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HOMOGENEITY WITHIN LAYLÁ BA‘ALBAKĪ’S SHORT STORIES

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Abstract

*This article discusses selectively Laylá Ba‘albakī’s short stories—the twelve collected in *Safīnat ḥanān ilá al-qamar* [A spaceship of tenderness to the moon] (2009), as well as *al-Batal* [The hero] (1966). This discussion aims to explore the feminist writing of the writer, arguing the existence of homogeneity, which the interweaving and interconnections create among those short stories. This literary analysis begins with an examination of narrative manner, including the narrator, style, and language used, and then turns to the major themes, which run through the stories (Igharia, 2015). Since the short stories that were as the rationale for bringing the author to trial, a particular aim in what follows is to provide the necessary literary analysis to evaluate the court’s charges of obscenity. As we will see, Ba‘albakī’s defence was that she was simply describing real life as experienced by women. This paper provides the groundwork for any later discussion of this issue.*

Keywords

Laylá Ba‘albakī, Literary Analysis, Feminist Writing, Short Stories, Lebanese Women Writers, Lebanese Modern Fiction

1. Introduction

1.1 Literature Review

Surveys of modern Arabic literature offer readers short and general literary analyses or comments on the first and second novels of Ba'albakī, including representations of characters, plots and brief indications of techniques and narrative styles (Shaaban, 2009; Aghacy, 2006; Bramson, 1990; Accad, 1993). These texts argue that *Anā aḥyā* is a realistic novel that highlights notions of rebellion against society. Moreover, they offer brief insights into comparative aspects between the two novels of Ba'albakī. While Ba'albakī's two novels have been given such attention in passing, her short stories have not yet been given even this level of attention. For example, when Shaaban treats Ba'albakī's literary works, she only discuss her novels focusing on Līnā as protagonist in *Anā aḥyā*. Although Shaaban mentions *Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar* briefly, she does not reference any specific short story of the writer at all (2009). Consequently, even if such texts can be said to contain a literary critique of Ba'albakī's fiction, there remains a need for a more thorough literary analysis of Ba'albakī's short stories. Moreover, while Shaaban argues that Ba'albakī's fiction is a political rather than one focused on sexual issues (2009), several modern surveys point out that Ba'albakī focuses on sexuality, women's liberation and writing which challenges social norms and ideas (Bramson, 1990; Allen, 1995; Jum'ah, 2005). These surveys, including Allen's (1995) and Shaaban's (2009), generally approach the topic by not addressing Ba'albakī specifically and comprehensively, so even where such texts contain insights about Ba'albakī's sexual and anti-patriarchal, there remains a need to shift attention from general literary studies to specific works such as her short stories. Nazīh Abū Niḍāl (2004) and Sayyid al-Nassāj (1980) examine in terms of characters a conceptualized notion of the "rebellious" Arab women in the twentieth century. Similarly, this article also examines that notion, but specifically regarding Ba'albakī. Unlike Abū Niḍāl and al-Nassāj, I argue that within literary analyses, writers must take into account not only contents and ideas of "rebellious" women, but also a thorough literary analysis and the ways and techniques in which such women, like Ba'albakī, present their rebellious views, attitudes and perspectives.

As academic works, the studies of 'Ulā Āghā (2002) and Malā' Kaḥīl (2002) seem to be more specific than the texts previously mentioned. These works consider Ba'albakī as one of Lebanon's three most important women novelists. They offer intensive examination of Ba'albakī's characters, narrative techniques and styles, though with special reference to *Anā aḥyā*, rather than Ba'albakī's short stories.

Among the literary studies that have dealt with Ba'albakī's fiction, Olga Bramson's thesis (1990) is the most specific study yet. Bramson's research can be largely credited with

drawing attention, even if only in passing, to two short stories by Ba'albakī which are not included in the author's collection *Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar*; her project focuses more on sociology rather than literature. These two short stories were ignored and largely unknown. Despite this contribution of Bramson's work, it is limited in not providing any literary analysis of any of the writer's short stories.

In summary, there are many lacunae in the existing literature: no critical analysis of her short stories. The existing literature does not deal with the objectives raised in this paper. I argue that a literary analysis should be thorough enough to let readers get a fully understand not only the impact of the short stories but also the context of the commentary which the short stories represent.

1.2 The Significance and the Aims of the Study

The real breakthrough for Arabic language women's novels in Lebanon came in the 1950s. Some scholars affirm that Ba'albakī's novel *Anā aḥyā* [I live] (1958) was the first Lebanese women's novel that can fairly be considered to constitute a landmark in the development of women's fiction in Lebanon (Al-Id, 2004; Abū Niḍāl, 2004; Allen, 1995). In addition to *Anā aḥyā*, her second novel, *al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah* [The disfigured gods] (1960), as well as novels by other Lebanese women writers, made a considerable contribution to Arab women's writing at the time (Ba'albakī, 2010). Ba'albakī is a major Arab female novelist of the mid-twentieth century, who has achieved renown beyond her native Lebanon. Researcher and translators translated her works into French, English, and other languages. In 2009, the Arab Writers' Union in Damascus placed her first novel, *Anā aḥyā* (1958), on its list of the top one hundred Arabic novels. In addition to her two novels, Ba'albakī published a book-length lecture, *Naḥnu bi-lā aqni'ah* [We are without masks] (1959); and a collection of short stories, *Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar* [A spaceship of tenderness to the moon] (1963, and 2010). Roger Allen suggests that Ba'albakī contributed significantly to the creative writing at the time (1995). At her trial in 1964, Ba'albakī became a scapegoat for all the feminist women writers in the Middle East. Her attempt to improve the lives of Arab women and her opposition to patriarchy had made her a target. Her writings raised the taboo topic of female sexuality, and constituted a revolutionary attack against the patriarchal culture, values, and institutions.

An examination of Ba'albakī's short stories aims to shed light on the philosophy and views that she expressed in her writing. By critiquing and building on the available material, bringing together different approaches in a spirit of critical examination, this paper seeks to contribute to the knowledge base for the future study of Arab women writers in general and Lebanese women writers in particular, and of modern Arabic feminist writing overall. As a

whole, by constructing a thorough literary analysis, this article not only explores to what extent the feminist perspective of the writer affects her literary short stories, but also examines how her short stories are homogeny.

1.3 Methodology

This article will be based on a literary analysis of Ba‘albakī’s short stories. I have opted for this approach in an effort not only to examine the literary initiatives of Ba‘albakī, but also to document employing her short stories for feminist agenda.

The method of literary analysis employed draws upon Mieke Bal’s approach to narration (1985). Bal presents a set of conceptual tools to guide the study of a text, with the aim of providing “a textual description [...] that is accessible to others.” The tools she offers provide a guide to investigating the events, actors, time, and location, which “together constitute the material of a fabula.” Bal’s method of analysis is based upon recognizing certain implicit procedures that the author undertakes in producing a work of fiction, and then tracing these back in the process of presenting a literary analysis. In this context, I cannot ignore Muḥammad ‘Azzām in his literary analysis of the stories of the Syrian novelist Nabīl Sulaymān *Faḍā’ al-naṣṣ al-riwā’ī: Muqārabah bunyawīyah takwīnīyah fī adab Nabīl Sulaymān* [Space of the narrative text: Structural and formative approach throughout Nabīl Sulaymān’s literature] (1996). Taking the flexible approach of Bal into account, and similarly to ‘Azzām, I will consider a textual analysis, focusing on several technical aspects such as structure, narrative manner, style and mood.

2. Narrative Manner

This section explores the features of the short stories’ various narrators, and the styles of narration that apply. In addition, this section aims to investigate the narrative language and lexicon in use throughout the short stories, and to explore the links between language and lexicon, and the narrators’ and the writer’s agenda.

2.1 Narrator

The dominant approach is that of first-person narration from the perspective of a female internal participant protagonist. There are two exceptions to this rule: the story “The Silvery Shoes of the Queen” which is narrated in the third person, and “The Cat” which is narrated in both first and third persons, though the first person dominates. Al-Samman also “employed prominently I-first person narrator in her collection of short stories *Lā baḥra fī Beirut* [No sea in Beirut] (1963) to focus on women’s suffering and fulfilment” (Ḥammūd, 2002, p. 173). The first person is the most proper pronoun to narrate events, which prominently sound like reality

(Fūghālī, 2010; Yūsuf, 2016). However, I suggest that Ba‘albakī is committed to this first-person narration in order to let her hero narrators be most dominant, and to give their voices the most space. While the reader might expect to see continuing use of polyphonic narration as used in *al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah* [The disfigured gods] (Ba‘albakī, 2009-a), the voice of the female narrator is in general the only voice which is heard in these short stories. Moreover, in the “The Silvery Shoes of the Queen” and “The Cat”, the voice of the female narrator is still stronger and given much more space than those of the other voices, which are of men. The nearest thing to an exception to this rule is the male voice in “The Cat,” which is given considerable space within the story. Given that this particular male voice is a feminist voice that is in harmony with the voice of the female narrator. In some short stories, such as “The Silvery Shoes of the Queen,” “The Cat” and “I was a Filly, now I’m a Mouse,” the narrator is omniscient, and knows everything that the characters are thinking and feeling (Ba‘albakī, 2009, p. 42-3). In the other stories, however, the narrators are non-omniscient: they do not know everything. For example, the narrator of “Your Chest is No Longer My City,” “I did not know any way except the way to the university and coffee shop,” (Ba‘albakī, 2009, p. 20).

While the reader might expect that the use of the non-omniscient narrator might increase objectivity in the narration, we see in fact that the writer makes the narrators non-omniscient mostly to further the agenda of the dominant female voice. There is little need to prove that being omniscient serves the agenda of the narrator, because as she knows everything – even, that her mother loved a man who was not her father – she has clear knowledge of her targets and the goals of her struggle. On the other hand, though, it is also arguable that where the narrator is non-omniscient this also serves that agenda. From the above examples, the gaps in the narrator’s knowledge seem to be strategic, allowing the narrative to focus upon the things she does know about in her relationships with men. So, the female narrator quoted above does not know any way to the university except for the way which led her to fall in love with and to spend time with a particular man; and the narrator in “When Snow Falls” does not know what time it is specifically because something is lacking, namely her boyfriend. The narrators in the short stories are mostly editorial, and pass comments that evaluate or criticize the other characters around them. For example, in the story “A Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon” where the narrator says, “In this way he becomes cruel and stubborn, capable of making and carrying through decisions” (Ba‘albakī, 1992, p. 274). Here, the narrator is analysing another character, passing comment relating to his ability to make decisions. Similarly, the narrator is also not neutral in that she comments on and analyses the expected future behaviour of characters, and so prevents the reader from forming reliable expectations about their forthcoming actions,

behaviour, and attitudes. This feature also perhaps shows that the narrator is not neutral or objective. In sum, the narrator in the short stories is mostly an internal participant editorial voice, which is female, non-neutral, first person, and, being that of the hero, is also the most dominant. This identification of the features of the narrator leads us on to an examination of the styles that the narrators employ within their narration.

2.2 Narrative Styles

In her short stories, the writer uses the technique of not naming characters, both males and females. All the short stories revolve around the relationship between a man and a woman, whether between a wife and her husband such as in “A Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon,” “I was a Filly, Now I’m a Mouse,” or between a woman and her married or unmarried boyfriend, such as in “The Cat,” “The Explosion,” and “When Snow Falls.” In particular, “The Silvery Shoes of the Queen” treats a relationship between not only a wife and her husband but also a woman and her boyfriend. The writer applies the technique of not naming the characters in order to bring her stories into line with her theorizing (Ba‘albakī, 2009, p. 7). It seems as though there are twelve voices of women but they are in important respects all the same, because they all serve the agenda of the writer, which is also the agenda of women who seek freedom and equality in Arab countries. Thus, the writer employs an increasing number of narrative techniques and styles designed to serve her feminist agenda in general (Igbaia, 2015, 152-164).

Interestingly, the writer also employs the technique of personification to legitimate her female hero’s theorizing as regards loneliness. She: “loneliness? It is killing me, and places where there are no other people terrify me. Therefore, I will marry and give birth many children” (Ba‘albakī, 2009, p. 43). Cats giving birth to large litters of kittens, so the writer employs this trait and uses it in the story “The Cat” to focus and expand upon the idea of marriage and giving birth. It seems as though the female narrator says that just as the cat hates loneliness and so gives birth to more cats, the human woman should do likewise (Şāliḥ, 2000). Şāliḥ also discusses the cat figure in the novel *Al-Mar’ah wa-al-qitṭah* [The woman and the cat] (1985) by Laylā al-‘Uthmān (b. 1943): “The existence of the cat (Dānah) was not convincing from the artist’s angle or as a symbol for the woman” (2000, p. 81). Whereas al-‘Uthmān made the cat a participating character in her novel, Ba‘albakī just described her female character using the prominent characteristics of a cat, further indicating this similarity by employing the cat in her title. The writer reveals this personification by the style of analogy in the story “When Snow Falls” when the female hero says, “I am a wild cat which disappears within the city streets which lead to the sea, when rain is falling” (Ba‘albakī, 2009, p. 52). Thus, the writer tries to draw connections between her stories, as she indicates in her introduction as mentioned before. While the writer

makes a connection between “The Cat” and the following story “When Snow Falls” through the personification of the cat, she connects “When Snow Falls” with “Sinnīn and Another Mountain,” which follows it, by describing mountains in the first story and offering the personification of a mountain in the second. Thus, the writer takes advantage both of natural elements and animals in devising the narrative manner.

In “The Experience”, the writer employs analogy to amplify the sense of the patriarchal oppression of women. She draws an analogy between the dogs, which attacked her female foreign friend in Beirut, and the men who attack her because of her writing and opinions. The analogy here also becomes a comparison, since the writer says that society can deal with wild dogs easily enough, but that it is difficult to do anything about patriarchal oppression. This leads the reader to note that there is another significant style in use here, which is that the author draws on autobiographical facts. The writer employs this combination to provide a focus for her short stories, which are, though, not autobiographical but fictions (Ba‘albakī, 2009, p. 52). Interestingly, the writer begins “The Experience” with an analogy between herself and her female friend: “the dog did not bite me, I am the writer. The event occurred to a female European friend who lived in al-Jabal. But, despite that I too was injured by a dog bite, so the two events are different” (Ba‘albakī, 2009, p. 75-84). Here on one hand, the writer reveals that what happened to her is different from what happened to her friend, while on the other she indicates that “a dog” also bit her. This is the use, once again, of a misleading technique, which could push the reader to follow the story in order to learn more about the suggested analogy with the autobiographical event. The real difference readers could reveal only at the end of the story, and this delay increases the tension. The narrator initially misleads the reader in her explanation of the title of story “Small Fire”. The narrator misleads by talking about the small fires, which a child makes (Ba‘albakī, 2009, p. 107). This part of the narration probably misleads the reader to the true explanation of the title’s deeper meaning, which is more metaphorical: fire here signifies the complex and complicated romantic and sexual relationships among married and single male and female friends. This misleading style and the use of metaphor pushes the reader to think deeply in order to arrive to an accurate understanding of the stories. I think that the writer succeeds in achieving this goal because, as the writer herself indicates, “I am not a writer of enjoyable and relaxing fiction, I write to bother the reader, to put challenges in front of him/her and to allow his/her emotions, thoughts, and body to move [to be affected/influenced]” (Ba‘albakī, 2009, p. 10).

However, it is evident that Ba‘albakī chooses titles for her works that have poetic echoes. The poetic aspect of the titles means that the writer charges her stories with symbolism, which

allows her to convey things that are perhaps too subtle for direct statement. The diction of poetry rather than prose characterizes the language of her titles. We see also in the title of the volume itself – *Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar*. The language of poetry similarly appears in the titles of her novels *Anā ahyā* and *al-Ālihah al-mamsūkhah*, as well as in the titles within the volume of her short stories. Through these titles, the writer aims to produce a kind of balance between how the recipient responds to the title and the actual narrative. She does not allow the recipient to be content with the title at first sight, since its meaning is in poetic symbolism. Rather, the writer calculates the title to attract the reader towards the actual text, where the writer explore symbolic and literal implications together. ‘Abd Allah Ṣalāḥ says: “A symbolic title of a narrative work motivates the reader to read the work and be able to explain the meaning of the symbolic title” (2010). The writer tends towards the lyrical, poetic narrative not only in her titles but also in the very fabric of her narrative, which relies on the speed of images and feelings, tuning the psychology of characters and their states of mind with whatever they see or come into contact.

The title “I was a Filly, now I’m a Mouse” is composed of two important strands, and these represent two keys, which enable the recipient to decode the story and grasp its implications (Igbaria, 2008, p. 110-13). These two strands belong to two different times, suggesting that the story will concern two distinct temporal domains, one in the past and the other in the present. This title has the function of an overture, giving the recipient a clue to the narrative thread. It arouses the attention without divulging the story right at the beginning (Ghanayim, 2015, p. 18-19). The elements of the title incite the recipient to engage in the act of reading to decode and identify the contents of those elements. Thus, it is not a tell-tales title, displaying its contents, which are normally the writer hide. The title, moreover, puts the reader immediately in the midst of the critical moment of the character’s life. This moment marks the negative turning point in the story. This makes the reader curious to uncover the circumstances and factors that have led to this outcome. The writer has achieved a remarkable success in endowing the title with a highly suggestive image that portrays the extent to which the hero feels that she has suffered from injustice and humiliation due to her marriage to a conservative Arab. The image in the title is thus profoundly psychologically expressive.

There are also the salient feminine words in the title: “mouse” (Arabic *Fa’rah*, feminine) and “filly” (Arabic *Muhrāh*, feminine). This emphasis on the linguistic, lexical convention of isolating “female” from “male” heightens the linguistic function of the title in bringing out the signification of the narrative, revolving as it does around the liberation of the woman from the domination of the man. It seems the author took linguistic measures in the title in order to impress the image. This results in a greater compatibility in the reader’s mind between the

semantic and pragmatic signification of the title and the narrative that follows. Further, the title of this story places the focus on the actions of the story and the crisis that the hero faces, but in this form, it requires that the recipient should not delay the process of reception for the full impact of the real signifiers suggested in the preliminary focus. Furthermore, the poetic quality of the title, which surpasses that of the narrative text, is the result of the pragmatic effect of the narrative work. Al-Jazzār notes that the close connection between the title and the significations of the story confirms that the writer has been constantly aware of the intention of her/his literary work (Al-Jazzār, 1988, p. 45-6; Yūsuf, 2017).

Since the title of the story indicates a strong progression from one phase of the protagonist's life to the next, the reader would naturally expect a similar, if not fully corresponding, temporal movement within the narrative text itself. However, a surprise is in store for the reader, since the narrator does not simply set out the events in the order in which they unfolded, but carves a circular temporal channel. The narrator narrates the story from a moment when she had already left her husband, and she tells the reader about her past when she was married (for five years), before returning to the present, when she is separated from her husband. This shift in the temporal movement may attract the attention of the reader and increases their level of interest and curiosity (Khalīl, 2010). We see four movements in time represented in the novel. Temporal movement 1 represents a transitional movement; the narrative shifts and prepares to enter into the dream domain. The second represents a descriptive movement. It describes the central artistic crisis in the negative transition mentioned above. The third is an informative, educational, and interpretative movement. Here, the female narrator gives a background description of the formative environment and experiences that made Western culture appealing to her. She describes her childhood and life with her mother in the West. The fourth temporal movement represents the phase of exiting from the domain of dream and reverie to the present reality of the narrative – the “now,” the present moment in this room on the mountain. This technique enables the narrative to combine various strands of the story and achieve the necessary compatibility between meaning and structure. There is also in this story a spatial movement linked with the temporal movement and inseparable from it, each dimension serving the other in clarifying the general signification, being part of the signifier, if not its very core. Thus we need, in our analysis of the stories, to be alert to the importance of place and spatial movement which Rīm Al-Īsāwī and other researchers explored in general, but not regarding the stories of Baʿalbakī (2002; ʿBīdāt, 2012).

Monitoring that special movement and precisely identifying it will show that at the very outset, the narrator, after some brief narration and description, exits from the present and

surrounding reality (the room, her husband's house) and plunges into another place – the past. This transition perhaps reflects her wearied state of mind, which is out of tune with the present and the current reality that she finds so dreary. We may thus consider this place (the room, the present, the house of her husband) the “station-place,” the point of departure—a term suggested by Shākir al-Nābilsī in his analysis of some modern Arabic stories to describe the analysis of the narrating time and place movement (1994, p. 20). It is so because it is the point from which the narrator departs quickly to other places carved in her memory and consciousness in bright and glowing colours. They are the places which she longs for and wants to travel to and in whose space she wants to orbit, as is implied by the word “moon” which, as already mentioned, is a key word in the title of her volume of short stories and also the title of one story in that collection: “Safīnat ḥanān ilá al-qamar.” While she swiftly moves from the station-place, we find that she stays for a long time at the places that glow in her memory, describing them fondly and expansively. She does so because that gives her happiness and a sense of liberation from the station-place, even if only mentally. This place, of which she is so fond and which she deeply remembers, that equally considered as the womb, giving warmth, protection, repose, and freedom. Ba‘albakī must be credited with great success in her use of the description of place to express her characters’ feelings, attitudes, and inner soul: “She stretches her neck into the space, her head touching the clear sky” – a description which portrays her sense of freedom and pride. She goes on to describe the lofty trees, the distant mountains, the spacious valleys and houses, all of which express her freedom to move, to roam, to soar, to dream everywhere. Then she shifts to the station-place, describing it in detail, as if to rectify what she has omitted to do at the beginning of her story: “The windows are narrow, long, long and iron-barred. The rooms look like a dark corridor.” Hitherto she has been describing the public station-place, the East, but she does not overlook a description of the private station-place, her husband's house. Thus, the writer employs for her feminist vision diverse narrative styles in the short stories, most of which also appeared in her novels, but some of which are novel, such as the combination of dreams, and the combination of fiction and autobiography. We have seen how the writer makes connections between the stories that follow each other, using different devices, with the effect of suggesting to the reader that this collection of short stories is close to being a novel in itself (Ba‘albakī, 2009, p. 7). This exploration and investigation of the narrative styles now lead us to examine the narrative language used in the short stories.

2.3 Narrative Language

This section discusses the fictional language and lexis of the writer. It is relevant to both literary appreciation and critical scholarship to examine the writer's linguistic usage. We may be

interested on literary grounds to see whether, for example, she makes grammatical mistakes or uses Levantine colloquial; but we have also noted that the court judgment passed against the writer referred to the diction and words she uses as part of the evidence against her, and therefore this examination has a much wider significance as well. Moreover, the phenomena of conflict and opposition in her short stories invite such a study in order to identify the lexical store on which the writer has drawn to express the various confrontations that prevail in her fiction. This section will try to map out the fictional lexicon and its implications. The figurative and poetic language that Ba'albakī uses seems to be dominant in her short stories (Ba'albakī, 2010, p. 44).

On the other hand, the writer uses Levantine colloquial words, as well as making a few grammatical errors, of which the following are some examples from "Al-Qiṭṭah": *Kamashthā*, *kamash* instead of *masaktuhā* [to catch, to snatch a handful]; (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 46). These are examples from "Indamā yatasāqatu al-thalj": *lambah* instead of *misbāḥ* [lamp, light] (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 56). *t'arbash* instead of *tasallaq* [to climb] (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 57). These are examples from "Al-Infijār": *utīl* instead of *funduq* [hotel] (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 122). *tāsāt* instead of *Aw'iyah* [utensils] (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 141). These are examples from "Safinat ḥanān ilā al-qamar": *narvaz* instead of *aghḍaba* [to be annoyed, be irritated] (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 183). *Al-kākī* instead of *Azraq ghāmiq* [strong blue] (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 189). Two examples of linguistic mistakes are *jawāriban* (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 188) (socks as non-definite object: it should be *jawāriba* because this form of plural is an annotated noun); and *Istamarrīt* instead of *istamrartu* [I continued]. We may, in passing, wonder whether these are not so much grammatical errors as opposed to errors by an editor. However, it is clear that these are not editing issues because we note them not only in short stories but also in the re-printed editions of short stories in 2009/2010.

As regards the lexicon used in the short stories, there is a strong use of the lexicon of power, authority, and crisis. The terms that stand out here are "a mad woman," "I spit," "I break," and "I slap" (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 53). The use of words such as these, with their connotations of power, are consistent with the general prevalence of expressions of force and authority in the narrative lexicon which Ba'albakī uses in the short stories. There is a strong indication that they are employed to heighten and throw in bold relief the atmosphere of conflict and confrontation which dominates these stories. This choice of words raises the degree of dynamism, motion, and tension, attracting and then riveting the reader's attention on the text, which we could read with great avidity. This diction, moreover, shows the writer's unshakable persistence in her revolution against patriarchal society. She also reveals that hers is a condensed

and intense linguistic code of rebellion, as if she wished, by means of her lexicon, to declare a comprehensive, sweeping revolution against patriarchal society, at the basic lexical level.

In addition, we also see a use of poetic diction, in which linguistic balance is dominant. The use of these stylistic features contributes to the heightening and intensifying of the atmosphere of conflict between men and women. It is only natural that the polarities of confrontation and opposition in the stories require that we characterize the actors by antithetical qualities and opinions. Below, I discuss some illustrative specimens of this antithesis (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 62-63).

Here, the writer uses balance and antithesis to throw light on certain details that set the hero apart from other women in society. One such distinguishing feature is that she wants to compete with men in various occupations. The conservative woman, on the other hand, expects the man to assume these activities, while she stays at home, alone. Antithesis, then, serves here to magnify the voice of rebellion and revolution adopted by the hero and the author alike. The frequent mention of the body and its various parts is another feature of the short stories, and we could describe as "body writing." The body occupies an important place in Ba'albakī's feminist themes and expressive forms, and receives particular attention in her art. The significance of this lies in the close connection that her writings aim to establish between the woman and her right to be the owner of her body and to experience sexual freedom. This body lexicon, as manifest in "When Snow Falls," reveals that phenomena we could frequently interpret in the light of bodily parts (Binmas'ūd, 2012).

The short story "When Snow Falls," begins with a fleeting moment in the warm intimacy of bed, which affords the reader the opportunity to overhear the body lexicon by means of dialogue that embraces two bodies, a lexicon whose items consist notably of words such as arm, chest, hair, eyelids, cheeks, ear, feet, hand, thigh (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 68). The body in this story represents a medium of communication. It expresses the feelings and attitudes the two characters have towards each other. Its functional role is to express the love they have for each other. The relationship between the ego and the other in this story is determined through the dialogue between two bodies. The various positions, poses, and movements of these two bodies are observed in physical unison represented in the act of lovemaking, whose semiotic code is revealed by listing the relevant lexical items, the essence of which are encapsulated in the following two statements:

(1) He lay on his back and his hand dived under the cover, taking my hand and putting it on his chest and then letting it journey around the belly (Ba'albakī, 2009, 72).

(2) He licked my ear, then my lips. He hovered over me and then lay back, whispering that he was enjoying it and that I was so fresh, soft and frightful and that he had missed me so much (Ba'albakī, 2009, 74).

These two sentences are particularly relevant because the court judgment passed on her in 1964 referred specifically to them in accusing her of immorality. In reply, the writer claimed that these sentences and her fiction in general, simply reflected the reality which society experiences in daily living. This was a crucial point: the court dealt with these sentences as fictional and obscene, and accused the writer of calling for the practicing of sexually free relationships. However, in response the writer claimed that she was not calling for people to practice sex outside of marriage, but was simply describing the reality of society. Writing with a "body" sexual vocabulary reflects a social and cultural consciousness of the role of body of the female and the interaction of women with their bodies. The physical image that the story presents is not one of cheap lust. It is rather an image of a human, cultural, and lived experience. This invites us to deal with the body as a means of liberation and dialogue, since every individual, man or woman, has the right to control their own body. The story becomes a celebration of the human relationship that results from the action of a body that has regained its dignity and its freedom from any cultural or moral suppression. Ba'albakī, by distancing herself from the prevalent modes of writing, was establishing a certain mode of being open to the other, a mode so different that it shocked and offended readers while also challenging their illusions about certain cultural norms. For example, she: "Your chest [of a man, her beloved], your chest is for me, my chest for you" (A Spaceship of Tenderness, 11-12). In summary, then, the writer uses Levantine colloquial words, which could indicate the influence of her father's *zajal* or by the dialect, itself, or both. In addition, she uses poetic and figurative narrative language in her short stories. This leads to that several Arab and no-Arab poets influenced her. Further, the author draws on a feminist lexicon that enables the language to meet the central requirements of the narrative task. This task concerns liberating woman from the control of men. The author employs the device of semantic and metaphorical repetition, which is typical of the feminist theme prevalent in Ba'albakī's work. She employs this device to present the centrality of the struggle and to improve the portrayal of women. Moreover, she aims to reveal the author's fascination for life in the Western city or cities in general in comparison with that in Lebanese villages.

3. Themes

This section explores and discusses the themes which run throughout Ba'albakī's short stories. Aside from feminism (Igbaria, 2015, p.152-164), the themes she addresses are mainly

political, religious, and social. Interestingly, the writer here generally links politics with matters of wealth and finance, so it seems reasonable to say that the short stories are concerned to address the idea that politics leads to wealth and power. I will therefore discuss these aspects of wealth as they apply within politics. In addition, I pick out the topic of marriage, both as a religious issue and as a social one. The texts do not go into detail about these themes. This is what readers could expect, since her work is literature, and not social or political science. Since her texts themselves are restricted to reflecting her opinions and positions as regards these issues, I will limit my discussion to level of detail that we see in her short stories.

3.1 Politics

The short stories criticize the non-democratic rulers in Arab countries of the mid-1950s to 1963, and especially those Arab countries, which derive their wealth from petrol exports. The implicit criticism is that they have not shared the wealth fairly between their citizens, but rather that all the money has gone to the rulers and their families. By indicating this, the stories criticize the fundamental relationship between wealth and political power, in Arab countries (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 118-119). The writer employs imaginary and ironic dreams to explore politics and finance, and indirectly to criticize it. Through this dream, the narrator criticizes the unfair hoarding of the money of the state, money that is not the property of those who rule but of all the people and citizens. Thus, the short stories deal both with the close and unjust link between wealth and politics, which is wasting public money in non-democratic regimes (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 118-119). This similarity of political issues not only with what is mirrored in her short stories but also with what was pointed out in her two novels and published lecture does reflect the writer's courage as well as her awareness of the underlying political facts of the Arab world, given that she expressed such views when she did. This similarity with the recent Arab uprisings' demands suggests that these works of the writer remain resonant. However, Ba'albakī also brings in a new theme, present for example in "Your Chest Is No Longer My City," which is criticism of the people of Lebanon for being more interested in weapons than they are in anything else (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 14).

This theme was not present in her two novels, and is perhaps even contrary to one of the themes in her lecture, where she called for young people to sign up for military service against Zionism. To this theme, she also adds criticism of Lebanese politicians for their abuses of the rules of war. These criticisms are, I suggest, in line with the writer's own attitude regarding the 1975 civil war in Lebanon, which is when she finally emigrated from Beirut to London, as was mentioned in the section on her biography. To sum up, in the short stories Ba'albakī calls for peace, democracy and the fair delivery of wealth, for cooperation and for challenging hunger and

poverty in the world. Having discussed politics, I turn now to the social issues running through the short stories.

3.2 Social Issues

The short stories seem to be calling for greater cross-cultural interaction, or more specifically, they call for people to take advantage of the possibility of experiencing other cultures. However, as we will see, there are limits to how far Ba‘albakī is willing to endorse this. In general, this call indicates the author’s appreciation of other forms of education and cultures, because of the freedom that those others cultures can possess. This is reflected in the way the author lets a British male character play a major role in the story “The Silvery Shoes of the Queen,” where this British character praises his native culture and education, especially in his description of men and women’s free sexual and romantic relationships outside of marriage (Ba‘albakī, 2009, p. 169).

In “No, the Anger will not Cease,” the author calls for the younger generation to escape to the West, which mostly are countries of freedom, particularly so that they can register a civil marriage which in Lebanon is forbidden. Men and women could marry each other according to their own choice and not the choice of their families, and could escape social limitations such as the restriction on Muslim women marrying Christian men, for example. However, in contrast to this, we note a sense of opposition to mixed marriages – that is, marriages between Arabs and Europeans or Westerners. This opposition we could note in the story “The Experience,” with its ridiculing of a Lebanese man in his fifties who studied in America and came to marry an American woman. The narrator also ridicules his children, and the fact that he seeks to get a visa. There is a sense of subtle accusation that the man only used the marriage in order to get a visa (Ba‘albakī, 2009, p. 76). This is in also line with the description of that man as facing serious problems, and being in need of rescue; the rescue then comes to him in the form of the love of a young Lebanese young girl when he is in his early fifties. The narrator says, “This girl joins to the man like a rescuing branch of wood which exists on the surface of the sinking morass” (Ba‘albakī, 2009, p. 76).

Thus, one could conclude that the short stories weave in perspectives and opinions linked to certain themes, and that sometimes one story completes the opinion on an issue that begun in another, as we see in the above example. The cross-cultural issue runs through several short stories, without repetition, and completes it by contributing more supporting details.

Violence against the defenceless is also a theme in the story “Small Fire,” but now the focus is on violence towards children. Their father reflects it in the treatment of two children. After his wife dies and he begins to dream of another woman, he plans to sacrifice his two sons

in order that he can get married a second time (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 109-110). Here, the level of violence in the plans that the father was considering, although in the end he does not kill them. Other short stories explore violence against the self, that is to say the violence represented by suicide. Throughout the story "Your Chest is No More My City", the hero indicates that she knows how to commit suicide by mentioning several specific ways, as we have seen. This could also be a reference that the writer has specific literary purposes in mind in allowing or disallowing the characters to put an end to themselves.

Thus, the writer wove the issue of violence into several of the short stories, and that this echoes the theme of suicide as violence. These are also other indications that the writer succeeded to connect her short stories together by unifying themes: several of the short stories also contribute to supporting and weaving in the perspectives and opinions of the heroes. Moreover, several short stories weave in the perspectives of the heroes, which is to say that we could see the connections between these short stories from the point of the above themes. Having discussed politics and social issues, I turn now to the religious issues running through these short stories.

3.3 Religious Aspects

Some aspects of religion appear particularly clearly, within the story "No, Anger will not cease." First, we see a call for rebellion against religious and social laws, which restrict marriage between women and men of different religions –as, mentioned before (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 136). There is a call for circumventing those religious limitations by seeking out civil marriage in Western countries. Interestingly, this call is also sounded in *Ayyam ma'ahu* [The days with him] (1959) by Colette Khoury, within the romantic relationship between the female hero Rīm, who is Christian, and Ziyād, who is a Muslim. However, this call falls in line with the Lebanese laws, which permit Lebanese citizens to practice civil marriage abroad, but not in Lebanon, which we could consider as a call for rapprochement between Christians and Muslims. In addition, civil marriage and immigration to a foreign country are means for finding safety away from violent fanatics (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 136). Thus, another religious issue in play here is the claim that people in Lebanon are fanatical, and thus the stories sound a note of rebellion against fanaticism that she described as common to all sects and religions in Lebanon (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 14).

4. Conclusion

In review, then, the writer employs her short stories by both their themes and their styles and techniques for her feminist vision. The narrator is for the most part an internal participant editorial voice, which is female, non-neutral, first person, and dominant. We have seen that the writer employs many diverse narrative styles such as the interweaving of dreams into the

narrative, the combination of autobiographical aspects with fiction and the complex temporal structures in the narrative. I have also shown how the writer establishes an overlapping series of connections between the stories that follow each other, using a variety of narrative devices. This has the effect of suggesting that this volume of short stories is not all that far from being a novel in itself.

We also see the use of Levantine colloquial words such as *Kamashthā*, *kamash* instead of *masaktuhā* [to catch, to snatch a handful] (Ba'albakī, 2009, p. 46). This could indicate the influence of her father's *zajal* poetry and he influenced her by Levantine dialect too. As well as this, Ba'albakī uses poetic and figurative narrative language. The narrative language also manifests dynamism and vitality in several stories of the writer such as *I was a filly, now I am a mouse*, both in the titles and the texts, as well as movement in both time and space, and these works in tandem to enhance each other. In addition, she draws on a feminist lexicon, particularly concerned with using imagery and terms related to the body, she permeates the narrative with descriptions, reports, and metaphors based on the idea of physical movement. This enables the language to meet the central requirements of the narrative task of liberating woman from the control of men. Leaving aside the theme of feminism, the short stories address themes of economic and social justice such as fair delivery of wealth, and contain calls for democracy and the fair distribution of wealth in Arab countries. The treatment of social and cultural issues in the short stories is somehow ambiguous, and that although the author expresses opposition to marriage between Arabs and people from the West, she encourages Arab women and men to use the freedoms of the West so that they can enter into civil marriage without the influence of their parents. Thus, we see the author being selective in her dealings with other cultures. Her opposition to religions and sects in general is so clear, because of the limits they place on marriage and sexual relationships.

Thus, the interconnections and interweaving of themes throughout the author's short stories are creating a sense of unity. The unity among the short stories in *Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar*, is overlapping chains of connection between the stories which follow on from each other. Despite this interweaving of themes and narrative devices, however, these short stories are still independent units, every one of which is complete and independent in terms of structure, characters, and narrative manner. Similarly, Bādīs Fūghālī points out the homogeneity within his analysis of the collection of short stories *Aḥlām azminat al-dam* [The dreams of times of blood] (1997) by the Algerian writer Jamāl Fūghālī (2010). A similar sense of homogeneity, employed for a social critical agenda is, in *Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar*, employed for a feminist agenda by Ba'albakī.

Thus, this paper contributes to the knowledge base for the future study not only both of Arab women writers in general and Lebanese women writers in particular, but also for the modern Arabic feminist writing overall. Therefore, this paper opens the doors for future researches such as comparative studies between Ba‘albakī and other Lebanese women writers of the 1950s and 1960s.

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