dissatisfaction as a norm, and that acceptance becomes for her a coping mechanism in the sense that it shields her from the disappointment often resulting from the disparity between expectation and outcome” (Nkealah 2009, 30). Similarly, Owen Anderson Brittan, in his dissertation titled “British Masculinities Beyond Patriarchy” (2017), contends that for a proper understanding of masculinities and gender configuration, there is a need to understand that there are different masculinities within cultures and societies. He further asserts, drawing on Butler, that “studying masculinity challenges the assumptions that gender is timeless and unproblematic while questioning the universality of the roles, attributes, and comportments socially specified as ‘masculine’” (Brittan 2017, 2). Brittan emphatically submits that “gender is a powerful aspect of individual and collective identity, along with classifications, such as class, occupation, sexuality, and ethnicity, among others” (2017, 2). However, Joanne Britton, in “Muslim Men, Racialised Masculinities and Personal Life” (2018), valorises the “understanding of changing gender and generational relations in Muslim families and shifting masculine roles and identities

which further reveals how various experiences of racialization practiced impact on their personal lives within the private spaces of home and family” (2018, 2). Consequently, women’s writings have demonstrated so many possibilities, particularly the need to reinterpret works, represent women’s plight and reinternalise her existence.

To show the masculine roles, sexuality and racialisation, the Senegalese Mariama Bâ’s *So Long A Letter* ([1979] 2012) showcases women’s marital experiences in Africa, Islamic metaphysics, widowhood and women’s liberation. Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret* examines the experience of a female protagonist who relocates from Sudan to Britain in search of peace and tranquillity, as well as the experience of an Orthodox Muslim woman in the hands of patriarchy. Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* (2003), which is set in Afghanistan and California, provides a framework for Afghanistan after the Cold War, women enslavement, ethnic aggrandisement and immigration experiences in the United States. Mohsin Hamid’s *Moth Smoke* (2000) visualises Islamic metaphysics and ethnic Pakistani imperatives with mystic tradition embedded in the collective memory of the people, while women and men continue to be genderised. Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000), which has London as its setting, is a projection of the wild lives of Jamaican and Bengali characters that are intertwined with those of English white men and women. The fiction raises some questions about the Islamic faith, Islamic men and women, Islamic values, and family co-existence in vertical and horizontal perspectives in literature.

Randa Jarrar’s *A Map of Home*, set in Kuwait, Egypt and Texas in America, provides a typical experience of men and women as a result of the First Gulf War, which leads to some domestic breakdowns, the exploration of sexualities, sex and masturbation among an Arab family. Cheikh Hamidou Kene’s *Ambiguous Adventure* (1961), set in Senegal and France, probes real Islamic metaphysics and gender performativity, which leads to freedom for women and men. It explores the experience of a young man who strives assiduously in his Quranic education and has a breakthrough in secular academics. G Willow Wilson’s *Alif the Unseen* (2012), with its setting in the Middle East, examines the protagonist’s mixed-race, Islamic co-existence and hawking fantasies, particularly as the discourse of the novel affects women and their gender portrayal. The Moroccan Laila Lalami’s *Secret Son* (2009) is an eye-opener on the experiences of the poor and various Islamic influences on that enclave. Orhan Pamuk’s *My Name is Red* (2001) is a Turkish, Nobel Prize-winning novel that reflects the evil, murder, and mystery of the miniaturists of the Ottoman Empire and Islamic cultural influences on both men and women that leave everyone genderised. The Turkish Tahmima Anam’s *The Good Muslim* (2011) is an ironic Islamic novel that showcases a sudden change in a female medical doctor as a result of the 1971 Bangladeshi war with Pakistan. She becomes a religious leader in the wake of Islamic subversion, women’s oppression, etc. Michael Muhammad Knight’s *The Taqwacores* (2004), set in Buffalo, New York, relays the experiences of Pakistani Americans and the influence of Westernisation on Islamic cultural heritage. Rajaa Alsanea’s *Girls of Riyadh* (2007), which centres on four women in Saudi Arabia, their marriages and sex lives, visualises a high level of pretence among

some Islamic women and provides expositions on Islamic sex, prostitution and women's predicaments. Although the novel was banned in Saudi Arabia, it achieved a lot of literary success in the configuration of Islamic literature. Craig Thompson's *Habibi* (2011), with its fictional setting in Wantolia, is a pointer to the motif of mythology, epistemology and metaphysics of Islam. Roles of men and women were also fictionalised.

## Women's Fictions: Aboulela, Alsanea and Jarrar Exploring Masculinities and Identities

Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005), Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* (2007) and Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008) probe succinctly into issues that have to do with social terrorism, configurations of class and identity, women wearing the hijab, strict religious behaviour, and sex in the city, which some critics described as "Islamic sex" (Britton 2019, 42).

To start with, Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005) captures knowledge and freedom in the religious and political postcolonial Sudan. The plot, divided into six parts, revolves round Najwa, Omar, Anwar, Tamer, and other minor characters. The major preoccupation in the novel is anchored around class stratification and religious bigotry. Love and hatred become the other main theme. The novel probes sensitive issues with regards to the struggles of females in both familiar and unfamiliar settings, wherever they find themselves—from Sudan to England and Scotland. According to Sara Al-Asmakh, *Minaret* concentrates on "major cultural settings that are the postcolonial fragmented culture of Sudan and multiculturalism that is experienced in the West (England and Scotland). Also, the cultural aspects that are presented in the novel define the characters and characterizations and play a major role in their identity formation, and most importantly in their identity crises" (2009, 4). The novel celebrates religious pretences and aristocracy among the higher class in Khartoum, while women and children, who are the underprivileged, suffer negligence. The novel's portrayal of Islam is stereotypic and the use of hijab as an indicator of Muslim identity among women lends credence to some kind of fundamentalism. The novel explores the division between colonialism and postcolonialism.

In the novel, colonialism is of cardinal interest; it denotes the colonisers imposing their cultures and ideologies on the natives in place of their existing norms. In this context, there is a genderisation of male natives when the colonisers impose their cultural hierarchies to replace what the natives already know. In that situation, the servant and master motives emerge from the display of masculinities. From the postcolonial perspective, aristocratic tendencies also emerged with the embezzlement of funds perpetuated by corrupt politicians in Sudan and the subsequent coup d'état which ended that era. Minorities that form the government use the Islamic religion as tool of exploitation against the weak and the oppressed in society. Women are flagrantly disadvantaged in this situation because the male minority had already occupied the super structure and the vacuum created by the colonisers in Sudan. Levels of identity emerged.

In terms of male reconstructed identity, there is now identity formation, identity crisis, identity loss, and cultural destabilisation whenever women come in contact with their fellow Islamic men. Also, the use of masculine language denotes a class division and class polarisation put in place in Sudan to cause friction. The fact that Omar, Najwa's twin brother, goes to prison for 15 years in England for trying to kill a police officer who wanted to arrest him shows that nothing special should be accorded the male child, as is constantly practised by Africans and Arabs. Superiority cannot be accorded to any particular sex, since gender is an artificial creation.

Consequently, Najwa, the female protagonist, resists vehemently cultural slavery and domination while at work with her employer, Lamya, and her other colleagues. Even when she tries a new relationship with Termer, she redesigns and reinterprets such a relationship and constantly has problems with people. This is axiomatic in the words of Derrida, as texts cannot be perceived as discrete wholes because they contain "some certain irreconcilable and contradictory meanings" (Derrida 2013, 41). As he says, "these texts link these interpretations inextricably and the incompatibility of these interpretations is irreducible, therefore an interpretative reading cannot go beyond a certain point" (Derrida 1981, 10). The female protagonist attempts various interpretations to re-evaluate different deconstructed masculinities in order to enhance a gender balance which is free of bias, that is, to be performative, in the words of Butler.

Rajaa Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* (2007) is a radical and revolutionary piece of writing that exposes both the good and the bad activities going on in Saudi Arabia. The work is not a one-sided report of a feminist writer who wants a drastic and dynamic change in the aspects of pretences and Islamic fundamentalism. The work lends credence to a desire, which might be interpreted as perverted, by college girls for exuberance, to explore love and be loved in the midst of Islamic culture and its influence on people. Critics have often remarked that most works of Islamic women are geared towards effecting radical change and providing total freedom or liberation for women (Al-Asmakh 2009; Brittan 2017; Britton 2019; Nkealah 2009). The novel uses emotional configurations to delineate the oppression of women and the masculine tendencies ravaging the psychological and sociological understanding of the Saudi man. It posits the need to create a new ideological paradigm for all people to be unified without any iota of fundamentalism, which has preoccupied the Saudi geo-political locale. Set to explore the experience of four college girls and their contacts with their men, the novel takes a new approach and departs from the traditional novelistic Aristotelian plot structure, which provides a rendition with a beginning, middle and end, because Alsanea uses the email system in rendering her story and explaining the various trends that inform her plot.

Traumatised by religion and culture, the author exposes masculinities and gender configurations through different ways, such as the traumatic experience of Sadeem, who out of religious bigotry divorces his wife for showing boldness and requesting sex. This action is portrayed as ridiculous and ironic in modern literature. There is also the sad

discovery of Qamra that Rashed, her husband, who took her to the United States after the solemnisation of their wedding, is still in an active love affair with his Japanese mistress; this lands her a divorce and she returns to Saudi Arabia pregnant. Further, Mashael is refused a wedding because she is not seen as marriage material as her mother was an American. These examples are all symptoms of Islamic heresy being practised by some Saudi natives and it becomes obvious that Alsanea is critical of the instrument of oppression used by men to make women perpetually silent. This problem and a plethora of others are evident in many Islamic women's writings, according to Naomi Nkealah:

The voices of Muslim women writers, although modulated into differing tones and varying pitches, constitute a harmonious blend of sound that is perceived as a heartrending song, the "scarlet song" (Ba 1986) of women's marginalization. Woman's lot in a patriarchal culture is the theme that runs through Muslim women's writing. Nawal el-Saadawi of Egypt, Mariama Bâ of Senegal and Zaynab Alkali of Nigeria are three prominent writers who have addressed the problems and challenges facing Muslim women in Africa. Although all three writers are concerned with the status of woman. (Nkealah 2009, 29)

The problems facing Muslim women were largely ascribed to the patriarchal tradition and the imposition of masculine tendencies, which they now reject in contemporary literature. To push this further, Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* throws a searchlight of protest and ironical indictment on the evils associated with masculinities and excessive male desires, which are associated with the Palestinian-Israeli wars that made many people homeless, and Saddam Hussein's inordinate political ambition that rocked the Iranian crisis and caused the mass relocation of refugees to Kuwait and other neighbouring countries. Masculinities and excessive male dominance in all aspects of life are largely viewed as behaviours constantly practised by men. The novel, *A Map of Home*, is a family story largely tied together by the first-person narrator, Nidali, celebrating various encounters from Kuwait to Egypt and finally to Texas. The family ties and masculinities cause Asiyanbola to remark that the

roles of men in the family are closely linked to the attributes of masculinity (Silvia, 1999). Studies on masculinity, mostly from the developed countries have revealed about five important conclusions (Short, 1996): that masculinity is not a biological category as much as a social construct subject to change, revision and multiple representations; that masculinity is not fixed, it is a relational, constantly shifting attribute defined in relation to the feminine; that masculinity is a site of interconnection and tension with other sources of social differentiation; that masculinity is both lived and imagined desires; and that masculinity is not only socially constructed and reconstructed. (Asiyanbola 2005, 4)

However, "social differentiation" is constantly exemplified in the different contexts in which women come into contact with men. Although the novel is an autobiographical rendition of a character, it dovetails to expose and satirise the evils of war, identity, cultural crises, male impositions, family suffering and poverty. The role of Baba, the

Palestinian father of Nidali, and Mama, her Egyptian mother, is to justify cultural unification and love, despite their differences in countries of origin, cultures, and languages. Literature, in this context, has been used to challenge and correct many anomalies ravaging most male-dominated societies. Consequently, Rice and Waugh maintain that literature “may challenge, reflect, refract, mediate, break up, defamiliarise, distance from, expose contradictions in and/or reinforce ideology” (2001, 104). According to Alexander Kure, however, “[l]iterature has always been put at an uncomfortable defensive as to its essence in the trajectory of human development” (2010, 81). He notes “the shift in human perceptions based on the various changes that have been brought to bear on the course of human development in the last quarter of the last century” (2010, 81).

Aboulela’s *Minaret*, Alsanea’s *Girls of Riyadh*, and Jarra’s *A Map of Home* put up a radical defence and revolutionary force against cultural and social dominance by depicting female protagonists at various stages to create new norms and values for an egalitarian society. That is why Butler rejects the concept of oppression and proposes new ideas which better explain identity configuration and gender. In her conceptions of different categorisations of sex and gender, she opines that the “performative” is preferred over “the illusory” perspective, which is the major preoccupation in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex* and Sigmund Freud’s perception that the clitoris is a little penis. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler prompts us to consider, “[i]f gender is a construction, must there be an ‘I’ or a ‘We’ who enacts or performs that construction? How can there be an activity, a constructing, without presupposing an agent who precedes and performs that activity? How would we account for the motivation and direction of construction without such a subject?” (Butler 1993, 7). She continues, “if gender is constructed, it is not necessarily constructed by an ‘I’ or ‘We’ which stands before it in any spatial or temporal sense” (1993, 7).

## Summary and Conclusion

It is expedient to note that, though many orientations constitute the feminist framework, most feminists would not want to reverse the binary placements (with women now on top). Rather, most would like to contribute to the creation of conditions for the equality of the sexes in literature and society. Butler’s challenges to sex/gender categorisation have really helped in the application of the theory of gender performativity to the selected female writings. Derrida’s deconstruction, which recognises binary representations in feminism, has greatly propelled women’s writings and the development of modern Muslim women’s writings around the world. Deconstruction, therefore, created some room for meanings to be deconstructed, interpreted and reinterpreted, and has aided the understanding of texts and intertextual analysis in African and Arab literature and religion.

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