



RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Hanan Al-Shaykh, Emily Nasrallah, and Ghada Al-Samman's perceptions of masculinity crisis

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ABSTRACT

The present study tackles the crisis of masculinity as depicted in several Arabic novels written by prominent female authors, including Hanan Al-Shaykh, Emily Nasrallah, and Ghada Al-Samman. It highlights that the masculinity crisis is not limited to men alone, but is closely and profoundly connected to women, their position in society, and the way they are perceived. Since masculinity and femininity are deeply intertwined, the crisis of masculinity can be understood through the dynamics of the man-woman relationship. Accordingly, the present study builds upon the central premise that there is a causal link between the crisis of masculinity and violence against women in all its forms and dimensions. It explores how this crisis serves as a primary contributor to the challenges and issues women face.

The study examines the crisis of masculinity from two main perspectives. The first perspective is related to its relation to the issue of honor, which places the burden of upholding it on women. The second perspective is related to the obsession with controlling and illuminating women as a reflection of masculine insecurity within the socio-cultural Arab context.

KEYWORDS: crisis, masculinity, women's issues, honor killing, freedom, control, illumination

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Introduction

The crisis of masculinity in contemporary Arab narratives is an issue that is intertwined with other social issues. It is a living issue that cannot be studied in depth unless it is considered in its living intertwinement with the issues of women and society in general, that is, its human dimension. Contemporary Arab narratives have dealt with the crisis of masculinity from multiple perspectives, clearly highlighting the forms of intertwining with women's issues within the broader human sphere. For instance, Najib Mahfoudh, Fathi Ghanim, Tayeb Salih, and Zakaria Tamir depicted the harsh suffering of women in the Arab society out of the crisis of masculinity (Al-nabulsi, 1991). In some other novels, there are depictions of the struggle to break the norms that shackle women and condemn them to inferiority linked to male supremacy. Among these novels, for example, are *I am Free* by Ihsan Abdulquddous, *I Live* by Layla Al-Baalbaki, and *Days with Him* by Colette Khouri (Abdulquddous, 1955; Khouri, 1959; Al-Baalbaki, 1985). In a number of his short stories, Mikha'il Naima included images of the injustice that befalls women as daughters, wives, mothers, and grandmothers. Through his heroines, he introduced words that call for the removal of oppression from women and for granting them their rights in society (Abu Jahjaha, 1985). This injustice can only be shaped from the perspective of a man's behavior, which is based on some crisis.

In parallel with the crisis of masculinity, Hanna Mina, Tawfiq Al-Hakim, Fathi Ghanim, and Abdullah Al-Tawkhi pushed women toward the social change that is necessary to improve their status (Al-Nabulsi, 1991). In a similar style, Tayeb Salih portrayed women in various social positions, narrating their evolutionary journey and their pursuit of advancement, in contrast to the general behavior of men (Ibrahim, 1997). As for Abdulrahman Munif, he addressed this crisis in connection with the affairs of Arab women and other social phenomena. He did not attempt to extract its issues from the general social and cultural fabric for the purpose of studying them independently. He presented them in all their entanglements and complexities.

Other novelists addressed women's issues related to the crisis of masculinity in their novels, almost exclusively focusing on women's affairs. Among these novels are, *Naphthalene Grains*, *The Blue Eggplant*, *The Circle's Dot*, *The Gazelle's Musk*, *The Devil's Horse*, and many others (Al-Shaykh, 1975; Al-Shaykh, 1996; Aalya, 2000). It appears that the crisis of masculinity is intertwined with women's issues in these narratives. In turn, both men and women are the Arab man and woman with all their issues, concerns, pains, and ambitions. The present study starts from this idea to crystallize its problem, represented by the causal link between the crisis of masculinity and violence against women in all its dimensions, arriving at its hypothesis that violence against women is the inevitable result of the crisis of masculinity. Therefore, any discussion of the crisis of masculinity is a discussion of women's issues, since this crisis is the primary driver of women's problems and issues. This connection leads to a universal human dimension. The human dimension of this phenomenon takes it beyond its individual framework. It can only be deeply understood within the framework of its integration with other social phenomena. This vision strongly requires adopting the structuralist, generative approach, following the vision of Lucien Goldmann, to conduct the study. This approach is based on holism in its view of the world. Thus, it is based on the phenomenological doctrine, which holds that individual phenomena can only be tangibly understood within a framework of total homogeneity. It is also based on the potential for multiple meanings in the text awareness of the world. From this perspective, a work of art or literature is not the product of an individual author, but it reveals collective consciousness, interests, and social values in general. It contains the structure of social consciousness that reveals a holistic vision of the world, based on a system of values and standards. The essence of the structural-formative approach is manifested in illuminating the theory of the relationship between literature and society by assessing its structure and content. At the social level, it examines a system of interconnected visions and ideas (Zima, 1991).

Therefore, the structural-formative approach can be understood as part of the sociology of knowledge (A Group of Authors, 1997).

Based upon, the present study tackles the crisis of masculinity in the targeted novels within their general human dimension. The study consists of two sections. Section one tackles the crisis of masculinity and the problem of honor associated with women. Section two tackles the crisis of masculinity and the obsession with controlling and eliminating women.

Section One

The Crisis of Masculinity and the Problem of Honor Associated with Women (Honor Crimes)

There is no crisis that is more complex than the crisis leading to murder. Some Arab novelists have addressed the murderous violence that women are subjected to, highlighting the crisis of masculinity in its most complex form. Their works have aligned with the research of some scholars who have studied this phenomenon from its social dimension. These authors have noted that some women in the Arab world are subjected to this violence for many reasons. The most controversial reason among them is sex outside marriage, which constitutes a real crisis for men. In this case, many men view it as a violation of their honor and dignity. Consequently, they believe that the just punishment is merciless murder. From a broader social perspective, a man who does not kill his wife, daughter, sister, or even a female from his relatives is a man without dignity or honor. This situation reflects a man's belief and overwhelming desire to possess women through their bodies. His aggression erupts violently if this possession is violated.

Some researchers of social backwardness assert that violence and aggression diminish the existence of the oppressed person. They represent the moment of explosion of the truth inherent in the structure of backwardness. Accordingly, women are perceived as the most articulate examples of oppression in all its aspects, dynamics, and defenses (Al-Ruwaili and Al-Bazi'ee, 2007).

How does the crisis of masculinity manifest in this context? Why is retribution taken against women who make mistakes? How are images of violence justified, and why is there this insistence on linking honor to the body? (Men's Honor and Women's Body)

Some Arab novelists have attempted to depict various models of so-called honor killings. They have sometimes answered some of these questions. At other times, they have delved into various aspects of this serious issue, linking it to human justice as an opposing concept, sometimes to deception and lies, and to a different perspective at other times. The issue has been viewed from multiple human angles:

1. The Long Night in a Lantern by Hanan Al-Shaykh

In Hanan Al-Shaykh's story *Fanousa*, Abbas, a pious, pure, and chaste man committed to a declared marriage, seeks out Fanousa and begins a love relationship with her. Some people are certain that he comes to her house for love, but they search for a reason that would condemn Fanousa and disown him. They find it! Fawzia asserted that Fanousa had bewitched Abbas because he never sinned or committed adultery! (Khashifa, 1997).

When the men and soldiers raided her house, they found Abbas with her totally naked, so he fled and disappeared. Having found a donkey that is unfamiliar to the village near the house made them be sure that Fanousa had bewitched Abbas with a donkey (Hijazi, 1997).

From the outset, it is quite clear that these people tend to exonerate the man, even if they resort to the unseen, to belief in magic. From their perspective, sin is then inherently linked to the woman. She is responsible for it, not the man. Therefore, the penalty fell upon her. She must be punished. The just punishment is death. The women spat on her. The ignorant beat the drum for her. Fanousa tried to save her life. Al-Abbas said to them, crawling over their backs. They put her in a sack and stoned her. Blood was gushing and splashing the sand and gravel, and no heart pitied her sight. Not a single tongue uttered. Everyone cried out goes to hell, woman, devil, dog (Al-Shaykh, 1982).

It is clear that the entire community participated in her murder. In their view, she must be killed and the man must be spared! In addition, it is noted that her murder revealed a burning thirst for violence that could only be quenched by blood. It is also an expression of a sense of possessiveness and an insistence on punishing the unforgivable woman for whatever reason. According to this view, punishment was not based on moral principles. If it were, the man would be held accountable just as the woman is. It seems that this violence reflects a form of age-old deprivation. It is a flagellation of the self, not of the guilty other. It is true that it is a violence that is directed at a lantern, at the other, but this other is, first and foremost, a part of the ego. Killing this other is a veiled torture of this ego. It is an attempt to suppress a raging, repressed desire. In such collective-ceremonial manner, the killing of a woman is an attempt to kill the inner desire, within her, in men, and the inner desire, through what she has done, in women. Masculinity fades, and the man flees, leaving the woman to her fate, as determined by a patriarchal society. The killing of the guilty woman is a retribution whose laws are set by men because they cannot tolerate a woman who is not submissive and non-compliant. Violence is an escape from

desire. According to these defensive methods, love is a sin and a mistake. In this context, the crisis of masculinity is manifested in the man's inability to push the issue to its safest form. He saves himself, then holds the woman accountable so that she bears the burden alone. From this perspective, masculinity is in a cycle of immoral decay. This is a complex crisis that manifests itself when problems become entrenched. Masculinity can only confront it by placing the blame on women. Can these people fully comprehend the truth of the matter? Will they wait long enough for the night of ignorance to pass before they know what they are doing? How can their perspective on the meaning of love, sex, sin, and freedom be shocked?

2. The Double Crime in Emily Nasrallah's *The Oleander Tree*

In Emily Nasrallah's *The Oleander Tree*, Rosine is simple, naive, and foolish. Her body grows and matures, but she continues to live in the world of childhood. They find her in the weeds, with marks of wolf fangs on her body. Someone took advantage of her simplicity and naivety and had a sexual relationship with her. Yet, no one knew who it was. The scandal spread to every home. Nothing helped but the shedding of blood. Shame can only be erased by a viscous liquid. Her cousins knew how to shed blood at such times to cleanse their honor of filth. Rosen cannot bear responsibility for this act according to any Sharia or law. However, the cousins see it as a matter of their own honor. As for the brother, he swore not to sleep until he had avenged the family's honor. People lived an hour of anticipation and waiting. The big celebration begins at sunset. They took her to be slaughtered on the Harrat Rock. This is the last of the bitches (Nasrallah, 1991).

It is the slaughter at sunset. It is a celebration, during which Rosen is killed for the second time. She was first killed by the violation of the sanctity of the body, uncontrolled by a mature, sane mind, and then by customs. There is no true manhood here! The one who committed the first act was a male, not a man. Perhaps, deprivation or perversion drove him to what he did. It would have been more appropriate to hold him accountable, but manhood flees and then kills the victim. Neither assault nor murder is manly. That is not manly. What happened is a profound expression of the absence of manhood, of a crisis that it cannot confront. Rosine is a real example of the alienation of women in a backward society. She is a victim of lost manhood. The crisis is not just that of an oppressed woman, but it is a crisis of manhood in the deepest sense. Reducing her to the confines of her body and attaching manhood to this body has truly ruined her. In essence, this behavior expresses a real crisis that men suffer from, limiting their honor to the woman's body and limiting their manhood to her murder.

Researchers assert that women are reduced to their bodies, and then to their sexual dimension. This body is an indecent object that must be covered, preserved, and protected. It is the property of the family and society as a whole. A woman has no authority over her body. It is both a place of honor, protected and desecrated. Fear for it may be another facet of fear of it. Therefore, society subjects it to very strict laws and regulations (Nasrallah, 1991). Based upon, there is a true weakness that men suffer from regarding women. This weakness is represented by their insistence on possessing them in an inhuman and brutal manner. The severity of these laws automatically leads to murder if a woman escapes them. She must then pay the price, which is her body itself. Perhaps there is no crisis that a man suffers from more severely than when he hangs his dignity and honor on a woman's body.

Rosine, the victim, exposes the twisting of these laws and customs. She highlights the love of possession, the tightening of control, and the confiscation of freedom. She lays bare the crisis as the crime is committed against her twice. Despite the strictness of these laws and the cruelty of these customs, a woman may survive even if she makes a mistake! She may survive, perhaps, if she can lie, thus placing masculinity in a position of ridicule.

3. Murder and Deception in *The Virgin of Beirut* by Ghada Al-Samman

In the story of *The Virgin of Beirut* by Ghada Al-Samman, Alia and Mariam record a dangerous paradox that exposes the crisis of honor associated with the body and the crisis of masculinity through bitter irony. They lost their virginity, thereby violating the law and the foundations of honor and dignity.

Alia confessed to her deed and she was killed. Her family gathered around her like cannibals, with her father holding the dagger, and her brother holding the Demol bottle. Her mother closed the window so that no one from outside could see. She was killed, and the family's honor was purified.

As for Maryam, she fully understood the terms of the lie and repeatedly mocked society and customs. She first mocks the man who wants pure, untouched merchandise, sealed and untouched. After losing her virginity and sleeping with several men, she had her hymen sewn shut, married a very wealthy man, and became a top-class socialite. She decided to maintain her old relationships after her husband saw the hymenal blood and confirmed that she was a virgin. As she prepares for marriage, Maryam says, I was inviting them to my wedding. I am the virgin of technology. They are the primitive tribe who still stand at doors begging for a blood-stained rag that the groom would bring out at dawn and reassure them that the world is fine (Al-Samman, 1979).

Ghada Al-Samman then reaches the pinnacle of sarcasm in this story, through one of her characters, who says: Any prostitute can return to being a virgin for 300 Lebanese pounds. I think that from now on, the Arab man will marry at the hands of a priest and an expert doctor who will examine the merchandise for him (Al-Samman, 1979). This sarcasm commences with linking The girl's virginity and man's honor to the same matter, indicating the extent of the weakness that characterizes his self-esteem and his standing among others. The man's weakness appears in his projecting his shame onto the woman in order to appear strong, and that his apparent coarseness is consistent with his inner weakness and conceals it (Hijazi, 1986).

Then, Ghada Al-Samman presents the issue of honor from a confusing perspective.

It cannot be thought that the author is beautifying lies in the eyes of women. rather, she is perceived as a rejection of both men and women based on honesty. She wants men to take a deeper look at the meanings of honor and dignity. Perhaps, this call is better illustrated in her story, Crime of Honor.

4. Honor and Ambiguous Masculinity in Ghada Al-Samman's Crime of Honor

A green tale in Ghada Al-Samman's story, Crime of Honor, confirms that the crime is committed against real honor through a series of meticulously woven events. Abu Ali, from Aitharoun in southern Lebanon, marries Taghreed, whom he met at a cabaret in the Zaitouna neighborhood of Beirut, and they had Ali (Al-Samman, 1979). She runs away from him some time after giving birth. He learns that she is meeting a lover nicknamed the Bey. Abu Ali initially wants to kill him, while Israel destroys his home and burns his land. Condemning his behavior and feelings, Abu Ali asks himself: Why am I capable of killing Taghreed but incapable of killing an olive tree? (Hijazi, 1986). His suffering does not last long. He finally emerges from this dilemma. He learns who the Bey is, but decides to go to his land to defend his home and children (Al-Samman, 1979). There is real honor. The story shows how this man broadened his horizons and freed himself from the shackles of the illusion associated with a flimsy honor. He turned to his dignity, stemming from his jealousy for his land and children. He forgot the honor associated with a woman's behavior and envisioned the good in his son, Ali, Taghreed's son. He hoped to find him jealous for his land. He wanted him to fight for her. But he was shocked.

Ali reveals his desire to let his sister bleed to death after she was shot by the Israelis because she was the lover of the fedayeen Joel. His father tries to point out that the Israelis are the enemy, and that they want the house, the tobacco, and the land, which is honor. He replies that what matters is the girl's honor. Finally, the Israelis attack the village, bombing and burning it. Abu Ali rushes there, hoping to find his son carrying a weapon. He finds him wounded.

My son. Ali. wounded. So you carried a weapon.

I carried a weapon.

You fought.

No. I tried to kill my sister in defense of honor. I caught her trying to escape with Jules to the cave She claimed she wanted to fight I attacked her with a dagger to slit her throat.

After you killed her, did you fight and get wounded?

No. My vicious sister wounded me. She was armed.

Then?

Then, I killed her, of course and ran away.

Then. They stumbled. What happened? Did they burn everything?

I don't know. I didn't stay, I ran away. The important thing is that I killed her (Al-Samman, 1979).

Ali confirms twice that he ran away. He is weak in the face of the enemy, but he insists on killing his sister

for honor. His inner weakness, in the face of the arrogant enemy, is now masked by outward rudeness that he projects onto his sister. Weakness in the face of the enemy is clear and unquestionable, which prompts Ali to project his own helplessness onto the woman, making her a source of shame that must be eliminated. This issue also poses a different question about the concept of honor. Is real honor linked to a woman's behavior, or to preserving one's land? Does honor require killing a girl if one likes, while simultaneously fleeing the enemy? Moreover, Ali's insistence on killing his sister is extremely dangerous because Ali represents the new generation. This behavior is a cultural pattern that is deeply embedded in the value system. It seems very difficult to get rid of it. This is what the story suggests. In addition to the issue of honor, Ali represents another, more serious issue, which is the question of the connection between violence and men. Is this violence also linked to a twisted concept of masculinity?

Section Two

The Crisis of Masculinity and the Obsession with Control and Elimination of Women:

In the minds of some people in our society, masculinity is equated with virility. In the Arabic culture, the practice of intercourse is often expressed by opening, piercing, and ploughing. It is also said that a man fools a woman, rubs, stamps, plants, mounts, and rides her. Apart from their intended meaning, these terms, in their entirety, convey a sense of violence and may be a translation of the fantasy of violence. They also imply that the man is the party who initiates and is the first and active party, while the woman receives the action and is no longer a partner. In this regard, if a woman accepts a relationship with her husband or partner, it is said that she allows him to have sex with her. It is not said that she interacts with him or that they interact together. If she refused, it is said that she did not allow him to have sex with her, or she refused him.

On the one hand, the military dimension in these last expressions catches attention.

Enabling, refusing, and abstaining are used in this context. On the other hand, these words, phrases, and sentences indicate that the woman has no desire. She either gives herself or does not give it, she accepts or refuses, but she does not ask.

In this regard, it is said that the bride was escorted to her groom, but not the groom was escorted. She is the one who is exposed, adorned, and taken to him. It is also said, He asked for her or He asked for her hand, so we gave it to him. It is never said, She asked for it. Finally, it is said, He took her, meaning he possessed her and consummated the relationship with her. The action always falls on her. The man is the doer, and she is the recipient. Therefore, masculinity may be linked to virility, Which may be the reason why a man sees consummating a relationship with a woman as a form of triumph, victory, and conquest, and thus self-affirmation.

5. Violence and the Affirmation of Masculinity in *The Oleander Tree* by Emily Nasrallah

Makhoul's predicament with Rayya, and his way out of it in *The Oleander Tree*, can be understood based on the violence he inflicted on her. Rayya is a child whose father died when she was young. She lived in poverty and was subjected to harassment, which increased her alienation. She matured early. She refused to submit to Abu Da'as, who claimed paternity toward her. He tried to confiscate her, to possess her, and to shape her fate as he wished. She married Makhoul to survive, but she realized she had made a mistake and refused to interact with him. As a result, Makhoul finds himself in a real dilemma. His manhood is at stake. He finally responds to Abu Da'as's provocation: Now does a woman have a reckoning? The horse is behind the rider To put it bluntly, the girl won't let you get near her. Don't you hear the whispering? The whole village is talking about you Blow her up. The problem will be solved Or would you rather become a laughingstock in front of the villagers? (Al-Samman, 1979).

With these words, Abu Da'as represents society's attitude toward women. This society does not accept a woman as a master of her body. It prefers a woman who is submissive, subjugated, and obedient. She is then a good woman (Al-Samman, 1979).

Makhoul then goes home, with Abu Da'as's words echoing in his mind: You are not a man. Who is mocking you? A woman? Eve who rolls your mustache in the mud? How will you confront people? What a shame! (Al-Samman, 1979). These words are crystal clear. The moustache is a symbol of manhood. If this

manhood is humiliated, the moustache wallows in the mud, and shame befalls their owner. The meaning of manhood is crystal clear. It is self-affirmation through sex. It is virility.

Influenced by this conviction and led by Abu Da'as's words, Makhoul drank wine and became honorable, with the fire of anger boiling and seething in his veins. He dragged her by the hair and threw her onto the bed. His manhood triumphed. His mother was relieved, reassured by this triumphant manhood, and rushed to Rayya's shirt, ululating, to spread it out. The blood of virginity was on it, confirming her son's victory and her daughter-in-law's purity and submission alike (Al-Khouri, 1993). As for Makhoul, he felt his manhood once again and was intoxicated by the scent of victory. He straightened his hair. He tied a strand of basil into the buttonhole, then headed toward the village square, with his nose in the air and his steps crumbling rocks (Tarabishi, 1997).

Through this behavior, he declared that he had won, and that there was no need to tamper with his strength and manhood. He now possessed himself and was completely out of the predicament. As for Raya, she refused to be the oppressed woman. She refused to be a female who walked with the herd, so she drank the poison and died (Khalil, 1985).

The writer refuses for her heroine to live so defeated. She prefers death to that life. She rejects that standard of masculinity and wants women to control their bodies, hearts, and souls. She calls for a different understanding of both masculinity and femininity. Conflating masculinity with virility is a grave insult to real masculinity. There's no doubt about that. Physical ability exists automatically and naturally. Its possessors have no control over it. Demonstrating strength, presence, and personality through this ability is weakness! It's a search for strength in what exists without effort or favor.

Through her novel, Emily Nasrallah invites us to a different understanding of masculinity, characterized by reason and character, by work, giving, and a transcendent vision of life and existence. It cannot be limited to virility. That would be a grave insult to it. She crystallizes a different understanding of the meaning of strength through subjugation as well. The illusion of women's subjugation through control of their body is evidence of internal weakness. It confirms the illusion of self-power by affirming the weakness of the other. False power requires a weak other. Based on this equation, violence is nothing but an expression of fear of the power of that other. The deviation toward violence to assert control truly reflects that fear.

As seen in these stories, society always seeks methods to tighten its grip on women in accordance with this vision. Sometimes, it may find methods in which violence is not overt, but rather more covert. It is based on objectifying and commodifying women, robbing them of the most precious thing a human being can possess, including freedom and humanity.

Her family and husband practice this type of violence against her. She is their property, or they exchange her property. According to this possession, she offers as if she has no right to love or to demand. She is loved, desired, and receptive (Khalil, 1985). She has no right to choose a husband or marriage in general.

6. Shattered Will and the Illusion of Masculinity in Emily Nasrallah's *The Morning Star*

In Emily Nasrallah's *The Morning Star*, Khazma's father decides her fate in a few words, without consulting her or even hinting at her. He gives his words to the suitor: We are honored to accept you into our family. Her mother, after him, expresses her joy and completes the weaving of fate: Congratulations, Khazma! Congratulations, my daughter. A fate like this won't come twice in your life That you're his fiancée now, you can talk to him and answer him if he asks (Nasrallah, 1998). The marriage takes place, of course, and Khazma moves with her husband to the United States, where she is surprised by his character and his view of women. He sets his conditions clearly from the outset: You will not leave the house. Understand? You are young, you do not know American traditions, and I am responsible for you. Remember that well. You are my responsibility, and your duty is to obey (Nasrallah, 1998). Khazma submits! She lives her life subservient to her husband, emptied from within.

One observer of social backwardness notes that a woman dies psychologically so that a man can derive the illusion of life. She is crushed so that he can derive the illusion of self-realization (Hijazi, 1986). In this case, there lies a crisis of masculinity, one that befalls the woman harshly. This husband greatly insists that he is responsible for his wife, and that she must obey and comply. In doing so, he is trying to self-realize and affirm his masculinity. If the wife submits, he achieves this. He rejoices in this illusion. Khazma grows up in his

care, marries off her children, and then her husband dies. However, after this long period of time, the surprise is that her willpower has been completely crippled, becoming like a hollow reed. Her daughter comes to her from a distant city and asks her to accompany her to see her grandchildren. She is surprised, remains silent, contemplates, thinks, looks at her daughter and says, I wish you could pass by on your way, toward the graves, so that I could ask your father's permission before leaving. What Emily Nasrallah wants to draw attention to is the crime of destroying a woman's willpower. This is more cruel and violent than inflicting physical harm. This insistence on objectifying her and dehumanizing her is nothing but an affirmation of her weakness, fearing to confront her real strength, and fearing that she might become a real equal to the strength of men, thus robbing them of their privilege and preference. Therefore, he constantly strives to extinguish or eliminate her.

The killing of the will is a painful psychological violence suffered by marginalized women, increasing their weakness and ignorance. Men insist on it, increasing their illusion of strength and self-assertion. Women, then, are crushed, subdued victims of what is called possessiveness, linked to men's weakness. Emily Nasrallah also referred to this type of violence in another story.

7. Possessed Childhood and the Peak of Male Weakness in *The Hostage* by Emily Nasrallah

In Rania's story, the surprise is that Nimrod proposes to her family before she is born, and they agree! Just like that! What do you say, Saeed, to marrying me to your daughter? I'm not joking If you have a daughter, will you promise her to me? The father agrees, and the mother is pleased because the suitor has done them both a favor (Nasrallah, 1998). Rania is born. Nimrod raises her as he desires and loves. She grows up. Her mother tells her that Nimrod is her suitor, and that he will marry her soon! Rania refuses and protests. She wants to be freed from this promise. She fails and admits that her fate has been written. I was bound to him. The rope of consciousness began from him, and the end is in his hands. That relationship could shackle me and restrict me to his will (Nasrallah, 1998).

Later, Rania acquired a great deal of knowledge and learning, but she always emphasized that she was bound, that her inner being was concealed by sturdy walls. She spoke of these restrictions with the pain of someone who knew they had lost their freedom forever: I grew up far from people, in the care of an elderly man who made his being walls around me, concealing the secrets of existence from me (Nasrallah, 1998). What truly pains her is that she herself got used to being subject to his will and his teachings (Nasrallah, 1998).

After that, she is given the opportunity to fly through love. She is given the opportunity to be liberated and to exercise herself, but she refuses, she fails, her ability betrays her! For a moment, she feels free. She loves, and she compares her self, yearning for freedom, with her self, entrenched in chains. She communes with this love: I was shackled and chained, and you set me free. I was a hostage to generations of slavery, and you set me free (Nasrallah, 1998).

She experiences and lives that freedom only on an internal, imaginative level for a few moments. She does not practice it in reality. Marwan, who loved her and whom she loved, allowed her to fly. He invited her to his home in the mountains. She felt happy, but the specter of Nimrod continued to haunt her. She finally realized that she was a miserable bird who, having lived in a cage for so long, had forgotten how to use her freedom and fly. Therefore, she returned home before dawn, leaving a letter for Marwan in which she confessed her inability to make any decision (Nasrallah, 1998).

Rania is more of a symbol than a reality. She is the woman confiscated through the exchange of her ownership between her family and her husband. She is the woman whose humanity was stripped away through the deprivation of her will. The danger in her story is that she has become accustomed to this defect or has been completely disabled. She represents most women who submit to the roots of their ownership and the contracts of their exchange of ownership.

Hidden beneath this stated story is another story that may be more prominent despite its absence. It is the story of the fragile masculinity of Nimrod, the man-husband, and the other man-father. From this perspective, there is a double dilemma, the dilemma of fatherhood and the dilemma of marriage.

A father's masculinity may breathe more clearly into his fatherhood when he is the father of a daughter. In his behavior toward her, he reveals his understanding of fatherhood and manhood simultaneously. In this story, the father demonstrates what appears to be a total blindness to the meanings of fatherhood by giving his daughter to a man before she is even born! He confiscates her will, her heart, and her conscience before they

are even formed. In doing so, he demonstrates that he is not fully aware of what it means to have a daughter. In terms of true manhood, a father pushes his daughter upward by affirming her human being, which is closely linked to her human freedom. He pushes her to become an active member of society, fully aware of her place and presence. This is her right and his duty, connected to his understanding of fatherhood, which is closely linked to manhood. What the father did is to confirm the subsequent lack of fatherhood and manhood. This is a real crisis that those who breathe within him are not aware of.

Nimrod, however, is no different from the father in this respect. He is not aware of the profound meaning of marriage. For a man, marriage is equivalent to manhood, or it can be a sign and proof of it. Marriage is the deep partnership between spouses in every detail, the first and most important of which is the first choice. A wife chooses a man and measures her choice based on the meanings of masculinity, while a man chooses a woman and measures his choice based on the meanings of femininity. Nimrod did not choose. He decided that he would have the woman who had not yet been born! Rania did not choose. She was faced with what was decided for her. The principle of first choice collapsed. Hence, its standards also collapsed. Manliness is a standard for women. As for Rania, she was forced to choose a manhood she did not see. He did not present his manhood to her so that she would choose it. He kept it to himself. From this perspective, manhood can only breathe in the embrace of a woman of his choice. He deprived himself of the manifestation of his manhood through the free femininity that chose him. He left her within him, imprisoned by his gaze and his delusion that she existed and that she was active.

Conclusion

It is noted that the narratives presented in the present study have highlighted the crisis of masculinity through violence directed toward women, and through the insistence on controlling them and confiscating their freedom and decision-making. What is truly striking about this issue is that it is rooted in culture and that it affects society as a whole. It is not emergent or the result of a cause that can be easily identified and eliminated. It is a cultural construct produced by multiple, interacting factors deeply embedded in thought, belief, and behavior. However, efforts to contain it in preparation for its elimination have begun. This issue is closely linked to women's issues, which are in turn linked to societal issues. The way women are viewed is part of the cultural, political, economic, and educational structure of this society. This is why one of the researchers of this society expresses the poor condition of women due to the crises of masculinity by saying: It is tragic for a person to be born female in our society (Nasrallah, 1998). His judgment stems from the inferior position women are placed in by men due to their own problems related to masculinity. For this reason, they occupy an inferior position in society (Sharabi, 1991). This is why Arab society produces a racist discourse that places them in a position opposed to that of men and their centrality.

If allowed to participate, women will participate with men, and if destined to be equal, will be equal to them! In our societies, they remain a neglected quantity who participates little in public life (Barakat, 2000). They are a neglected quantity from the perspective of men. He confirms this condition for himself in order to inflate the importance of masculinity. For him, strengthening masculinity by degrading women only points to a real crisis of masculinity. Even the most progressive positions are subject to skepticism. There are some individuals who actually speak of equality and participation, claiming to believe in them and work towards them. Yet, some specialists believe that this position is sometimes challenged by a deeply ingrained, backward vision and a superficial upbringing that beautifies a person's appearance but does not truly penetrate and change them. If men were to free themselves from the dilemma of masculinity, they would be able to see women as they should be seen, as they truly are. Therefore, violence against women and attempts to control and subjugate them are two issues presented from the same perspective as the dilemma of masculinity. It is a social, moral, and humanitarian issue, representing a stance and behavior specific to thought and civilized personality, always demanding transcendence and the pursuit of human justice. In contemporary narratives, this issue is represented through serious and important calls. Among them is a call to reconsider not only the meaning of masculinity, but also the meaning of femininity, as it is the standard for affirming it. It is a call to separate masculinity from virility and to restore consideration to its lofty standards, such as reason, character, and a refined human presence.

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